



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/B3/PS

Dear Mr López,

Thank you for the LDAC Advice regarding sustainability concerns of fisheries and aquaculture production in the EU-Norway relations.

You raise several recommendations related to additional market access concessions in the framework of the EEA Agreement, the fisheries management by Norway of some fish stocks such as Arctic cod and mackerel, as well as issues related to unsustainable production of farmed salmon. Before reacting to each of those specific recommendations, please allow me some remarks of more general nature.

I should first emphasise that the management of shared fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic was an important background to the negotiations with Norway, and later on approval by the Council, of the protocol on additional market access for Norwegian fisheries products under the EEA Agreement. Where needed, stock-specific sensitivities were raised and notable adjustments were made compared to the previous protocol (e.g. mackerel). In doing so, the Commission repeatedly sought guarantees from Norway that it would return to constructive cooperation with the EU on fisheries matters. This has been the focus of the Commission's engagement with Norway across the full range of fisheries issues in the past few years, including in the discussion around the renewal of the ATQs Regulation.

The Commission will continue to engage in good faith with Norway to resolve outstanding issues in the area of fisheries and aim at a positive resetting of our fisheries relation. You might be aware that President von der Leyen proposed earlier this year a high-level dialogue on fisheries and ocean matters to Prime Minister Støre, and that a first meeting took place in July under the EU leadership of Executive Vice-President Šefčovič. The discussions have focused on EU historic fishing rights and legitimate interests in Svalbard waters and international waters of the North-East Atlantic. The Commission has underlined that decisions should be based on the best available scientific advice, ensure sustainable management of fish stocks and be in line with the 1920 Treaty of Paris. The high-level dialogue, whose next meeting will take place in October, should

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provide a forward-looking platform to address fisheries issues in our relations and deepen our cooperation in the areas of joint interest.

Please find below more specific reactions to the LDAC recommendations in your letter.

Recommendation 1: It is important for the EU to promote, in its relations with Norway, social and environmental sustainability in the production of fisheries and aquaculture products.

The EU is promoting social and environmental sustainability standards with all its trade partners, including with Norway through the implementation of the EEA Agreement.

Moreover, with respect to the need to ensure sustainable aquaculture practices in third countries, the European Commission and EU Member States are committed to promote sustainable aquaculture in international and regional fora and bilateral relations. The Strategic Guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture adopted by the European Commission in 2021 call EU Member States to “actively promote the objectives and principles stated in this Communication, notably the need for aquaculture to develop in a sustainable manner that is respectful of the environment, in the context of: (i) the sea basin strategies; (ii) bilateral agreements; and (iii) participation in international fora (e.g. the FAO).”

The EU, together with other FAO Members such as Norway, has promoted the work on the FAO Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture that were adopted by the FAO Committee on Fisheries in July 2024. These guidelines provide concrete recommendations on how to ensure the social, economic and environmental sustainability of aquaculture activities. This includes, for example, the adoption of practices to ensure the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the sustainable use of wild fish stocks and fish byproducts for aquafeed. The European Commission intends to use these guidelines as a reference in its cooperation with third countries on aquaculture.

Recommendation 2: Given the shortcomings of Norway when it comes to its fisheries and aquaculture production, we call on the EU to stop the continuation of tax derogations to Norway’s fisheries products (i.e., cod, mackerel, salmon, and others) entering the EU market.

The basic market access conditions for fisheries and aquaculture products are laid down in the EEA Agreement with Norway and Iceland. The fisheries products have always been considered as sensitive in the context of this Agreement and their market access have not been fully liberalised. Contrary to industrial goods, only partially reduced customs duties are applied on many fisheries products and many of them still must pay full duties. Exceptionally, tariff rate quotas are laid down for specific products and, periodically, additional market access preferences are laid down in the framework of the EEA Financial Mechanism. These additional concessions are limited in time and are carefully negotiated with the EEA Contracting Parties, taking into account the EU sensitivities.

Similarly, the current Autonomous Tariff Quotas also took into account the context of our broader relation on fisheries matters with partners.

Recommendation 3: It is important that further negotiations with Norway should be based on a mandate that gives consideration to the need for Norwegian fisheries

and aquaculture products to follow international resolutions from RFMOs as well as sustainability rules and standards from FAO in sustainable aquaculture and fish welfare.

In the EU-Norway high level dialogue the Commission has underlined the need for close cooperation in the framework of NEAFC, which is the relevant RFMO for the North-East Atlantic, and that EU and Norway should agree on sustainable management of the stocks of common interest that are also present in international waters.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck, our Advisory Councils coordinator, via the functional mailbox MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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