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NSAC/NWWAC Advice on generational renewal in fisheries

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1 Background

This paper stems from the collective engagement of the North Sea and North Western Waters stakeholders in the joint NSAC/NWWAC Social Aspects focus group, which aims to bring to attention identified gaps and shortcomings in the fisheries legislation concerning the social and economic considerations, provide missing links or point to areas where further work is needed, and provide recommendations on ways to improve the social and economic aspects of commercial, small-scale and recreational fisheries.

Following the first two papers, the Framework Advice on Social Aspects¹ and the joint Advice on Vessel Safety Directive², the group went on to shed light on factors playing into the aging population of the fishing industry and generational renewal as part of the wider efforts in the overall restructuring of the sector, in light of decarbonization, climate change and environmental degradation, technological advancement as well as societal changes and ensuing requirements.

This is done with recognition and support to the European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 on Fishers for the future: Attracting a new generation of workers to the fishing industry and generating employment in coastal communities (2019/2161(INI)).³ Not to double the work, it is our aim to fill in the potential gaps and provide concrete insights from a fishing

¹ https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/02-2223-NWWC-NSAC-advice-on-social-aspects-of-fisheries-2022_EN.pdf

² https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/07-2223-NSAC-NWWAC-advice-on-Vessel-Safety-Directive_EN.pdf

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0386_EN.pdf

industry perspective, supported by the research of our affiliated stakeholders of Other Interest Groups (OIGs).

2 Factors playing into the aging workforce and generational renewal

A generational change within the industry is evident. While the older generation fishers are a vital part of the industry for the wealth of knowledge and richness of experience gathered over their long careers, the arrival of a younger generation of fishers is essential for the EU fisheries. Inter-generational exchange will be essential and a vehicle to achieve environmentally, economically and socially sustainable fisheries. The integration of more modern technology on board including sustainable innovations and digital transition represents a significant advancement, ensuring enhanced safety and adding to the attractiveness of the sector. In addition, improved working and social conditions will attract generations that are by default more attentive to the notions of safety, health, comfort, inclusiveness, and equality.

The basic underlying condition for the attractiveness of any sector is the prospect of the industry to remain viable in the short and the long-term future. Long-term perspectives concerning quotas and fishing opportunities play into this certainty, that is currently not taken for granted among European fishers.

Additionally, we have to underline again the challenges created by the limitations of fishing capacity (gross tonnage) in relation to modernization of vessels to improve standards of comfort, security, gender parity etc. Such limitations need to be reviewed in view of social progress.

Lastly, review and streamline EMFAF requirements to effectively reach those projects that contribute to social sustainability of the fishing sector as well as to ensure technology transfer from research labs to fishing vessels.

2.1 Training and certification

Improved training and EU-wide certification systems are crucial for future prospects of the industry. In that respect, the implementation of a Watchkeeper Certificate throughout Europe constitute such a substantial leap forward. An Irish example comes to mind, where such a certificate is released in tandem with training and is taken on by skippers, who take on the responsibility to be more vigilant in terms of the crew that is taken on board. It is essential to recognize that in the case of new crew members entering the fishery sector, a significant portion of training occurs on board individual vessels under the guidance of skippers and other crew members. Unfortunately, this crucial acknowledgment is to some degree not sufficiently recognized within the industry. The purpose of the Watchkeeper Certificate is to validate specific qualifications attained by both the skipper and crew members, ultimately enhancing onboard safety assurance.

Many fishers perceive no incentive to return to formal education for concepts they have already mastered through years of on-board experience. These barriers should be addressed within the requirements. In the framework of training and certifications, national authorities should consider a fisher's accumulated time served and skill set, potentially assessed through a test. This approach would help avoid unnecessary training where it may not be essential. Generally, creating a more uniform regulatory landscape across the EU would be advantageous.

In addition, there is a need to incorporate the developments associated with the sustainability and energy transition demands into training activities. As fishing grounds are increasingly compromised due to the expansion of offshore wind, MPAs, VMEs, fishers are compelled to diversify their activities. One of the projects recognizing the need for diversification of fishers' expertise is the [Catching the Potential](#) (CTP) project (financed through EMFF) designing a training model for sustainable fisheries and hinging it upon STCW-F⁴ certification. In this project, 14 pilot trainings in individual Member States have been conducted and the "Train the trainer" approach aimed at reaching hundreds of fishers annually. Some of the challenges identified in the project were differing training pathways and requirements in different Member States, which goes against the identified considerable movement of fishers as labour, the low levels of ratification of STCW-F and the threat posed by the diverse and complex training requirements for the fishers, other users and marine environment, also contributing potentially to illegal work and worker exploitation. Some of the recommendations made were to maintain and extend educator's network, and to install a similar mechanism and scheme for mutual recognition of certificates of fishers, as was done for seafarers.⁵ Young generations are less and less bound to one profession or one country. The CTP-standard on sustainable fisheries applied across geographical areas, covering horizontal topics and connecting youth from different fields and different regions globally could contribute to making the sector more attractive to young workforce and thus better prepared for future challenges.

