



ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
OF FISHING ENTERPRISES IN THE EU

EP(20)20

COMMISSIONER
Virginijus Sinkevičius
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 14 March 2020

Re.: COVID-19 disruption of fishing and market activities

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

The European fishing sector represented by Europêche, is experiencing an unprecedented crisis due to the escalating protectionist measures taken by EU governments to avoid the spread of the coronavirus infection “COVID-19”. In some countries the effects are beginning to be visible. Due to the lack of market demand for seafood products, the industry is already noticing an important reduction of volumes of fish and prices which will inevitably lead to the cessation of fishing activities in some areas. Europêche hereby calls on the European Commission to adopt urgent and extraordinary measures to tackle the economic consequences caused by this pandemic.

First of all, EU authorities must reassure the public that there is no evidence that seafood or food packaging have been associated with transmission of the coronavirus and that there is no reason to be concerned. Indeed, there is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread through any food products. We encourage you to remind EU consumers that seafood is a vital part of a healthy diet and remains a safe, smart choice at grocery stores and restaurants.

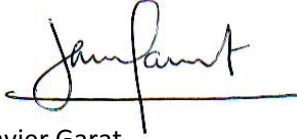
As any other EU citizen, our fishermen are worried about their personal health and well-being. For that purpose and in order to guarantee job protection, Europêche would appreciate a communication campaign from your services, perhaps based on the “[Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers](#)”, to help fishing companies follow the advice provided by United Nations agencies adapted to our sector.

In addition, since many fishing companies will certainly have to temporarily cease operations because of the unpredictable decisions taken by national authorities, designation of high risk areas, trade disruptions and lack of market demand, we believe it important that DG MARE communicates to the governments and to the industry the available European funds and financial measures at their disposal (such as the de minimis or the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Regulations), and adopts mechanisms, insofar as necessary, that allow activation of urgent measures to help mitigate the severe economic damage caused by the corona pandemic. This should include the possibility for EU fishermen and operators to receive allowances and compensation under the current EMFF for the temporary cessation of their activities under the events described. We therefore call on you and your services to urgently modify Article 33 of the current EMFF and include this possibility.

In cases where these funding sources are not sufficient in the long-term or not foreseen at national level in certain EU countries, it would be fundamental to further adopt extraordinary measures and actions to compensate the economic constraints and burdens suffered by our fishing companies.

We thank you in advance for your consideration and for the efforts the European Commission will put forward to help the EU fishing industry to overcome this social and economic turmoil.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Javier Garat', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Javier Garat
President of Europêche