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Mr. Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS

European Commissioner
Environment, Oceans & Fisheries
European Commission
1049 BRUSSELS

EAPO22-61/CNPMEM-202

Oostende/Paris, 7 December 2022

Subject: EC proposal for measures relating to eel fishing (article 12 of the EC non-paper of October 28)

Dear Commissioner,

On behalf of the signatories of this letter, we are asking you about the objectives of your proposal to close 6 consecutive months of European eel fishing in the context of the discussions of the Council of the European Union on TACs and fishing quotas on December 11 and 12.

Indeed, the European Commission's proposal, applied to the migration periods of glass eels or silver eels, will lead to the extinction of professional eel fishing, from the shores of the Mediterranean up to those of the Baltic Sea. Moreover, none of the actors involved in the European eel supply chain (storage, sale, farming and/or restocking) will be able to recover from such restrictions.

The eel's stock is suffering from degradation of its living environment, in particular the disturbances caused by too many obstacles placed along its migration cycle. Thus, fishing ban will not allow for these barriers' removal, making it impossible to meet the stated objective, or the stock's recovery. In the end, the fishers are the one bearing the consequences of the other anthropogenic impact. We regret the lack of holistic measures, that would mitigate all the activities impacting the eel stock.

The direct but also indirect consequences of this decision will be dramatic. The consequences have not been evaluated; no socio-economic impact assessment has been published by the Commission.

The disappearance of the fishery will put an end to the efforts these same actors have put in favor of the stock's rebuilding. The restocking programs, the only ones that have proven

capable of providing a short-term solution to the consequences of pollution and habitat fragmentation will be meaningless.

For France, 60% of glass eel catches are intended for this purpose and will repopulate quality natural environments eels cannot reach naturally. 622 small scale fishing companies of the coastal fringe, most often one-man companies, operating in fragile and precious areas such as estuaries, salt ponds or lagoons, are condemned.

In the Danish straits, where pound net fishing for migrating eel is an ancient way of living in remote areas, the effort has been reduced with more than 50% already. A closure for six months will be the final blow to this traditional fishery.

In The Netherlands is already a 3-months closure for eel fishery in the months September, October and November or similar measures to limit the effect on the stock of eel. This is the period of the traditional catch of silver eels. A general extension on EU level of the measures, a full closure of 6 months could be the end of this traditional relatively small-scale fishery. It is recommended to work on a more regional approach that fits in what you want to achieve, improve the status of the stock. In that case it is essential to focus on the silver eel and because of the migrating character is a period in EU-member states never the same.

In southern Sweden, eel fishing is an important part of the coastal culture and if the proposal becomes reality, it will inevitably mean a cultural loss.

Ironically, in areas freed from professional surveillance, this ban will also pave the way to all forms of poaching public authorities are trying so hard to contain.

European Regulation (EU) No 1100/2007 has required Member States involved to set up eel management plans, approved by the European Commission. To the detriment of the eel itself, the commitments and measures provided in these plans will no longer have any reason to exist if the closure proposal is decided. Legally speaking, overriding years of joint efforts to implement complex management plans with a simple yet brutal 6 months closure does not seem correct. This ban also questions the EU-eel regulation that forces MS to recover the stocks through restocking, where are they to find the material for restocking if the ban goes through?

Just in France, 16 years of collective efforts will be thrown away. These same, soon to be obsolete, management plans, however, set binding and ambitious targets for all eel mortality factors, including sources of impact other than fishing, such as the fragmentation of rivers and streams, water contamination or turbines.

It is recommended to involve the fishing industry to improve the status of the stock. There are already some examples where fishermen are catching silver eels in front of barriers and release them on a place where they could continue the migration. A full ban of six months causes that fishermen are not more able to give their contribution on this project.

Eel fishery is in many cases not a year-round fishery. A general ban of six month will not meet the objective and could harm the fishing industry unreasonable hard. A regional approach,

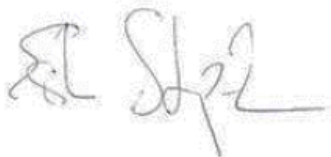
based on scientific information, is the only way to meet the objective and taken into account the interest of a traditional (small scale) fishing industry.

Recent scientific monitoring programs carried out in French rivers have shown a stability and even an improvement of the general state of the population. These encouraging results are not considered by the closure proposal. Also, a similar decision was taken in the case of the North Sea Cod, with 7 years of 0 TAC advice by ICES, the stock was predicted to go extinct. An MSY based management plan was set up, allowing fishers to continue fishing. The end point being that the stock has not gone extinct, and this year's advice has been corrected due to a severe underestimation.

To add insult to injury, the proposal only targets maritime waters and would come into effect on the 30th of January, High season of glass eel fishing and restocking. For another fishery (Adour basin in France), the proposal was published 3 days before the opening...

For these many reasons, we call for the withdrawal of a simple answer to such a complex question. Solutions can only be found through multistakeholders involvement within a reasonable timeframe and a regional approach. We trust reasonable measures which will be based on the best available science, including the expertise of all those involved in the eel's recovery, most importantly professional fishermen, the only players with an objective rationale for defending the quality and diversity of the aquatic environments.

Yours sincerely,



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