



SETTING THE RIGHT SAFETY NET: A FRAMEWORK FOR FISHERIES SUPPORT POLICIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

SUMMARY

Our relationship with nature is our link to life; and that link is strained. The Covid-19 global pandemic requires emergency action to address immediate health concerns and to cushion economic impacts. Yet, such emergency action must be taken in the context of a wider plan for Europe's future and guided by an ambitious European Green Deal to avoid exacerbating the pre-existing climate and nature crises while dealing with the pandemic. We need to remedy the broken relationships that endanger our planet and deepen inequalities within our society. The ocean is the source of all life, yet we are putting it under unrelenting pressure. Easing that pressure and restoring ocean health will deliver enhanced resilience to the impacts of climate change and safeguard key natural elements that may equip us with countless more solutions to future and unexpected challenges.

While disruption in seafood supply chains has brought temporary relief to wild fish populations, this should not be celebrated. This environmental improvement has not come about due to any deliberate transition plan for workers, nor will any environmental relief prove lasting once the public health crisis passes. Environmental improvement is essential, but it should be achieved in a socially just manner.

A principle-based approach provides a useful framework to assess whether fisheries support policies in response to Covid-19 will aid the path towards a healthier fishing sector, public, and marine environment.

Ten principles are proposed:

- 1) **Concurrent crisis response:** Policies to address one crisis should have a positive impact on other existing and anticipated crises.
- 2) **Efficiency:** Obtain the best results with limited resources.
- 3) **Rationality:** Effective policy requires a linkage between the crisis being addressed and the policy proposal.
- 4) **Speed:** A crisis situation requires a rapid response.
- 5) **Institutional integrity:** Support measures should respect existing institutions.
- 6) **Anti-abuse:** Ensure that policies are directed towards their intended recipients.
- 7) **Consultation:** Engage industry and civil society in policy generation.
- 8) **Clarity and transparency:** To protect against abuse, policy intent should be stated and outcomes monitored.
- 9) **Conditionality:** There should be clear eligibility criteria and transparent procedures for application.
- 10) **Integration:** Fisheries support policies do not exist in a vacuum and should strengthen policies in other areas.

While some policies that have been publicly advocated for violate one or more of the principles, other policies offer promise and should be pursued with urgency. Based on the ten principles, successful policies should:

- support the acquisition of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves;
- enhance remote surveillance and non-observer monitoring programmes to ensure that essential data is collected and that IUU fishing does not undercut law-abiding fishers and the marine environment (e.g. cameras, electronic reporting systems);
- improve traceability to ensure that efforts to develop new, localised supply chains can support EU fishers and prevent IUU seafood from entering the supply chain, through digitisation;
- ensure that lost fishing income due to the Covid-19 public health crisis is compensated for through income support schemes (including self-employed and fishers earning share of sales);
- condition any support for fixed business costs on improved environmental performance (e.g. the adoption of low or lower-impact fishing gear and remote electronic monitoring);
- pursue in-year quota flexibilities to allow fishers the opportunity to utilise their quota allocations (e.g. rollover of monthly allocations, promoting the use of quota swapping/leasing, other means of increasing in-year uptake particular to each Member State).

Based on the ten principles, a path to build back better should include:

- investment in the marine environment;
- more resilient labour models in marine fisheries (e.g. wage guarantees, sick pay);
- a shift in financial support away from damaging subsidies and towards a system where the industry pays for the costs of fisheries management (i.e. cost recovery), for access to a limited public resource (i.e. resource rent), and for environmental damages (i.e. negative externalities).

While there are numerous potential fisheries support policies that could be pursued in response to Covid-19, these policies can be broadly grouped into categories based on their approach. We therefore define a typology that helps to determine how the ten principles guide policymaking for each category of policy.

While not a Covid-19 response measure in a direct sense, reviewing the typology of support measures against the principles makes it clear that environmental improvements are needed. Fundamentally the Covid-19 economic crisis is about incomes, costs, and livelihoods. Improvements to incomes will be larger and longer lasting if fish populations and the subsequent fishing opportunities are larger. Fishing costs also decrease as more abundant fish populations can be harvested with less effort. Better prices can be secured by ending the ‘boom and bust’ of quota-setting cycles, so that fish can grow to larger size classes, and eco-certification can be achieved.

Critically, while Covid-19 response measures may offer support for one year, a sustainable marine environment supports livelihoods for years to come. With the climate and biodiversity crises as the setting, any policy proposal needs to answer the fundamental question: how does this policy allow us to build back better?

The full **16-page briefing** can be found online [here](#).

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April 2020