2.2 Occupational risk prevention and digitalization – best practice examples

Fishing is statistically one of the most hazardous occupations globally. The risk of accidents on fishing vessels in certain fisheries and in some EU-countries is about 50-times higher compared to professionals onshore.⁶ At the same time the profession is evolving, regulatory constraints intensifying and digital development increasing its pace. It is therefore vital that efforts are made to effectively communicate the risks and work with fishers on risk reduction and prevention, as well as to provide support to fishers in digital transition.

The French company [GLAZ](#)'s mission is to support fishers in their daily challenges with their products. This includes the development of digital tools to support sailors in the transition of

⁴ <https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/humanelement/pages/stcw-f-convention.aspx>

⁵ The full report from the concluding event of the Catching the Potential project is accessible here: https://www.nsrac.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/NSAC-report_From-Waves-to-Wisdom_Catching-the-Potential_21-Sept-23.pdf

⁶ Conoship International. (2022). Stability of beam trawlers – report, Accessible here: <https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/ronl-3e57eb8eec4bad3f3d4dbfcd4e7091658a028779/pdf>

their profession. It offers digital solutions for handling data onboard, and provides digitalized versions of mandatory documentation, such as the risk assessment form and first aid videos that can be watched through the app without an internet connection. An alert system was also developed sending notifications on the renewal of mandatory documents. They also assist maritime professionals in the field of risk prevention at sea, contributing to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of fisheries through personalized risk assessment documents, as well as contributing with proposals to improved working conditions on board, including risk prevention, ergonomics, trainings, mental health etc. A project will also be launched aimed at reducing human impact on the ocean.

The Institut Maritime de Prévention ([IMP](#)) works to reduce maritime work accidents and occupational illnesses among seafarers. Their team studies the evolution of accidents in the maritime sector and analyzes the work of seafarers and the risks to which they are exposed. Having solid knowledge of the profession/industry is vital for understanding and catering for the needs of seafarers. General prevention mission covers the areas of advice, training and awareness. Through statistical monitoring of occupational accidents, it works to improve working and living conditions through awareness raising, brochures, videos, websites, prevention campaigns (such as on exposure to asbestos, injuries, drug and alcohol-use, mental health etc). It also helps design new equipment and machines (i.e. RECOMER programme on recovering man overboard). It is partly funded by the Brittany and Normandy regions, as well as through private or public contracts, and operates on non-profit basis.

In Denmark, the accident statistics over the years have shown that things are going in the right direction, as the players in the industry have made a great effort to improve conditions on board. Today, the risk of accidents in Danish fisheries is not higher compared to other industries onshore. The fishers take responsibility for their working environment and safety, and there is today a safety culture on the vessels, where the work tasks are discussed by the skipper and crew, who jointly draw up procedures and instructions for the work tasks on board. The workplace assessment (APV) has become a commonly used tool in this process. The dialogue in connection with the preparation of the APV can contribute to achieving a common position on how the tasks can best be carried out in a safe and health- and safety-related manner. Through such measures, Denmark has managed to improve their accident statistics significantly.

Since its establishment in 1993, the Fisheries Working Environment Council (FA) has continuously carried out mitigation and prevention campaigns and projects contributing to strengthening the safety, health and working environment on all vessel categories in the fishing industry. The FA has benefited from the goodwill and interest from fishermen to participate in various projects and information campaigns. In fisheries education, there is a strong focus on safety and appropriate working environment, and the new generations of fishers are aware of the importance of prevention.

These examples can serve as best practice examples for other fleets. Pooling resources and knowledge from all Member States and wider is important and further exchange of information and practices should be encouraged and facilitated. An EU-wide annual or bi-annual conference could be organised to facilitate this exchange. Additional recommendation is the

use of voice-over in videos to assist fishers in a way that does not require the use of hands so that they can fully attend to the task at hand. Moreover, when designing new vessels, more attention should be placed on design that is adapted to specific exercises, such as recovering man overboard, or improved working conditions, such as non-slippery surfaces. Systematic exchange of best practices would drive further harmonisation of procedures and working standards and practices in the EU.

2.3 Remuneration and harmonization of employment standards for migrant workers

At present there are no international or EU standards for salaries for fishers. There was a recommendation from the ILO on remuneration of seafarers, that could, as far as deemed practicable by the competent authority of the flag state, and after consultation, be applied to fishing. The recommendation was withdrawn by the ILO in 2021 and no known MS of the EU has ever made use of the possibility. In this matter the EU cannot act because it has no competence on pay. Therefore, it is primarily up to the flag state law to regulate remuneration, bearing in mind freedom of contract.

