



Brussels, 26 October 2020

To: Members of the European Parliament

The European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH)

The European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE)

In view of the discussions on the own initiative report "The impact on the fishing sector of off-shore windfarms and other renewable energy systems" (2019/2158(INI)) in the parliament, we would like to present our views on this topic.

Climate change hits our ocean and seas strongly. The rising concentration of greenhouse gas emissions is having a double impact on our ocean and seas: it is driving up water temperatures and causing acidification, which interact to the detriment of marine ecosystems. **Warmer and more acidic seawater will negatively affect fishery and aquaculture.** Increase in water temperatures will contribute to a restructuring of marine ecosystems with implications for ocean circulation, biogeochemical cycling and marine biodiversity. Ocean acidification will affect the ability of some calcium carbonate-secreting species (as molluscs, planktons and corals) to produce their shells or skeletons^[1].

In order to limit the impact of climate change on our society, EU Member States need to commit to a climate neutral economy by 2040 by phasing out fossil fuels and committing to energy efficiency and a transition of our energy system to one that is **100% based on renewable energy sources**. Moreover, in 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that to remain below 1.5 degrees, decisive action in the next 10 years is important implying that in the coming decade, EU Member States need to significantly increase the deployment of renewable energy. **Offshore renewable energy will be a key technology** part of the future energy transition of which the deployment should be handled with respect for marine ecosystems. **As the fisheries sector will also be hit by climate change, it is in their own interest to actively contribute to solutions to limit the impact of climate change. This includes finding synergies with the offshore renewable energy sector.**

We share the concern of the fishing sector about the future of our seas and the coastal water ecosystems. However, our seas and marine ecosystems are already heavily altered by offshore oil and gas exploitation, habitat destruction relating to extractive activities and dredging and marine and land-based pollutants, such as shipping discharge and wastewaters, agricultural runoff and plastics which result in a poor environmental and ecological status. Also overfishing and



bottom trawling activities have a negative impact on our marine ecosystems and fish populations. There is abundant scientific research that point to the destructive impact on the environment and fish populations overall of current fishing practices that definitely would need to be ad

dressed. In fact offshore windfarms can offer a refuge for fish populations to recover. **When discussing the future of the fishing communities, it is imperative that measures to find synergies with the offshore renewable energy sector are complemented with commitments to better protect marine ecosystems against different forms of harmful uses.**

In the run up to the discussion of the INI-report, below we highlight a number of suggestions that CAN Europe believes are important to take into account in this debate.

The deployment of offshore renewable energy needs to increase

It is imperative that climate, energy and biodiversity policy are reinforcing each other.

In the coming decade, EU Member States need to significantly reduce energy demand and increase the deployment of renewable energy to ensure that we reach net zero emissions by 2040. The current 2030 EU renewables target of at least 32% is not enough, as already in this decade renewable electricity generation should triple. This should lead to renewables covering 50% of gross final energy consumption in 2030 and 100% in 2040.

Offshore renewable energy will be a key technology part of the future energy transition. To support the needed multiplication of offshore renewable energy capacities, the EU and its Member States need to improve planning, increase regional collaboration and significantly improve the regulatory framework to ensure sufficient offshore renewable energy is deployed fitting with a scenario in line with the 1.5°C target. However, while doing so, the deployment should be handled with respect for marine ecosystems. We should also keep in mind that for technologies with long lead times such as offshore wind, we need to plan today for what should be installed by 2030.

Measures to prevent and reduce impacts of offshore windfarm construction, operation and decommissioning

The construction, operation and decommissioning of offshore windfarms result in physical changes in the marine environment, which entail ecological risks. But there are various mitigating measures that can be taken to prevent, to reduce the intensity or scale, or to reduce the duration of the impact. Years of research and the development of measures now enable to lower

sound emissions related to piling, helping mitigating the disturbances to marine life. A well-known noise mitigation measure is the use of bubbles curtains which break down the sound waves.

There are also uncertainties with regards to the impact of the larger scale development of future wind farms. Therefore, further improvements and innovations to prevent and reduce the impacts of offshore wind farm construction, operation and decommissioning are required.

Offshore wind is a growing sector, competing for space in an already busy seascape, due to other - in general much more harmful - activities such as fishing, dredging, shipping, oil and gas drilling, and military activities. These activities exert pressure on our marine ecosystems with often more severe consequences than offshore wind energy.

Offshore wind farms offer opportunities

Offshore wind farms also offer opportunities for the natural environment of our seas. Wind turbine foundations and surrounding deposited rocks, possibly in combination with active recovery, provide additional hard substrate. Research shows that mussels attach themselves to wind turbine foundations and thus spread further out to sea. The shells that fall off the foundations offer an attachment location for other species, which may lead to more shellfish banks. Some fish species are also attracted by the food and protection offered around hard structures, this may result in an increase in fish such as cod and whiting^[2].

Joint Marine Spatial Planning

EU Member States are currently developing their Marine Spatial Plans in which EU Member States need to spell out how to organize their sea space. When developing their plans, Member States should adopt an ecosystem-based approach. Secondly, there is not only a need to assess impacts of individual activities/projects; it is important to assess cumulative effects of different maritime activities. Thirdly, the impacts of maritime activities are not restricted by borders, so Member States should work more towards joint transboundary planning. And as a last issue, Member States also need to consider if and how activities are in line with the Paris Agreement objective to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C.

Finding synergies: working towards coexistence



Even though limited in using sea space, the further deployment of offshore wind may overlap with some fishing areas. Efforts should be undertaken to find synergies between those two sectors. As such, it is important to start early dialogue, communication and discussion. Not only

safety rules should be part of this discussion. There also needs to be a dialogue about the socio-economic dimension of offshore wind projects for coastal communities.

Marine Spatial Planning is a key tool to improve cross-sector cooperation and thus minimize spatial conflicts. Long-term options for multiple potential uses should be tackled at an early stage in the planning process.

Co-existence options depend on site-specific characteristics - such as ecological importance - and site management plans. While in some areas, bans on fishing in offshore wind farms (for safety reasons) are beneficial for recovery of fish populations as these areas serve as refuges, offshore wind farms could be utilised to experiment with more sustainable forms of food production (in a way that does not inhibit the development of the natural environment) in other areas.

^[1] <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/eu-adaptation-policy/sector-policies/marine-and-fisheries>

^[2] North Sea Foundation (2019). North Sea wind farms: ecological risks and opportunities. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OBugg23NlaJbZlZgFvh0AIPNgwvQFEJ/view>