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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Energy transition in EU fisheries and aquaculture - Presidency draft background note

The annex to this note contains the Presidency's background note and guiding questions for the Council meeting ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 30 March 2026.

Policy context

The Cyprus Presidency highlights the importance of the energy transition in the EU fisheries and aquaculture. This is a key moment for the sector, with major policy developments that will shape its future, such as the upcoming CFP evaluation, the Vision 2040 for EU fisheries and aquaculture, the EU external action for fisheries, and the Ocean Act. This policy debate aims to reflect on how the energy transition can be furthered in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector. Energy transition in the sector is a key step in meeting the European Union's wider sustainability goals and strengthening the sector's economic resilience in view of its overreliance on fossil fuels.

With the Vision 2040 framework and the Energy Transition Communication 2023 (COM(100)2023) as guiding documents, the Cyprus Presidency recognises that the energy transition roadmap strives to transform the sector, taking substantial steps towards climate neutrality by 2050.

The EU fisheries and aquaculture sector stands at a critical juncture. While efforts for its transition to a sustainable and resilient industry are underway, the sector continues to face significant challenges. The high reliance on fossil fuels has rendered it vulnerable to fluctuating energy prices, undermining its economic performance and stability and threatening its long-term viability. To counter these challenges, a transition to renewable and low-carbon energy sources, coupled with increased energy efficiency, is essential. The energy transition requires the sector, stakeholders and Member States to actively participate in transforming the sector by reducing reliance on fossil fuels and adopting carbon-neutral energy sources. The Cyprus Presidency also recognises that the energy transition roadmap needs to align with other broader EU initiatives such as the Competitive Compass, the European Industrial Maritime Strategy and the Ports Strategy.

However, the energy transition in the EU fisheries and aquaculture should be seen in the context of the wider transition to a sustainable and competitive fisheries and aquaculture sector. To date, the sector has been facing several long-standing and persistent challenges. These include an ageing fleet, low average profit margins and high levels of uncertainty about the future of the sector. Small-scale fisheries are particularly impacted. Moreover, the prospect of generational renewal is endangered by difficult working conditions and inadequate remuneration, deterring potential applicants. Geopolitical shifts and competition for maritime space exacerbate these challenges, further complicating the sector's outlook. Without a clear direction, the sector risks continuing on a path of declining competitiveness, low profitability and lack of modernisation. This context makes the energy transition particularly challenging in this sector. At the same time, the situation of the fleet and the current policy context provide the EU and Member States with a unique opportunity to reflect on the future of the EU fishing fleet and aquaculture energy transition.

Strengthening energy infrastructure and supply systems is crucial for enabling the uptake of clean fuels in the EU fisheries and aquaculture sector. Currently, inadequate port and energy infrastructure limit the adoption of low-emission technologies. In addition, technology testing and scale-up are needed to ensure that the most adequate technologies for the different segments reach the market and are available for the sector. Synergies from shipping and other waterborne transport can be developed. However, the particularity of the sector may require adaptation or specific technologies. Targeted investments in port infrastructure, to ensure bunkering infrastructure for low-carbon fuels, and in testing technologies for specific segments of the sector are essential for fostering modern, low-impact operations. A coordinated rollout by the EU, while mobilising private investment and public-private partnerships, is needed to successfully achieve this transition.

The sector also struggles with significant barriers due to limited funding, including constraints from the current EMFAF. Low profit margins and aging vessels hinder its ability to attract private investment, making it less appealing to investors. Additionally, the high costs associated with adopting new technologies pose further challenges for fishers and aquaculture producers in financing their transition to more sustainable practices, in particular for small-scale fishers. These factors collectively restrict the sector's capacity to modernize and embrace cleaner energy solutions. The future MFF holds potential for funding the energy transition, provided that close collaboration with stakeholders continues. Member States have a critical role in these transformative efforts, by considering the opportunities arising from the new National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP) as well as seizing opportunities within the European competitiveness fund and Horizon programs.

EU support for technology readiness can accelerate a transition hand-in-hand with modernised and renewed fleets. In addition, addressing structural issues such as overcapacity or access to fishing opportunities and improving working conditions will be crucial components of the future of the sector, which should tie into the CFP and the broader energy transition roadmap.

The presidency highlights the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the sector across Member States.

Against this background, the Cyprus Presidency's objective in organising this debate is to have a high-level exchange that can contribute to the ongoing reflection process on the energy transition in the sector.

Questions for discussion

The Cyprus Presidency invites participants to share their views on the following questions:

1. **Regulatory change and simplification** a) Which regulatory reforms are necessary to support the sector's energy transition? b) How can the level playing field for the EU sector be ensured?
2. **Investment and financing** a) How can the energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture be effectively financed, considering the respective roles of public and private investment? b) What type of initiatives can ensure technology scale-up at EU level, the needed supply of alternative energy and adequate ports and infrastructure to support the energy transition in the sector? c) Where and how should funding be targeted, taking into account technological maturity, particularly, the availability of technologies ready for practical application in fisheries and aquaculture, and where is further research and development is still needed?
3. **Future business models** a) What roles should Member States play in promoting a viable and competitive sector, ensuring resilient sustainability and carbon neutrality in the sector by 2050? b) How can regional cooperation within each sea basin help develop practical solutions for the fisheries sector? c) How can Member States support the heterogeneity of the different fisheries and aquaculture sectors and the different fleet segment needs?