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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EX- POST EVALUATION
OF THE
EUROPEAN FISHERIES FUND 2007-2013

{SWD(2017) 274 final}

This Staff Working Document presents the main findings of the ex post evaluation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF)¹ for the 2007-2013 programming period. The evaluation was undertaken by independent evaluators and finalised at the end of 2016². The findings will be used to inform the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders for further implementation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (the EMFF which succeeded the EFF for the 2014-2020 period) and for reflections for the future.

The key evaluation tasks were to review the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund over the 2007-2013 period, as well as to answer six evaluation questions in order to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, EU added value and sustainability of the EFF. Stakeholders were consulted through targeted interviews (in particular with Managing Authorities) as well as by means of an open, internet-based public consultation.

1. BACKGROUND

The EFF was established in the 2007-2013 programming period as a follow-up to the previous structural support programmes, the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), in support of the fisheries sector since the early 1990s³. Unlike its predecessor which had over 60 Operational Programmes (OPs), the EFF adopted a simplified approach, with only one OP per MS⁴.

The EFF was launched in 2007 at the onset of the global economic and fuel crises which resulted in reduced access to private finance, stronger public expenditure control, increased financial and economic pressure on the fisheries sector (rising fuel costs, fish feed costs increase, rising unemployment), a decline in demand for fisheries products, and prices that had stagnated or fallen.

2. RESOURCES MOBILISED BY THE EFF

The main focus of the ex post evaluation was the EU contribution of 4,3 billion euros that was allocated in 2007 to the Member States (MS) through their OPs. By December 2015, 102% of the total EU budget had been committed⁵ and 72% paid to the beneficiaries. However, a boost was noted for certain measures at the end of the EFF programming period, and the final figures declared by the MS⁶ in the framework of the closure indicate that payments reached 90% of the amounts programmed. However, the application of the N+2 rule throughout the programming period led to some de-commitment, reducing the final amount of EU funds programmed to 4,056.754 million euros (94% of the initial amount of funds programmed).

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 of 27 July 2006 of the European Fisheries Fund and Commission Regulation (EC) No 498/2007 of 26 March 2007 laying down detailed rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the European Fisheries Fund.

² This date was established by Commission Delegated Act (EU) 2015/895, adopted on the basis of Article 129 of the EMFF Regulation 508/2014.

³ The Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) was created in 1993 as the specific financial instrument dedicated to fisheries structural policy. First established through Regulation (EC) No 2080/93, the FIFG became the structural pillar of the CFP.

⁴ For the 2007-2013 period, Luxembourg did not receive funding from the EFF, while Croatia only had an OP adopted in 2013.

⁵ It is a common practice to "overbook" the commitment since it may happen that some operations are not carried through.

⁶ Please note this figure must be used carefully since it is based on the amounts declared by the MS at the end of March 2017, which have not yet been verified by the Commission, nor audited.

3. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

Effectiveness: The EFF has been moderately effective in meeting its objectives.

- Between 2007 and 2015, the capacity of the EU fishing fleet decreased by 17.5% (in gross tonnage), of which more than half (53%) was removed with support from the European Fisheries Fund. Thus, nearly 10% of the EU fleet capacity was removed with the help of the EFF. This also resulted in a 9% decrease of engine power in the EU fishing fleet.
- However, the evaluation of the EFF confirmed that there was scope to improve the links between the EFF and the sustainable exploitation of fisheries given that this is also the result of fisheries management measures. Similarly, the contribution of the EFF to broader conservation objectives such as protection and enhancement of the environment and natural resources when related to the fisheries sector were less visible. This has in large part been addressed with the EMFF in the 2014-2020 period. There, the links with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, including the sustainable exploitation of fisheries and minimizing the negative impacts on the marine environment, are clearer.
- An overall *improvement of the fleet competitiveness* was aided with EFF support by contributing to the modernisation of the remaining fleet, improving fishing ports and landing sites, and increasing the added-value of fish products by supporting investments in marketing and processing.
- In the *aquaculture* sector, the results were below the expected objectives as EU aquaculture production increased less than global aquaculture production over the 2007-2013 period. However, EFF funding was particularly important to sustain the sector during the economic crisis.
- *Processing and marketing investments contributed* to maintain and create jobs and accelerated the modernisation of the industry.
- *Sustainable development of local areas (Axis 4)* enabled maintaining and creating jobs and has been an important source of investments towards improving the quality of life in fisheries dependent areas.
- The EFF is estimated to have *created approximately 17,000 jobs and maintained many more* over the programming period. Both temporary cessation and socio-economic compensation measures have contributed to maintain employment on a temporary basis, in the specific fleets where it was applied, whilst the EFF contributed to the creation of approximately 10,000 new jobs in the processing sector. Another 6,760 jobs would have been created and 9,240 maintained as a result of projects supported under community led local development (Axis 4)⁷.

Efficiency: The quality of the monitoring data does not allow assessing whether the EFF objectives were achieved at a reasonable cost. However, there is scope for improvement:

- With regards to fleet measures, the cessation evaluation carried out in 2013⁸ concluded that the efficiency of cessation measures in the long-term is questionable. Furthermore, there is general agreement amongst Member States that overcapacity has been addressed in many fleets. Differences in the cost of fleet measures can be observed, but these largely depend on the structure of the fleet targeted by adjustment plans. Competitive bidding for

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/axis-4_en. These figures were confirmed by a survey undertaken by the FARNET Support Unit in 2016.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/documentation/studies/cessation_en

the allocation of grants was found to increase substantially the efficiency of fleet measures in the MS that used it.

- In both aquaculture and processing, the average cost for creating an additional tonne of production capacity across the EU varied considerably between MS, which can be partly explained by the focus on different species or processing methods.
- Managing authorities used the technical assistance measure to address administrative burden issues⁹. Analysis also showed that administrative costs acted as disincentives for potential beneficiaries.

Relevance: Even though EFF support for permanent cessation decreased during the 2007-2013 period, the need to continue the process of rebalancing the fleet remained relevant for the objectives of both the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and the EFF. For aquaculture and processing, competitiveness was the focus and the scale of uptake suggests that these measures were highly relevant for the sector.

Coherence: The objectives of the EFF Regulation were not contradicting those of other EU structural investment funds such as the ERDF, the ESF or the EAFRD, or those of other EU funding instruments such as LIFE. However, despite clear demarcation lines between these funding sources, complementarities and synergies with other funds remained limited (except for Axis 4 which was complementary with the EAFRD/LEADER in many fisheries areas).

EU added value: The added-value of the EU intervention lies mainly in the reduction of the fleet capacity, the achievements of Axis 4, innovation projects and collective actions. Furthermore, the EFF contributed to an increase in fuel efficiency and selectivity of fishing methods.

Sustainability: The ex post evaluation concludes that reductions in the fleet achieved with EFF support may not have been long-lasting and structural.

This ex-post evaluation showed that the objectives of the EFF were reached to a large extent, but that there was scope for improvement, in particular its effectiveness and sustainability, and with regards to its delivery system and a focus on results. To a large extent, these issues have been addressed with the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund with a greater result orientation but the evaluation also provides a reference framework for judging over the coming years if the issues are being tackled in an effective and proportional way – as well as which elements will need to be maintained or reinforced in the future.

⁹ However, the ex-post evaluators underlined the fact that technical assistance was not properly documented and monitored; this limits the value of these conclusions.