July 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 envisioned\(^1\), catching amounts of fish that are no longer sustainable\(^2\). 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 levels\(^3\).

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

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\(^1\) 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


\(^4\)The 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 allow, while 39% of the assessed fish stocks in the North East Atlantic and more than 88% in the Mediterranean remain overfished.

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 overfishing. A World Bank report 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,

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6 European Commission (2013) 319 final Communication from the Commission to the Council concerning a consultation on Fishing Opportunities for 2014
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing

Dr. Alejandro Aguilar
Professor at the University of Barcelona
Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Gilles Bœuf
Professor
Université Pierre & Marie Curie
Paris, France

Dr. Philippe Cury
Director of the CRH (Centre de Recherche Halieutique Méditerranéenne et Tropicale)
IRD - IFREMER
Sète Cedex, France

Dr. Rainer Froese
Senior scientist
GEOMAR Helmholtz-Centre for Ocean Research
Kiel, Germany

Dr. Ricardo J. Haroun Tabraue
Center of Biodiversity and Environmental Management
University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, Spain

Dr. Sidney Holt
Independent Consultant on Fishery Science and Management
Paciano, Italy

Dr. Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara
President
Tethys Research Institute
Milan, Italy

Dr. Daniel Pauly
Professor and Director Fisheries Centre
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Dr. Callum Roberts
Professor of Marine Conservation
University of York
York, UK

Dr. Carl Safina
President, Blue Ocean Institute
Research Professor, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, Visiting Professor and co-chair, Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science
Stony Brook University
Stony Brook, USA

Dr. Enric Sala
Explorer-in-Residence
National Geographic Society
Washington, D.C.
USA

Dr. Ussif Rashid Sumaila
Professor and Director
Fisheries Economics Research Unit
Fisheries Centre
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Dr. Les Watling
Professor and Graduate Chair
Department of Biology
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Honolulu, Hawaii

Dr. Boris Worm
Professor of Biology
Dalhousie University
Halifax, NS, Canada
Signed online by:

Iván Acevedo García
Technician in Molecular Systematic Laboratory and PhD about endangered marine invertebrates
Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (CSIC)
Spain

M. Teresa Aguado
Professor of Marine Zoology. Doctor Research Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
Spain

Ana Aguiar
Postdoctoral researcher
University of Lisbon
Portugal

Miguel Alcaraz
Professor
Institute of Marine Sciences
Spain

Edward Allison
Senior Lecturer
School of International Development,
University of East Anglia
UK

Eduardo Almansa Berro
Senior researcher
Spanish Institute of Oceanography
Spain

Alexandre Alonso-Fernández
Researcher
Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas, IIM.CSIC, Vigo, SPAIN
Spain

Dr. Thora Amend
Senior advisor development cooperation
GIZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit
Germany and Peru

Carolina Antequera
Technician
Institute of Marine Sciences CSIC
Barcelona
Spain

Jurgi Areizaga
PhD. in Coastal Management
Cantabria University
Spain

Cynthia A. Arochi Zendejas
Programme coordinator
GVI Mexico
Mexico

Kathrin Bacher
PhD candidate
Centre of Advanced Studies in Blanes (CSIC)
Spain

Enric Ballesteros
Scientist
Centre d'Estudis Avançats de Blanes - CSIC
Spain

Jorge Baro
Director Oceanographic Centre of Malaga
Instituto Español de Oceanografía
Spain

Marisa Batista
PhD candidate
Centro de Oceanografia, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa
Portugal
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing

Giovanni Bearzi
Coordinator
Dolphin Biology & Conservation
Italy

Estibaliz Berecibar
Research Doctor
Portugal

Matthias Biber
Undergraduate Student
Bangor University
UK

Thomas Binet
Research fellow
CEMARE
UK

Marzia Bo
Researcher
Università di Genova
Italy

Miguel Cabanellas Reboredo
PhD student
IMEDEA
Spain

Antonio Canepa Oneto
PhD Student - Marine Ecology.
Marine Science Institute (ICM-CSIC).
Barcelona.
Spain

Maria Capa
Research scientist-marine biology
Norwegian University of sciences and Technology
Norway

Massimiliano Cardinale
Senior scientist
Institute of Marine Research
Sweden

Federico Cardona Pons
Project Officer
AquaTT Ltd
Ireland

Edgar Casas Güell
Pre-PhD. Researcher (FPI)
Institute of Marine Science
Spain

Ines Castejon
PhD
Independent researcher
Spain

José J. Castro
Lecturer
Center of Biodiversity and Environmental Management of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands
Spain

Maria Chicharo
Professor
University of Algarve
Portugal

Eric Clua
Director of regional office for Science and Technology
Ministry of Scientific Research
France

