

October 2013

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

As members of the international science community, we write to you with grave concern about the state of Europe's seas. The reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), have provided the European Union (EU) with a great opportunity to play a large role in stopping global overfishing through the significant reduction of subsidies to the fishing sector.

We urge you, as elected representatives of the citizens of the EU, to use your leadership to guide the European Parliament in addressing this global challenge. Our marine ecosystems are at a tipping point, and overfishing represents one of the greatest threats to their productivity. Our lifetime of experience in studying ocean ecosystems and marine fisheries has allowed us to witness the significant changes that have occurred in the marine environment and its exploitation. In mere decades, developments in fishing technology have sent fishing vessels further and deeper than ever envisioned¹, catching amounts of fish that are no longer sustainable². Many fish stocks, including those of species at the top of the marine food chain, have been depleted to only a fraction of their historical levels³.

Historically, subsidies have contributed to boosting the EU's fleet capacity by massively funding the construction of new vessels.⁴ As a consequence, the EU's fishing fleet is estimated to be two

¹ E. Norse et al. (2012) Sustainability of deep-sea fisheries, *Marine Policy* 36: 307–320

² U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): more than 85 percent of the world's fisheries are now overexploited, fully exploited, significantly depleted or recovering from overexploitation in FAO. (2012) *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture – 2012. Part 1: World Review of fisheries and aquaculture*. Rome

³ R. A. Myers & B. Worm. (2003) Rapid Worldwide Depletion of Predatory Fish Communities. *Nature* 423: 280-283; J. A. Hutchings & J. D. Reynolds. (2004) Marine fish population collapses: consequences for recovery and extinction risk. *BioScience* 94: 297-309; R. A. Myers et al. (2007) Cascading effects of the loss of apex predatory sharks from a coastal ocean. *Science* 315: 1846–1850.

⁴The construction of fishing vessels was subsidized under the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), which lasted from 1994 to 2006

to three times larger than sustainable fisheries would allow⁵, while 39% of the assessed fish stocks in the North East Atlantic and more than 88% in the Mediterranean remain overfished.⁶

Yet, despite the precarious state of the oceans, many European Member States continue to provide significant subsidies to their fishing sector. These subsidies produce such strong economic incentives to overfish that reducing them is one of the most significant actions that can be taken to combat overfishing⁷. A World Bank report⁸ concluded that input subsidies reinforce the sector's "poverty trap" by creating incentives for greater investment and fishing effort in overstressed fisheries. The economic losses in global fisheries resulting from inefficiencies (including subsidies) and overfishing, amount to up to 50 billion USD per year (34.2 billion EUR). The current EMFF reform represents a perfect opportunity to eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies to the fishing sector for the 2014 to 2020 funding period and change the course of European fisheries.

Continuing to spend public funds on environmentally harmful subsidies will bring European fisheries deeper into crisis. The EU needs to move away from direct fleet subsidies, such as funds for new engines, the building or modernizing of vessels, or leaving vessels to lay idle in port. Instead public money should be spent for the public benefit and focussed on control of compliance with management rules, data collection, scientific research and stock assessments.

We urge you to use your skill and leadership to achieve a successful outcome in the EMFF negotiations and demonstrate to the world that the European Parliament can play a constructive role in solving problems of global consequence.

Sincerely,

⁵ European Commission. (2008) Press Release: Common Fisheries Policy: Commission launches a mid-term review, Brussels. IP/08/1339.

⁶ European Commission (2013) 319 final Communication from the Commission to the Council concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2014

⁷ U.R. Sumaila et al. (2010) A bottom-up re-estimation of global fisheries subsidies, *Journal of Bioeconomics*, 12, (3): 201-225.

⁸ R. Arnason, K. Kelleher and R. Willmann (2008) *The Sunken Billions: The Economic Justification for Fisheries Reform*. The World Bank, Washington DC.

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