

REPORT

Meeting: **Fishers of the Future: closing event**
Parties: **Commissioner Kadis, DG MARE, ACs, stakeholders**
Date: **14 January 2025**
Location: **Brussels and online**
Moderator: **Steven Davies, DG MARE**
Rapporteur: **NSAC Secretariat**

1. Opening address by Commissioner Kadis

Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, Costas Kadis, opened the event by highlighting fisheries' central role in EU coastal communities, representing tradition, identity, and ensuring food security. Highlighting the challenges faced by fishers in a rapidly changing world, he called for collaboration and open dialogue with stakeholders to shape a fair and sustainable future for the sector.

The event marked the conclusion of the EU-wide participatory foresight study on Fishers of the Future (FoF), started in 2023. The study involved fishers, ACs, researchers, NGOs, and social partners to explore future scenarios, analyse trends, and assess the sector's trajectories up to 2050. Future plans include continued engagement through Fisheries and Oceans Dialogues and visits to coastal communities. The insights will feed into the European Ocean Pact, CFP evaluation, and considerations of the social dimensions of fisheries.

2 Fishers of the Future: final results presentation

Macarena Davies (Tetrattech) presented the final results of the FoF study ([final report](#)). FoF is the first foresight exercise of its kind for fisheries, and it provides insights into challenges and opportunities for the sector, projecting scenarios and fisher profiles up to 2050.

FoF employed a participatory, placing fishers at its core, and incorporating perspectives from diverse stakeholders. It was structured in three phases:

- **Setting the Scene:** This phase involved consultations with over 200 fishers and stakeholders across the EU to understand current concerns and future prospects. It produced a working definition of a fisher, 11 profiles of today's fishers, and an analysis of trends and policies impacting their futures.
- **Exploring the Future:** Using evidence from the first phase, the study developed four future scenarios through surveys and workshops. These scenarios, based on a two-

by-two matrix, considered two primary drivers, planetary crisis severity and demand for EU-caught fish, alongside secondary drivers (technological advancements, demographic trends, governance, and geopolitical challenges).

- **Developing Future Profiles:** Building on the scenarios, the study created profiles for small and large-scale fishers in each scenario, describing their characteristics and adaptations in 2050. Finally, profiles were presented to fishers, ACs, social partners, and other stakeholders for final feedback.

The four scenarios include:

1. **Thriving responsibility:** A sustainable future where fisheries balance ecological and economic needs, supported by advanced technology, strong policies, and consumer demand for sustainable seafood.
2. **Chasing declining stocks:** A challenging environment with reduced fish stocks and severe climate impacts, where small-scale fishers struggle while large-scale fishers innovate to remain competitive.
3. **Contested markets:** A scenario with moderate planetary crisis but low demand for EU fish, pushing fishers to diversify and adopt supplementary activities to sustain livelihoods.
4. **Scarcity and survival:** A dire future of depleted stocks, severe planetary crisis, and economic pressures, leading to widespread industry challenges and marginal profitability for fishers.

All in all, the produced profiles are intended to stimulate thinking about the sector's future, support analyses by fleet segment and regional context, and inform policymaking.

3 Stakeholder panel discussion

A panel of **five speakers** engaged in discussion on several aspects concerning the FoF:

- **Stylianos Mitolidis**, Director of Directorate D: Fisheries Policy Mediterranean and Black Sea, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE)
- **Cor Blonk**, Chair of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (SSDC) for Fisheries
- **Sergio Lopez**, Chair SWWAC – South West Waters Advisory Council
- **Emiel Brouckaert**, Chair NWWAC - North Western Waters Advisory Council
- **Macarena Davies**, Tetrattech, lead coordinator of the consortium for the Fishers of the Future study

Q1: What are general outlooks on the development and deliverables of the project?

FoF may be used to stimulate debate on key drivers and challenges, as it provides an investigation into different possible scenarios. Debate may feed into policymaking decisions. Concerns were expressed about the study's ability to reflect the diverse fishing practices and vessel types across the EU. The sector's vast diversity cannot be captured with only 200

interviews. Greater inclusivity and collaboration are needed to refine the study and ensure its findings are actionable and representative. Results need to be aligned with existing EU regulatory frameworks for better practical application.

