

**Mr. Virginijus Sinkevičius**  
**Commissioner for Environment,**  
**Oceans and Fisheries**  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi/ Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels

**Brussels, March 16, 2022**

Honorable Commissioner,

I thank you for the time you were able to dedicate in our meeting **on 9th March in Strasbourg**. During the meeting, we have discussed several topics and I appreciate your openness about all of them, starting from the science-based decisional process, the need to support innovation in the sector and the opportunities and improvements that the technological advancements can bring to the life of European and Portuguese fishermen.

In our conversation, we have also outlined the specificities of the fisheries sector in the Region of Azores. As we agreed in that occasion, I am sending you a summary focused on this last topic, listing the key points that I mentioned and on which I would like to ask you to dedicate your attention.

**1) Need for specific measures to compensate the increase of fuel prices**

The Commission should create with urgency a support mechanism for fishermen and operators to mitigate the impacts that the increase of fuel prices is having on their activities, to paralyze many vessels in short term. I must emphasize that not everyone has the same ability to deal with these impacts.

**2) Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): support in inspection and compensatory measures**

The establishment of MPAs requires compensations for fishermen especially for the fishing restrictions applied in those areas. The Commission should also provide monitoring support to prevent external vessels from fishing in these areas. In the Azores, the regional government is working to be able to protect 30% of its sea, in line with the European targets for 2030. Considering that its fishing fleet is aged, this could be an opportunity to create support measures for ship demolition and dismantling, as well as for the early retirement of professionals from the sector. On the other hand, there is still the need to truly support and encourage the qualification of younger fishermen and the renovation of the fishing fleet, as it would guarantee the use of more sustainable practices, the use of more sustainable fishing gear and more efficient vessels.

**3) Support for small-scale fishing fleet renewal**

Support for fleet renewal is a real need for small-scale fishermen, not for an increase in catches, nor an increase in the fleet, but it just means fishing better, in a more sustainable way, with better working conditions. This was a constant demand of the European Parliament during the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) negotiations. The support to the modernization of existing vessels, especially in very aged fleets, as we experience in Portugal, it is not enough. The European Commission has agreed to reassess this need during the implementation of the new EMFAF and I hope that progress can be made in this matter.

**4) Re-establishment of POSEI Fisheries from EMFAF**

This is a recurring demand, both from the authorities of the Outermost Regions (ORs) and from the European Parliament, which has already adopted several resolutions that called for the re-establishment

of the “Programme of Options Specific to the Remote and Insular nature of the Outermost Regions” – POSEI for fisheries, in compliance with article 349° of the TFEU.

Although EMFAF has progressed in this matter, with certain flexibility and derogations for the ORs, the truth is that the fund was originally designed to face the problems and challenges of the European continent and, therefore, it responds with some limitations to the specificities of fisheries in these regions. The Union cannot respond uniformly to the problems and specificities of such a fragile sector as is fisheries in ORs.

#### **5) Specific fishing quotas for the Outermost Regions**

The fishing quotas are allocated to Member States, which distribute them among their regions, according to the criteria of the central governments. So far it has gone well, but the ORs advocate greater protection or even the possibility of specific fishing quotas to their fisheries. Commission should study a positive discrimination and more autonomy for these regions in the management of their fishing quotas. Quotas managed by ORs, with the adequate scientific support, would allow a better management adapted to their needs. Without excluding, at the same time, the possibility to exchange quotas between an OR and its Member State or between two ORs.

#### **6) Support Campaigns to promote the consumption of less popular species**

It is important to value less popular species, of low commercial value, but which have comparable nutritional value, in order to diversify the production and consumption. For this, the European Union should support and encourage innovation in fisheries, the creation of new products, more appealing product packaging and quality certification. The Commission should promote the development of consumer awareness campaigns on the quality of these species.

#### **7) European quality label for Outermost Regions’ fishery products**

The EU should study the possibility of creating this quality label for ORs’ fishery products, in order to certify and export an image of quality of the fisheries and seafood from these regions, which can link fishing with sustainability, artisanal character, geographical conditions of ORs, economic and social importance for fishing communities, certifying that a fair price was paid to the fisherman.

#### **8) Research and dissemination of marine knowledge**

The ORs have specific problems related to their remoteness, topography and climate, recognized in the treaties. However, on the other hand, they hold specific and unique assets allowing the development of a sustainable blue economy, which can benefit the European Union as a whole.

ORs are excellent labs for research and innovation in the areas of biodiversity (they hold around 80% of the EU's biodiversity), marine ecosystems, renewable energies and for developing the potential of aquaculture in the open sea, which must be promoted and supported by the EU. The Commission should consider these regions to develop pilot projects in blue economy areas, involving their universities and research centers, such as the University of the Azores, with a long history and achievements in these areas.

Commissioner Sinkevičius, I thank you already for the attention you will be able to give to these elements and I am looking forward to receiving your feedback at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Maria da Graça Carvalho

Vice-chair of European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries