



## **CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA (Last update: 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2026)**

### **Conference Title:**

*How should the next generation of EU Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) look like? A multistakeholder perspective*

### **Key words:**

Policy coherence for development and fisheries; Transparency of fishing activities; International Ocean Governance; Ocean Diplomacy; Regional network; Level Playing Field for EU and non-EU fleets; Environmental sustainability; Economic competitiveness of EU fishing fleets; traceability of value chain; Cohabitation with relevant actors; Social responsibility; development of coastal communities in Africa; Fishing access, value addition and sectoral support; stakeholder engagement;

### **Venue: [European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\)](#)**

Room VMA22 - Rue Van Maerlant/Van Maerlantstraat 2

Brussels (Belgium)

**Date:** Wednesday 8 April 2026 – 09:30-17:30h

### **Co-organisers:**

EU Long Distance Fleet Advisory Council (LDAC) and European, Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in partnership

**Event Co-Sponsors:** Gobierno Vasco and Gobierno de Canarias;

**Event supporters:** Junta de Andalucía

### **LDAC annual work is mainly funded by:**

DG MARE (EC) and Spain General Secretary of Fisheries (SGP MAPA);



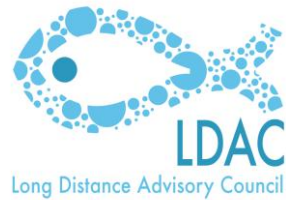
## 1. Background and Rationale

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) between the EU and third countries remain one of the building blocks and key elements of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) external dimension. They are bilateral international agreements offering a legal and operational framework to regulate access rights by EU fleets to surplus fishing resources within the EEZ of third countries. The beneficiary states, in exchange of this access, receive financial and technical support to contribute to the sustainable management of their fishing resources and its socio-economic development of the coastal communities living there.

SFPAs are public agreements and an important tool of cooperation contributing to enhancing transparency of operations and strengthening fisheries governance and fighting IUU fishing. They have the aspiration of generating mutual benefits for both EU operators and partner coastal states.

SFPAs are nevertheless frequently criticised on the basis of misconceptions, notably that they contribute to the impoverishment of third countries by depriving of fishing resources, encouraging migration towards Europe or constituting harmful subsidies. In reality, SFPAs are among the most transparent and sustainable fisheries agreements worldwide. A key challenge therefore lies in countering such narratives, in particular through evidence-based communication grounded in facts and data, and in enhancing the attractiveness of the new generation of SFPAs for partner countries in the future, for example by reducing administrative burden without undermining accountability. This is particularly relevant where partner countries may otherwise favour alternative arrangements offering short-term financial incentives, such as infrastructure projects financed by major global fisheries actors and fishing nations, including China, but which often provide fewer guarantees in terms of governance, sustainability and transparency of their operations.

As of January 2026, the EU has 12 agreements in force allowing access to different fishing areas to EU fleet segments such as bottom and pelagic trawlers targeting demersal, pelagic and deep sea species; surface and bottom longliners and purse seiners targeting tuna and tuna-like species.



Considering that the EU is currently carrying out an evaluation exercise of its Common Fisheries Policy including its External Dimension, it is timely to have an inclusive and multistakeholder forum for open discussion on how the new SFPAs should evolve in response to:

- Shifting global economic, geopolitical and environmental dynamics (e.g. increasing human pressures on the ocean, growing competition from non-EU fleets in international fisheries, new geopolitical priorities, impacts of climate change on fisheries resources);
- EU policy priorities and its linkages (sustainability, ocean diplomacy, food security, policy coherence with development, health, environment and trade policies);
- Expectations and perception of added value from SFPA partner countries (e.g. fair value for resources access, creating value addition in site, promoting greater support to improving fisheries management and increasing investment in coastal communities).

In this context, the EU Long Distance Fleet Advisory Council (LDAC) has a unique role to play as main stakeholder body advising the European Commission and EU MS on this topic during nearly 20 years.

In October 2025, the LDAC issued some advice on '[Towards a new generation of SFPAs](#)', stressing the need for improved policy coherence, stronger implementation of protocols and inclusion of clear transparency, non-discrimination and social clauses, greater transparency, promoting level playing field in partner countries in terms of MCS and reporting of fishing activities from other partners, and recognizing social, economic and gender components of fisheries.



## **2. Objectives of the Conference on New Generation of SFPAs**

This Conference aims building on the ideas reflected in this advice and continue with reflections on the interests of the EU and partner countries stakeholders alike, aiming to formulate specific recommendations addressed for decision makers in the context of the upcoming EU Strategy on External Fisheries Action.

The Conference has eight specific objectives, namely:

1. Discuss ways to enhance the visibility and strategic positioning of SFPAs within the EU's external policy and broader external action agenda, including their contribution to the EU's food sovereignty objectives, in a manner fully consistent with safeguarding food security in partner countries;
2. Explore how to improve communication on the benefits of SFPAs to decision-makers and public authorities, as well as to the wider public, within the EU, in partner countries and at international / global level.
3. Analyse and provide a diagnosis of the present strengths and challenges of SFPAs in force in light of global competition, climate change, and sustainability pressures.
4. Discuss how the next generation of SFPAs can deliver visible and tangible benefits for both EU and African coastal states, including contributions to local economies, employment, and value addition.
5. Identify opportunities and ideas for both the EU and partner countries to strengthen governance, transparency, level playing field and policy coherence.
6. Ensure a rich diversity of views and perspectives through balanced representation of stakeholders from the EU and SFPAs partner countries.
7. Co-create and present practical and specific recommendations to inform the future EU Strategy on Fisheries External Action.
8. Identify necessary material and human resources including available financial instruments to make SFPAs fully implemented and operational.



### **3. Target Audience**

- EU institutions: European Parliament (PECH, DEVE, BUDGET), European Commission (DG MARE, DG INTPA, DG TRADE), Council representatives, EESC, Committee of the Regions
- LDAC members including fishing sector organisations, trade unions and civil society organisations (incl. NGOs)
- EU fisheries stakeholders (including Advisory Councils with interest/stake in international fisheries)
- Member State authorities and regional governments
- Non-EU partner country representatives (fisheries stakeholders, national administrations, scientists).
- International organisations and partners (FAO, AU-IBAR, RFMOs, ATLAFCO-COMHAFAT, AFRIFISH-Net).



#### **4. Expected Outcomes**

- A set of policy recommendations feeding into the ongoing evaluation of the EU external dimension of the CFP and informing the future EU strategy on Fisheries External Action.
- Reinforced dialogue between EU institutions, partner countries, and communities, EU stakeholders.
- Contribution to improving the perception and legitimacy of SFPAs as mutually beneficial partnerships.

#### **5. Format and Logistics**

- Languages: English/Spanish/French (simultaneous interpretation)
- Format: Panel sessions with high-level speakers and open debate; rapporteurs for session summaries; final recommendations to be compiled in a summary document; and subsequent production of a booklet / conference report to be published in late 2026.