

## Call to the European Commission: An Inclusive Oceans Strategy is Needed to Secure Sustainable Fishing Communities

**W**e, the undersigned organizations and people, are deeply concerned by the recently published European Commission DG Mare proposed priorities on oceans, entitled 'A Blue Economy Initiative to Combat Climate Change' as it does not include the need to establish sustainable fisheries and fishing communities.

Even though fisheries are by far the largest provider of employment, income, livelihoods and food of all the ocean-based industries, they are absent from the European Commission strategy for achieving growth in the blue economy. As a result, the European Commission focuses exclusively on the development of other sectors, especially energy production, aquaculture, shipping, marine bio-technology, mining and tourism. These sectors occupy the maritime space, but they also have a direct impact on biodiversity and sustainable fisheries.

A fundamental problem in the Commission's approach is the use of crude economic indicators: growth in the blue economy is measured almost exclusively through Gross Value Added. The European Commission is aware of the dangerous flaws that stem from this approach, and the need to develop indicators that are more inclusive of social and environmental progress. Indeed, in the case of fisheries, their role and importance can only be fully comprehended when looking not only at the economic value added, but also at the vital contributions sustainable fisheries and fishing communities make to food security, livelihoods, social cohesion, cultural heritage and identity. There are also important synergies between fisheries and other sectors, such as coastal tourism. Fisheries is also more and more part of circular economy (fish

processing by-products incorporated into new products, recycling fishing gears etc.). Traditional sustainable fishing practices and the incorporation of traditional knowledge into scientific advice contribute to sustainable fisheries. In the absence of policies protecting fishing communities, the European Commission's approach will increase competition for scarce resources in coastal areas, and sustainable fisheries and fishing communities will likely be on the losing side.

Amongst the proposed priorities of DG Mare, the Seafood and Aquaculture Initiative implies that boosting aquaculture and excluding fisheries will help decarbonize this food sector. This argument is highly questionable. First of all, fisheries policy should be at the heart of climate action: ending overfishing, together with a shift to low impact fisheries will boost ocean resilience to climate change. Secondly, promoting ocean-based industries that compete with fisheries, such as deep-sea mining and intensive aquaculture, are expected to contribute further to the climate crisis and the destruction of the coastal environment.

This non-inclusive blue growth vision that marginalizes fisheries is even more concerning when it is promoted in the European Commission dialogue with third countries. Indeed, the European Union is currently supporting the African Union to develop its African blue growth strategy. In Africa, fisheries, and small-scale fisheries in particular, are essential to the social, economic and ecological sustainability of coastal communities. African fisheries stakeholders, consulted through the Fisheries Non-State Actors platforms initiated by the African Union, have emphasized

*On the occasion of the World Fisheries Day (21 November, 2020), sixteen small-scale fisheries organizations, from Europe and Africa, environmental and development NGOs, and the former Vice-chair of the European Parliament fisheries committee have signed a statement calling the European Commissioner-designate for Environment and Oceans, Virginijus Sinkevicius, to secure sustainable fisheries and prosperous fishing communities in Europe and in partner developing countries through an inclusive oceans strategy that recognizes the central role of fisheries. The statement is available at: <https://www.cffcape.org/s/191115-Final-Oceans-Statement.pdf>*

that sustainable fisheries, and the well-being of coastal communities, must be prioritised in the Africa Blue Growth Strategy, to address environmental threats to coastal ecosystems and to promote inclusive development.

In view of the above, the European Commission must recognize, respect and defend the vital role of sustainable fisheries and coastal communities in the blue economy in Europe and in partner countries. The 2014 FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication recognize the importance of such communities and would provide a framework for strong human rights-based approach to blue growth strategies.

To make this happen, we urge Virginijus Sinkevicius, European Commissioner-designate for Environment and Oceans, to revise comprehensively the European Commission Blue Growth Strategy and the work priorities of his administration, in order to develop an inclusive Oceans strategy that secures sustainable fisheries and prosperous fishing communities in Europe and in partner developing countries.

### Signatories

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### For more

#### DGx proposed priorities

[https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/clean\\_definite2.pdf](https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/clean_definite2.pdf)

#### DG Mare page on blue growth

[https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue\\_growth\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/blue_growth_en)

#### What is the 'Beyond GDP' initiative

[https://ec.europa.eu/environment/beyond\\_gdp/index\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/beyond_gdp/index_en.html)

#### Small scale fisheries and Blue Growth in the EU

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)573450](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2017)573450)

#### A call to the European Commission: An inclusive oceans strategy is needed to secure sustainable fishing communities

<https://www.cffacape.org/news-blog/small-scale-fisheries-organisations-and-ngos-call-on-the-ec-for-an-inclusive-oceans-strategy-to-secure-sustainable-fishing-communities>