André Costa
Master in Management and Conservation of Natural Resources
Centro de Oceanografia
Portugal

Isabelle Cote
Professor of Marine Ecology
Simon Fraser University, Vancouver
Canada
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing

Léa David
Dr
EcoOcéan Institut
France

Salud Deudero
Scientific researcher
Instituto Español de Oceanografía
Spain

Rosario Domínguez-Petit
Researcher
IIM-CSIC
Spain

Ana Faria
Postdoctoral researcher
Eco-Ethology Research Unit
Portugal

Fernando Ángel Fernández-Álvarez
MsC
University of Oviedo
Spain

Dipl.-Biol. Christine Figgener
Research Associate and International Relations Representative
Centro de Investigacion de Cetaceos (CEIC)
Germany

Eva Flo
Biologist
ICM-CSIC
Spain

Paulo Fonseca
Researcher
IPMA IP - Portuguese Institute for the Ocean and Atmosphere
Portugal

Alexandros Frantzis
President, Scientific co-ordinator
Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute
Greece

Maria de la Fuente
PhD student
ICM-CSIC
Spain

Óscar García-Aguilar
Researcher
Environmental Hydraulics Institute IH
Cantabria
Spain

Lara Silvia García Corral
Ph.D Student (Oceans plankton metabolism and Global Change)
Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies
Spain

Eva García-Vazquez
Professor of Genetics
University of Oviedo
Spain

Jose Garrido
PhD student
Centre of Marine Sciences (CCMAR)
Algarve
Portugal

Philippe Gaspar
Scientific Coordinator
CLS- Marine Ecosystems Department
Spain

Guido Gay
Deep seas explorer; designer of research equipment
Idrobotica GG&Co
Switzerland

Josep-Maria Gili
Research Professor
Institute of Marine Sciences, Barcelona,
Spain (CSIC)
Spain
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing

Ana Gomez
Scientific Officer
Griffith University
Australia

Damià Gomis
Professor of Physics of the Earth - Physical Oceanography
IMEDEA (Univ. Illes Balears - CSIC)
Spain

Miguel Gonzalez Calleja
GIS Technician
IMEDEA (CSIC-UIB)
SPAIN

Enrique Gonzalez-Ortegon
Researcher
Bangor University
UK

Emanuel Gonçalves
Associate Professor
Biosciences Department, ISPA - Instituto Universitário
Portugal

Andrea Gori
Postdoctoral researcher
Centre Scientifique de Monaco
Monaco

Hedelvy J. Guada
Director
CICTMAR, NGO
Venezuela

Elena Guerrero
PhD Student
Institut de Ciencies del Mar-CSIC
Spain

Paolo Guidetti
Professor
ECOMERS lab., Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis Nice
France

Noemi Guil
Postdoctoral researcher
MNCN-CSIC
Spain

Elena Gutierrez Gomez
Quality and Environmental Technician
Elimco soluciones integrales s.a
Spain

Nicole Henning
PhD candidate
Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre
Germany

Sofia Henriques
Scientist
Centro de Oceanografia
Portugal

Manuel Hidalgo
Researcher
Spanish Institute of Oceanography
Spain

Joakim Hjelm
Senior scientist
SLU Aqua, Institute of Marine Research
Sweden

Franck Hollander
Dr.
WWF - Belgium
Belgium

Kathryn Hughes
Postdoctoral Researcher
Bangor University
UK
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing

Francesca Iuculano
PhD student
Instituto Mediterraneo Estudios Avanzados (IMEDEA-CSIC-UIB)
Spain

Dr. Enrique Jaimez
General Manager
Cluster of Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Universidad de Oviedo
Spain

Stuart Jenkins
Reader in Marine Ecology
Bangor University
UK

Andrew Johnson
Self-employed fisheries ecologist
Bangor University
UK

Gabriel Jorda
JAE-Doc Researcher
IMEDEA
Spain

Juan Junoy
Profesor Titular
Universidad de Alcalá
Spain

Dominik Linhard
Project Manager
Umweltforschungsintsitut - GLOBAL 2000
Austria

Víctor Lucía García
PHD Student
University of Salamanca
Spain

Luisa Lamas
PHD student
Centro de Oceanografia
Portugal

Ángel Luque
Professor
Marine Biology Lab, Departamento de Biología, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Autónoma
Spain

Angeliki Lysimachou
Research Scientist
Marine and Environmental Research Centre (CIIMAR)
Portugal

Teresa Madurell
Postdoctoral researcher
ICM
Spain

Isabel Marín
PHD Student
Instituto de Ciencias del Mar (ICM-CSIC)
Spain

Pablo Martín-Sosa
Marine biologist
Spanish Institution of Oceanography
Spain

Brezo Martinez
Dr.
Biodiversity and Conservation Unit. Rey Juan Carlos University
Spain
Alejandro Martínez Abrain  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
Universidade Da Coruña  
Spain

