

Minister Prof. Vigilijus Jukna
Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania
Gedimino av. 19, LT-01103 Vilnius, Lithuania

Subject: Lack of Council response to the deep-sea fisheries proposal COM(2012) 371

Brussels, 10 July 2013

Dear Minister Jukna:

We wish to formally congratulate Lithuania for taking over the EU Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

We are aware of the tremendous amount of work and challenging tasks Lithuania will have to carry out during the next six months in the field of fisheries management, and hope that Lithuania will be able to act as a strong leader in overseeing the creation of legislation to help secure the future of sustainable EU fisheries. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to the access regime for deep-sea fisheries in the North-East Atlantic. We are concerned that the Council has neglected work on this file and is risking the future sustainability of relevant fisheries and the EU's credibility in terms of meeting international obligations to protect deep-sea species and habitats.

Almost one year ago, on 19 July 2012, the European Commission released a proposal to reform the access regime for deep-sea fisheries in the North-East Atlantic, including measures to improve the management of deep-sea stocks and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). This proposal¹ was officially referred to the European Parliament and Council on 11 September 2012. The process within the European Parliament is moving forward, with the plenary vote planned for October. Within the Council, however, work has not yet begun, despite the fact that the 18-month work programme of the Council specifically identifies this issue as a priority for completion.² This delay is particularly worrying given the tight timeline for finalising the procedure before the 2014 parliamentary elections.

It is the duty of the Council to consider all of the proposals tabled by the European Commission in a timely manner to ensure that legislative processes can progress. We therefore ask you, in your role as chair and President of the Fisheries Council, to ensure that this file is put on the agenda of the Working Parties on Internal and External Fisheries Policy as soon as possible. Any further delay could be seen as a deliberate attempt to delay or block new legislation on the deep-sea access regime.

A revision of the current regime³ is urgently needed to prevent overfishing and ensure that deep-sea fisheries are managed sustainably and in compliance with EU and international commitments. The current regime has proven ineffective. The status of most deep-sea stocks in the North-East Atlantic is either overfished or unknown,⁴ and many VMEs in the Atlantic, such as deep-sea corals and sponge beds, remain unprotected. The deep-sea measures adopted in 2002 fail to reflect scientific

¹ COM(2012) 371

² 17426/12, p. 90: "*The Council will continue to work on the Commission proposal for a regulation on the specific access for fishing for deep-sea stocks, in order to complete the review of this regime.*"

³ Regulation (EC) 2347/2002

⁴ COM(2012) 30

recommendations of the last decade and are inconsistent with existing EU policy and international commitments such as United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72.

We ask you to initiate work on the proposed regulation as soon as possible in order that the Council and Parliament may complete their review before the parliamentary elections in May 2014. Further delay would mean that the EU's main deep-sea fisheries will remain poorly managed and vulnerable to continued overfishing in breach of EU and international obligations.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. We wish you the best of success with your presidency, and remain at your disposal for any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Ariel Brunner
Head of EU Policy



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