VIRGINIJUS SINKEVIČIUS
Commissioner for Environment
Oceans and Fisheries

Brussels, 06/05/2020
Ref. Ares (2020) 2248637

Giampaolo Buonfiglio
ChairmanMEDAC
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Dear Mr Buonfiglio,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 March on the implementation of the measures adopted by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) for the sustainable management of trawl fisheries targeting giant red shrimps and blue and red shrimps in the Strait of Sicily.

First of all, let me touch upon the Coronavirus crisis, which is a severe public health emergency with huge socio-economic consequences for the fisheries sector. The Commission and the European Union have made combating the virus and addressing its consequences a top priority. To this end, the Commission has already adopted a number of measures that should also be of help to the fisheries sector, in particular the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives, including amendments to the EMFF, and a new Temporary Framework for State aid. Let me assure you that we continue to monitor the situation closely.

Turning to your letter, it is my strong belief that, along the lines of the MedFish4Ever Declaration, we all need to act together in the Mediterranean in order to safeguard the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources, including by fighting Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing. I note that MEDAC has an important part to play in this joint endeavor.

The GFCM has taken significant steps in the last years towards the fight against IUU fishing, including the adoption of a Regional Plan of Action for the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (RPOA-IUU). Going forward, combatting IUU should feature prominently in the upcoming GFCM strategy for 2021-2024.

From an operational standpoint, and since the adoption of the MedFish4Ever Declaration, GFCM has adopted schemes for international joint inspections to ensure the control of compliance with the adopted management measures.

Currently there are five areas under joint inspection schemes (Strait of Sicily, Ionian Sea, Levant Sea, Adriatic Sea, Black Sea). I would like to underline the key role played by the EU in both the adoption of these measures and their implementation, in particular through the critical support provided by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and the Member States' control authorities. I would like to recall that no less than around 1500 inspections at sea and over 4800 inspections ashore were carried out in the first half of 2019 under the EU Mediterranean Joint Deployment Scheme.

Now that a number of GFCM operational control activities are on track, it is important to reinforce GFCM's tools and processes to address IUU fishing cases. A number of steps have been taken in that sense at the last annual meeting, upon the EU's initiative: bringing transparency to access agreements, delivering pilot projects towards a regional VMS system and the implementation of an Electronic Recording and Reporting System, revising and updating the IUU vessels list, and categorising non-compliance cases according to the level of seriousness. The latter is particularly relevant to the issue you raised since the Committee of Compliance (CoC) will be better equipped to classify contracting parties and issuing more appropriate recommendations in order to enhance enforcement of GFCM decisions and their full implementation.

These measures will contribute to addressing the incidents your letter referred to. All detected and confirmed IUU fishing activities under the joint inspection scheme in the Strait of Sicily, are to be reported to the GFCM. I can confirm that the European Commission has duly transmitted to the GFCM, and to the Egyptian authorities as flag State, the cases that were identified in this context and to which our attention was drawn *via* EFCA. These cases will be presented and dealt with in the appropriate GFCM forum, which is the next CoC meeting. This is essential to safeguard a level playing field among CPCs in the Mediterranean and between EU and non-EU fishermen.

Let me reassure you that the European Commission is taking the incidents you referred to very seriously and that we remain strongly committed to combat IUU fishing in the Mediterranean.

I am looking forward to continuing our good cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Virginijus Sinkevičius