Pedro Martínez Arbizu  
Professor Head of Department  
Senckenberg am Meer  
Germany

Juan Martínez Ayala  
Technician  
IMEDEA  
Spain

Miguel Mateo  
Senior Scientist  
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas  
Spain

Inés Mazarrasa Elósegui  
PhD student  
Mediterranean Institute of Advanced Studies (IMEDEA-CSIC)  
Spain

Juan Moles  
PhD student  
University of Barcelona  
Spain

Pedro Morais  
Postdoctoral researcher  
Centro de Investigação Marinha e Ambiental  
Portugal

Carmen Morales Caselles  
Researcher  
University of Cadiz  
Spain

Elvira Morote  
Ph.D  
University of Almeria  
Spain

Marcial Murciano  
Professor  
OIC/UAB  
Spain

Carla Murciano Virto  
Research on marine science  
Plan Bleu Regional Activity Center / Mediterranean Action Plan  
France / Spain

Norma Zoe Neszi  
PhD Student  
ICM - CSIC  
Spain

Frederico Oliveira  
Research Assistant  
Centre of Marine Sciences - University of Algarve  
Portugal

James Oliver  
Programme Operations Officer  
IUCN Global Marine Programme  
Switzerland

Covadonga Orejas  
Researcher  
Spanish Oceanographic Institute  
Spain

Miquel Ortega Cerda  
Investigador vinculado universitario  
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona  
Spain
Scientific Community calls on the Members of the European Parliament to stop funding overfishing
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Jose Rodriguez  
Fisheries scientist  
Instituto Español de Oceanografía  
Spain

Antoni Rodriguez-Perea  
Emeritus Professor  
Balearic Islands University  
Spain

Eelco Rohling  
Professor  
The Australian National University  
Australia

Joandomènc Ros  
Professor  
University of Barcelona  
Spain

Erica Sá  
Researcher  
Centre of Oceanography  
Portugal

Nuno Sales Henriques  
Researcher  
CCMar - Centre of Marine Sciences, University of Algarve  
Portugal

María José Sánchez-Muros  
Profesora Titular  
Universidad de Almería  
Spain

Pilar Santidrian Tomillo  
Marie Curie fellow  
Instituto Mediterráneo de Estudios Avanzados  
Spain

Juan Jose Santos Blanco  
Senior Researcher  
Thuenen Institute for Baltic Sea Fisheries  
Germany

Maria del Mar Segura  
Postdoc Researcher  
University of Hawai  
USA

Bernard Séret  
Senior scientist  
IRD  
France

Ester Serrao  
Professor of Marine Biology  
Center of Marine Sciences, University of Algarve  
Portugal

François Simard  
Deputy Director  
International Union for Conservation of Nature  
France

Mila C.Soriguer  
Professor of Biology  
University of Cadiz  
Spain

Sanja Svrkota  
Project coordinator  
NGO Green Home  
Montenegro

Célia Teixeira  
Postdoctoral researcher  
Centro de Oceanografia, Faculdade de Ciências, Universidade de Lisboa  
Portugal

Anna Traveset  
Research Professor  
Spanish Research Council  
Spain
Leonardo Tunesi  
Research Director  
Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research  
Italy

Jean Vacelet  
Directeur de Recherches émérite CNRS  
Institut méditerranéen de Biodiversité et d'Ecologie marine et continentale  
France

Maria Valls  
Technician  
Instituto Español de Oceanografía  
Spain

Josefa Velasco Garcia  
Teacher and scientist  
University of Murcia  
Spain

José M. Viéitez  
Profesor de Zoología  
Universidad de Alcalá  
Spain

César Vilas  
Researcher  
Andalucia Institute for Researching and Training on Agricultural and Fisheries  
Spain

David Villegas-Ríos  
Researcher  
Institute of Marine Research  
Spain

Amanda Vincent  
Canada Research Chair in Marine Conservation  
The University of British Columbia  
Canada

Tomas Virbickas  
Senior researcher  
Nature Research Centre  
Lithuania

Jan Marcin Weslawski  
Professor  
Institute of Oceanology Polish Academy of Sciences  
Poland

Dr. Serinde van Wijk  
Researcher in Natural Sciences  
Bangor University  
UK

Anwen Williams  
Senior Clerical Officer  
EFF grant, School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University  
Lidia Yebra  
Tenured scientist  
Spanish Institute of Oceanography  
Spain

Ramunas Zydelis  
Research ecologist, consultant Research DHI  
Denmark

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