Q2: Which scenario do we currently in and what is the preferred scenario?

All panellists indicated Scenario 1 as the ideal future, emphasizing sustainability, recognition of fishing as a valued profession, and robust support for fishers. Current state of the fisheries sector varies significantly across regions, fleet segments, and métiers. Some areas align with aspects of Scenario 1, while others resemble Scenarios 2, 3, or even 4.

Gaps in the scenarios, such as insufficient attention to resilience and the sector's adaptive potential, were highlighted. EU policies need to ensure fair competition by addressing unsustainable practices in imported food, such as forced and/or child labour.

Q3: What specific aspects would we need to focus on to get to the preferred scenario or scenarios?

Training and Education: There is a need for universal access to basic safety training across the EU, as disparities in training availability between Member States persist. Training must also address broader competencies, such as navigation, business management, and operational skills, to ensure good basic preparation. Fishers should have access to and be able to utilize technologies for sustainable fishing, catch optimization, and market strategies.

Social Aspects: Generational renewal can be addressed by making fishing a more attractive profession through improved working conditions, better training, and recognition of the sector's importance. The directive on decent work and living conditions should be enforced, with clear definitions of what makes a "competent skipper".

Policy Coordination: There is a need for coordinated policies across fisheries, transport, trade, and other sectors to avoid conflicting regulations. Policies must be designed with practical application in mind, incorporating input from the fishing sector to ensure they can be implemented effectively.

Financing: Access to technology and financing mechanisms to support fishers in modernizing operations and adopting sustainable practices should be guaranteed.

Q4: How to attract the younger generation to the fishing sector, including more women?

Improving Work Environment: Creating a safe, comfortable, and rewarding work environment to attract the younger generation is paramount. There is a need for improved accommodation and sanitary facilities, also to make the sector more welcoming for women. Schedules and work schemes can be adjusted to accommodate younger generations' preferences for more flexible work arrangements.

Reducing Barriers to Entry: Heavy administrative workload and control pressures deter both new and existing fishers. Immediate policy changes are needed to improve conditions in the short term.

Positive Sector Promotion: The sector's role in sustainable food production needs to be positively promoted and value and challenges of fishing sectors should be communicated positively. Social media could be leveraged to reach younger audiences. Ensuring internet access onboard vessels is also essential to guarantee better connectivity.

Encouraging Women's Participation: Women already in the industry must be highlighted to inspire and guide others. Direct engagement with women in the sector is needed to understand their needs and challenges.

Q5: What skills and education needs are there and what should be done with this forward-looking perspective?

Standardization and Harmonization of Training: International minimum training standards must be followed for mutual recognition of certificates, covering social aspects, safety, and environmental awareness. Need to harmonize and simplify standards while allowing adaptation to regional and national contexts. A diverse range of skills (technology use, rule compliance, business skills, funding knowledge, marketing skills, etc.) are needed to meet the evolving demands of the sector. Onboard training might be offered to fishers, making it easier to learn without disrupting their work. Existing EU programs may be used to advance training and skills development.

Q6: Are there any final remarks and how should the results of the study be used in the future?

Need for Continued Engagement: Study should be used to **pose questions** and gather insights from various **sea basins, fleet segments, and stakeholders**, each with unique agendas and perspectives. Ongoing dialogues need to be organized to directly address the future of the sector.

Actionable Policy: Need for policies that **support vessel owners and the fishing industry**, through enabling investments in sustainability, decent work conditions, and fisher welfare.

Focusing on Specifics: Next steps must include examining how scenarios apply to **different sea basins, fleet segments**, and fisheries (e.g., demersal vs. pelagic). The roles of different fleet types and their unique challenges should be explored further.

Next Steps: The FoF study can be used as a foundation for further **practical application and regional adaptation**. The study's findings shouldn't be sidelined and instead actively used to guide future strategies.