In relation to migrant workers, it is essential that the Member States set harmonized standards for equitable remuneration and working conditions without exceptions. Any deviation from fair employment practices risks de-incentivizing employment of local crews, while casting a shadow on the EU sector's reputation as a decent and fair employer held up to the highest standards and equal treatment it advocates for. In this sense, the NSAC and NWWAC call for control and monitoring of the compliance with the minimum conditions for fishers in the coastal/port states where the fishing is taking place to be applied in all vessels in accordance with Directive (EU) 2017/159 implementing C188 Work in Fishing Convention, or, at the very least, inspection and enforcement measures to be put in place to root out instances of migrant crew being paid below the minimum standard of the flag state. We believe that the application of higher employment standards and enticement of a new generation of Europeans into the industry will be incentivized with a more proactive approach taken by flag state authorities to check on the conditions of work on all vessels that carry their flag including those that operate entirely outside their waters. Here we also recall the EU recently adopted the Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union.

2.4 Representation of the fishing industry to the young workforce, including women

The fishing industry has undergone significant changes, experiencing a reduction of hundreds of vessels in the EU fleet over the past two decades. Consequently, the challenges extend beyond just recruitment, encompassing broader industry dynamics impacted by escalating fuel costs and regulatory mandates for vessel enhancements, such as improved onboard facilities and the installation of WiFi connectivity. The demanding nature of the fishing industry, characterized by strenuous working hours and enduring hardships should be portrayed more realistically through a system that accurately reflects the industry's demands, aiming to reduce

misconceptions and shed light on the hazards associated with a fishing career. Providing education and raising awareness about the specific risks inherent to each vessel is vital to ensuring the crew's safety, a measure that should be recognized in national legislation.

Attracting youthful workforce is closely intertwined with efforts to eliminate sector's gender bias. Through efforts of feminist scholars, young professionals of today are much more sensitive to any persisting inequalities and are eager to attain a fairer society where access is granted to individuals irrespective of their social attributes (gender, race, age, religion etc.). Here we acknowledge country-specific differences, with some societies having a more traditional (patriarchal) outlook on the profession than others. Best practices should be adopted from those that address better the issue of gender bias.

We also note that in addition to efforts made to adapt newly built vessels to the needs of a more progressive and egalitarian society (contributing to social sustainability), attracting women to the industry should start at the schooling and training level. Young workforce is more mindful of changing social requirements, such as improved working conditions, work-life balance, work safety etc., which goes hand in hand with rendering the industry more attractive to younger generation, including women. In relation to this, we would like to bring to the attention the Norwegian [Youth Fishing Scheme](#) aimed at sparking interest in young fishers to do a career in fisheries. Interestingly, over half of the registered participants were women, which clearly shows that historic male dominance in the sector is not reflective of any real difference in the preference of the genders. Similar efforts could be encouraged in the European Union.

Today's youth communicate and engage differently. Despite their evident drawbacks, social media provide useful platforms for the promotion of fisher's way of life. In recent years there has been a proliferation of fisher influencers⁷, including women, who provide valuable insights into the life of fishers, and act as catalysts for generational renewal with informative and amusing content. Social media, such as Instagram, X, and LinkedIn, make these semi-public individuals much more approachable with interactive posts that allow young people to get access to information that might have otherwise remained unattained. These profiles might be further promoted and supported as champions of the profession and integrated in communication campaigns promoting the industry to the European youth.

2.5 Related or alternative occupational opportunities

Concerning recruitment challenges there is a need for better communication about the fishing profession. Currently, many are not attracted to fishing, and efforts should be made to showcase the skills and versatility required in the industry. In Germany, there are initiatives to offer additional qualifications to fishers, such as training to work in nature conservation as 'sea rangers' or to aid with scientific services (i.e. scientific sampling), providing opportunities for the industry to earn extra income with their vessels. In general, EU-wide campaigns to raise

⁷ See Instagram profiles: [thefemalefisherman](#), [_lifeofthefishermanswife_](#), [benjamin_bakke](#), [one_man_and_his_boat](#)

awareness of fisheries career possibilities would be useful in promoting the sector to younger generations. It is important to note that fishers' firsthand knowledge of the sea enables them to detect and report a number of events, such as, for example, cetacean sightings. Establishing a European qualification or programmes on fishing-related or alternative occupation opportunities (i.e. for roles such as sea-rangers or tourist guides) would be beneficial. However, this requires additional prerequisites to encourage more individuals to participate. There are many ways to showcase the valuable experience of fishers, and their expertise is currently used by various organizations, including NGOs, for monitoring sea conditions.

3 Conclusion and Advice

This joint advice aims to address the challenges of the fishing industry in relation to the aging workforce and other factors playing into its social attractiveness. Our recommendations are relayed below and span from trainings and certification, occupational risk prevention and digitalization, remuneration and harmonization of employment standards, external representation, gender parity, and related alternative occupational opportunities.

