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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: AOB for the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 22 June 2026:
European fisheries in Western Africa: future perspectives and the next steps to be taken
- Information from Latvia

European fisheries in Western Africa: future perspectives and the next steps to be taken

Information from Latvia

In Western Africa the cooperation between the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania in the fisheries sector dates to 1987, making it the EU's longest-standing fisheries partnership. Over the decades, the agreement has been regularly renewed and progressively strengthened, integrating more robust sustainability, scientific, and governance elements. A key milestone was reached in 2006, when the partnership was modernised into the framework that underpins today's Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs). This reform placed greater emphasis on responsible resource management, transparency, and support for Mauritania's fisheries sector.

The current SFPA and its Protocol, was signed on 15 November 2021 and is valid for six years (2021–2026). The Protocol grants EU vessels access to Mauritanian waters in exchange for a financial contribution covering both access rights and support for Mauritania's fisheries policy. The agreement includes science-based catch limits, monitoring and control provisions, and targeted sectoral support aimed at strengthening local management capacity and ensuring the long-term sustainability of marine resources.

Throughout its history, the EU–Mauritania SFPA has played a significant role in supporting Mauritania’s economy while promoting sustainable exploitation of marine resources in line with EU and international standards. In this context, Latvia underlines that the continued presence of the EU fleet in the region remains an important factor in ensuring sustainable and responsible management of fish stocks in the area. In the absence of EU fishing activities, there is a major risk that these opportunities would be taken up by third countries such as Russia, China, or Turkey, including through reflagging or joint ventures. Such developments could negatively affect the sustainability of fish stocks in respective waters, particularly given the current situation of certain species, including sardines and sardinella.

Should the Agreement fail to materialize, Latvia is concerned that the European Union risks losing not only an important fisheries agreement and its associated fishing opportunities, but also its broader presence and influence in the region. Precedents in other contexts, notably Morocco, illustrate the potential consequences of such a developments.

Latvia acknowledges and appreciates the Commission’s continued efforts and constructive engagement in the negotiations with the Mauritanian authorities. At the same time, Latvia expresses concern that the information provided thus far from the Commission does not sufficiently reflect the views expressed by Member States, particularly regarding the risks associated with a non-extension of the Protocol in due time and the conclusion of an agreement under conditions that would be unfavourable for the EU fleet.

Latvia emphasises that approximately 50% of its annual catches are taken in Mauritanian waters, underlining the critical importance of this fishery for the Latvian high-sea fleet and the need to safeguard these opportunities at the level which reflects current interests of engaged Member States. In this regard, Latvia wishes to express serious concern about the level of fishing opportunities proposed by the Commission under Category 6 of the Protocol (only 93,000 tonnes annually). This volume does not adequately represent the needs of the whole EU fleet, as it corresponds roughly to Latvia’s catch alone under the current Protocol. The volume offered even now is so low, it endangers the existence of our fleet. At the same time, industry has also confirmed that there is no level playing field for EU and third countries. Third country fishermen are using fish resources without equally substantial limitations as our fleet. The European Union provides substantial financial support to the SFPA and therefore expects tangible results, however, the situation continues to deteriorate. Following the latest round of negotiations, it has become evident that no further progress can be achieved, and the suspension of fishing opportunities is now unavoidable.

Latvia therefore calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure urgent, close and constructive cooperation with Member States who are interested in fishing opportunities in Western Africa, in order to help their fleets;
- seek an agreement with Mauritania that provides sufficient fishing opportunities under conditions that allow for the economic viability and full utilisation of those opportunities by the EU fleet;
- inform Member States about the next steps and planned actions to safeguard the continued presence of European fishers in Western Africa and any safeguard measures for EU fleet to ensure its existence;
- clarify the measures envisaged to ensure continuity of fishing operations under current negotiation scenario.

Furthermore, Latvia calls on the Commission to provide an update on the state of play regarding the SFPA with the Kingdom of Morocco. Although the Council granted a negotiating mandate in January, no negotiations have taken place to date. Clarification on the next steps is therefore urgently required.
