

European Parliament

PECH Committee meeting 26th April 2023

14:30 – 17:00

Commissioner Sinkevicius on the structured dialogue on the Commission Policy Package.

The Commissioner started by insisting on the need to face responsibility and continue taking measures to implement fully comprehensive environmental regulation and to drive global ambition on the topic. The EU has done a lot, but efforts have to continue. Fishers benefit from these efforts since they depend on marine healthy ecosystems. The Commissioner explained that we need to stop losing biodiversity and habitats. Lower emissions were needed too. He reminded that fishers are at the core of food security. Challenges and important changes require collective effort.

The Commissioner explained that changes have to be brought gradually, with transparency and wide consultation. Transitions have to be eased to protect those on the frontline of it. Moving away from fossil fuel requires huge endeavours.

The EU is not alone, and the Global biodiversity framework was agreed at COP15 in Montreal to address and reverse the loss of ecosystems.

When it comes to real measures, he explained that 3 issues proposed by the Commission have been misunderstood in the package.

1/ Obligations on environmental protection are not new. Member States might not have been acting on them, but they are existing obligations to ensure implementation what co-legislators had agree.

2/ No new top-down legislation is coming from the Commission. Member States are asked to start a dialogue.

3/ Initiatives remain at Member States level through regionalisation. The regional approach is a good one but has to be used properly by Member States. Member States have to bring forward solutions.

The Commissioner concluded that environmental protection is not the enemy of the fishing sector, quite the opposite. Environmental administrators and fisheries administrators have to work together. The joint special group for Member States, set up under the Action Plan will be key for this.

As much Commission resources as possible will be mobilised for accompanying the transition.

Regarding bottom trawls and other bottom contacting gears, the Commissioner recalled that according to scientific advice the biggest impact to marine seabed comes from fishing. Member States have established N2000 area to protect these areas and now they need to act on it.

He recognised that there might be difficulties for some fisheries like brown shrimps or scallops. The Commission does not want them to disappear, but they need to adapt to protect some bottom areas.

Real benefits can be achieved with healthier, more productive and resilient ecosystems under destabilising threats such as climate change, acidification, temperature rise, invasive species, etc.

The Commission communication on energy transition has dual objective to be more economically resilient and to reduce the carbon footprint of the sector. Switching to alternative fuel will be an inevitable step. There are short and mid-terms goals that could first allow to reduce the carbon footprint with new fishing techniques and gears. The Commission communication identifies 4 sets of enablers: stakeholders, innovation, skills and access to finance. The EMFAF has flexible conditions to support new technologies that are useful in short to mid-term. Some types of engine replacement are not possible if there a risk to create overcapacity. Broad range of other EU funding mechanisms will be presented in a guide by the Commission. In most Member States there is a gap between capacity ceiling and fleets capacity. On average 20% is unused and should be used for the energy transition. This should be discussed in the context of the energy partnership.

New CFP was implemented slowly. Regionalised CFP offers good possibilities but need wider implementation by the Member States.

Finally, the Commissioner touched upon the revision of the fisheries control regulation. For him, this is the most important discussion ongoing in the PECH. The most important issue is still open, namely the margin of tolerance. Its goal is to reduce misreporting. The Commissioner found it unfortunate that the Council and EP have amended the Commission proposal on this point which is backtracking from the current rules. This creates a risk to allow and encourage overfishing of species that are unreported in return for overreporting others. He took the example of the Baltic where he explained that there is massive over and under reporting because of this rule. A direct consequence of it was the 4/10th of stocks with a 0 TAC. Further on the topic he explained that TACs are set on the basis of scientific advice by species. Scientists need correct data to be able to do this assessment properly. The EU needs to keep good credibility at international level and not increase misreporting.

Questions and remarks were raised on the lack of clarity of the legal status of the package. Some MEPs criticised the approach towards bottom trawling. Some referred to offshore windfarms' consequences on the seafloor and others to fisheries products imports. MEPs called on more information on the financial resources to accompany the transition. Some MEPs also expressed their discontent with the remarks on the revision of the control regulation.