

COVID-19 outbreak: Council approves financial assistance for EU fishermen

EU ambassadors today agreed the Council's position on a proposal to help tackle the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the fishery and aquaculture sector. The proposal will amend the regulation on the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) and the regulation on the common market organisation (CMO).

We have to ensure that the current crisis does not cause irreparable damage to communities where fishery and aquaculture are the main economic activities. The proposal endorsed today will provide financial support to EU fishermen and aquaculture farmers to help them overcome the economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Marija Vučković, minister for Agriculture of Croatia

The proposal introduces the following specific measures:

- support in relation to the temporary cessation of fishing activities with a maximum co-financing rate of 75 % of eligible public expenditure
- support in relation to the temporary suspension or reduction of aquaculture production and sales
- support to producer organisations and associations of producer organisations for the storage of fishery and aquaculture products
- increasing the quantities eligible for storage aid to 25 % of the annual quantities of the products concerned

The Council position agreed today adds the following amendments to the proposal:

- inclusion of fishermen on foot (mostly women) as eligible for support in case of temporary cessation
- derogation for temporary cessation for new vessels
- flexibility in order to use 10% of the budgetary funds allocated to Union Priority 3
- granting working capital and compensating the reduction of sales and additional storage costs for aquaculture farmers

The specific EMFF measures in the proposal are complemented by an amendment to the CMO regulation which makes possible the resort to the storage mechanism if member states have not set and published trigger prices, and allows aquaculture producer organisations to benefit from the storage mechanism. The proposal also provides for expenditure for the operations supported under these measures to be eligible as of 1 February 2020.

Background

The regulation on the EMFF currently in force was adopted in 2014 in order to support sustainable and competitive fisheries and aquaculture, but it does not provide for the sort of support which is needed to overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Commission adopted its proposal amending the 2014 regulation on 2 April 2020.

Next steps

The presidency of the Council will now inform the European Parliament that should it adopt its position in the form set out in the text agreed by the Council, the Council will approve the European Parliament's position and the act shall be adopted in the wording which corresponds to the European Parliament's position. The presidency will also ask the European Parliament to use the urgent procedure.