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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)
programming process
– Information Note from the Commission

Delegations will find in the Annex an Information Note from the Commission on the above-mentioned subject, as received from the European Commission services. The Note will be discussed under "Any other business" at the session of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 13 June 2022.

EUROPEAN MARITIME, FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE FUND (EMFAF)

PROGRAMMING PROCESS

INFORMATION NOTE

The programming process for the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) has gathered pace. Member States are advancing in their programme preparations and the negotiations with the Commission are proving to be particularly helpful in guiding them on **the best possible use of EMFAF resources**. The Fund's key objectives are to contribute to the European Green Deal and to support the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Strengthening sector's resilience has become even more important in this regard, given the increased operating costs and raw materials prices caused by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

The new generation of EMFAF programmes will therefore be instrumental in achieving the EU objectives **of resilience, green transition and digital transition**, while delivering on the Fund's priorities for marine biodiversity, maritime policy and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. In this respect, the Commission is working with Member States to ensure programmes include **a medium and long-term investment strategy** addressing the specific needs and challenges of the sector with adequate resources and a performance framework to maximise the added value of public investment. This often translates, for example, into an increased support for more sustainable and low-impact fishing and aquaculture, as well as into actions contributing to the EU biodiversity objectives and a good environmental status in the marine environment.

The EMFAF should invest in the future. This means that projects should foster **innovation and skills development**, promote **diversification of economic activities** and increase **long-term resilience** to help the sector adapt to major trends as well as to alleviate the impact of market

disruptions. This is particularly relevant in the current context. Indeed, adding to the changing circumstances in relation to climate change, an aging workforce and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global context has shifted considerably with Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, causing significant disruptions all along the supply chain of seafood products, and underlining the need to speed up the green transition of the sector.

The increased operating costs stemming from the steep increase in prices of energy and raw materials, squeezing profit margins, jeopardise the economic and social sustainability of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and the local communities dependent on them. This underlines the importance of making the best use of public investment to help increase resilience of the sector in particular by **increasing energy efficiency, reducing operating costs, diminishing dependency on imports of inputs, and fostering collective organisation of production.**

To support operators to bear the immediate economic consequences of the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the Commission among other measures¹, has activated the **crisis mechanism of the EMFAF**, which enables Member States to grant financial compensation to operators for additional costs and income foregone due to the current market disruptions, as well as storage aid to producer organisations. **EMFAF support can be mobilised quickly and without legal risks for Member States**, upon establishment of a compensation methodology. The Commission therefore expects Member States to make support available as soon as possible to the operators of the fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing sectors, as called for repeatedly by stakeholders across the EU. These temporary crisis measures, however, should not impede in any way the long-term efforts towards **the structural energy transition of the sector** to reduce dependency on fossil fuels. This transition should be a priority of the EMFAF programmes.

¹ Commission has proposed the following crisis measures:

- a temporary crisis framework for State Aid, which enables Member States to set up schemes to grant up to €35,000 for companies affected by the crisis active in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors;
- an amendment to the Regulation on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support similar measures to those available under the EMFAF crisis mechanism. However, the EMFF framework will require still some time before entering in force, as it is subject to the ordinary legislative procedure.

Other key issues that are emerging in our negotiations with Member States are particularly important for effectively supporting our priorities under the CFP, the EU maritime policy and the EU agenda for international ocean governance. These concern in particular, investments in effective **nature protection and restoration mechanisms**, a robust **fisheries management and governance system**, as well as strengthened **control and enforcement measures**. As regards **aquaculture**, support should be consistent with the multiannual national strategic plan, while coastal Member States should ensure adequate support to **maritime spatial planning** as a key enabler for the blue economy. Dedicated support to producer organisations, diversification of livelihoods in coastal communities and small-scale coastal fishing are also considered priority investments that Member States are expected to take up.

In this regard, the Commission encourages Member States to continue keeping an open and active channel of communication with the Commission services (DG MARE) for any questions related to the application of the crisis measures and programme submissions more generally. The Commission is working around the clock to facilitate a swift adoption of the submitted programmes and expects Member States to act quickly, with programmes, partnership agreements and in providing the self-assessment of the horizontal enabling conditions' fulfilment, to ensure that high quality programmes are adopted before the end of this year. **This is crucial not to risk losing EMFAF resources**, as the Commission has made Member States aware on many occasions.