General

1. Facilitate the integration of more **modern technology** on board enabling enhanced safety measures and adding to the attractiveness of the sector.
2. Improve **working and social conditions** to attract generations that are by default more attentive to the notions of safety, health, comfort, inclusiveness, and equality.
3. Foster **inter-generational exchange** as a vehicle to achieve environmentally, economically and socially sustainable fisheries.
4. Contribute to the feeling of occupational certainty and **long-term viability** of the sector with long-term perspectives concerning quotas and **fishing opportunities**.
5. In view of social progress, address the challenges created by the limitations of fishing capacity (gross tonnage) in relation to modernization of vessels to improve standards of comfort, security, gender parity etc.
6. Review and streamline **EMFAF requirements** to effectively reach those projects that contribute to social sustainability of the fishing sector as well as to ensure technology transfer from research labs to boats.

Trainings and certification

7. Foster a more **uniform regulatory landscape** across the EU in terms of training and certifications. Improve training modules and EU-wide certification systems. Facilitate implementation of a **Watchkeeper Certificate** throughout Europe for vessels less than 24 metres in length. Acknowledge the training conducted onboard under the guidance of skippers and crew members as part of the Watchkeeper Certificate and **validate**

- specific qualifications** attained by both the skipper and crew members, ultimately enhancing onboard safety assurance.
8. National authorities should consider and validate fishers' accumulated time served and skill set, potentially **assessed through a test**.
 9. Address challenges and bottlenecks in getting young workforce onboard, including new training requirements reducing the earnings due to suspended fishing activities during that time, and the **lack of incentive** for fishers to return to formal education once they have already acquired the practical aspects onboard.
 10. To give young fishers a wider career perspective, the **certification barriers** between fishing and the other branches of the maritime sector should be removed. A certificate and sea time in fishing, should also give access to the other branches. A first step could be to bring larger fishing vessels (60 metres and up; 3000 kW and up) under the regime of STCW rather than STCW-F.
 11. Promote projects such as the [Catching the Potential](#) (CTP) and related **CTP-Standard**, a training module for sustainable fisheries recognizing the need for diversification of fishers' expertise.
 12. Foster **implementation of STCW-F** through an EU Directive and install a mechanism and scheme for **mutual recognition of certificates** of fishers.

Occupational risk prevention and digitalisation

13. Support and promote projects working on effectively **communicating the risks** and work with fishers on **risk reduction and prevention**, as well as to provide support to fishers in **digital transition**.
14. Facilitate the pooling of resources and knowledge on occupational risks and digital transition through platforms and/or events (i.e. EU-wide annual or bi-annual conferences). Systematic **exchange of best practices** would drive further harmonization of procedures and working standards and practices in the EU.
15. Equip video materials and guides with a **voice-over** for easier handling during fishing operations.
16. During the **design of new vessels** ensure that design is adapted to allow for specific exercises to be carried out, such as recovering man overboard, or improved working conditions, such as non-slippery surfaces.

Remuneration and harmonization of employment standards for migrant workers

17. Draw-up cross-sector guidelines on harmonisation and **equitable remuneration** of seafarers and adapt for application to fishing by the flag states.
18. A more **proactive approach** should be taken by flag state authorities to inspect on the conditions of work on all vessels, including compliance with statutory minimum wage or, in the absence thereof, agreed minimum wage through universally applicable declared collective bargaining agreement(s).

Representation of the fishing industry to the young workforce, including women

19. Provide **education and raise awareness** about the specific risks inherent to each vessel to ensure the crew's safety. Such measure should be recognized in national legislation.
20. Support efforts and projects working on **eliminating gender bias** in fisheries. Monitor and adopt best practices from societies where gender parity is better addressed. Enhance **communication** efforts in dispelling harmful superstitions creating challenges for achieving a fairer and more egalitarian sector.
21. **Attracting women** to the industry should start at the schooling and training level. The Norwegian [Youth Fishing Scheme](#) aimed at sparking interest in young fishers to do a career in fisheries could serve as example.
22. **Social media** provide a useful platform for the promotion of fisher's way of life, where users share valuable insights into the life of fishers, and act as catalysts for generational renewal with informative and amusing content. These profiles might be further promoted and supported as **ambassadors of the profession** and integrated in **communication campaigns** promoting the industry to the European youth.

Fisheries-related alternative occupational opportunities

23. Through communication efforts **showcase the skills and versatility** required in the fishing industry. Engage in **EU-wide campaigns** to raise awareness of fisheries career possibilities to attract younger generations.
24. Establish a European qualification or programmes on fishing-related **alternative occupation opportunities** (i.e. for roles such as sea-rangers or tourist guides).