

# Multiannual management plan for Western Waters: provisional agreement confirmed by the Council

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The management of fisheries in Western waters will soon benefit from a longer term and more consistent set of rules established jointly by all EU institutions.

EU ambassadors meeting in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (**Coreper**) **confirmed today an agreement** reached on 27 November between the Austrian Presidency of the Council and European Parliament representatives on a **multiannual management plan (MAP) for demersal stocks**, including **deep-sea stocks**, and their fisheries in **Western Waters**.

Thanks to the constructive attitude of the three institution, this agreement could be reached only eight months after the Commission published its initial proposal.

I am pleased to confirm that today the Council took another important step towards the full implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy. Thanks to the newly agreed multiannual management for fisheries in Western Waters we not only guarantee sustainability for the management of fisheries, but also a level playing field for all fishermen across EU sea basins.

*Elisabeth Köstinger, Austrian Federal Minister for Sustainability and Tourism and President of the Council*

The Western Waters area is a particularly challenging fishing environment as the most important demersal stocks (i.e. those that live at the bottom of the sea) are caught in **mixed fisheries**. As fishermen are not in the position to target a single species and are not allowed to discard catches due to the **landing obligation**, they may find themselves forced to stop fishing stocks subject to total allowable catches (TACs) because they reached the limit allowed for the most limiting stock (**choke species**).

In order to deal with this problem, the agreed MAP incorporates **all relevant**

**stocks** (demersal and deep-sea stocks) **into a single management plan**, thereby guaranteeing a sustainable approach and granting fishermen and member states more flexibility.

The **key target species**, counting for around 95% of landings, will be managed in line with the **maximum sustainable yield** principle which is one of the cornerstones of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, and will have to be fixed within a range of Fmsy values – the fishing mortality consistent with achieving maximum sustainable yield. **By-catches** will be managed according to the **precautionary approach**.

The plan also incorporates **safeguard measures** to restore stocks when they fall below safe biological limits.

Concerning **recreational fisheries**, when scientific advice indicates this could have a significant impact on the fishing mortality of a particular stock, the Council will take it into account and may limit recreational fisheries.

While taking into account the specificities of the Western Waters, the agreement follows the principles set out in the **Baltic and North Sea multiannual plans**, thereby ensuring consistency across sea basins and a level-playing field for all fishermen.

## Next steps

Now that the agreement on the Western Waters MAP has been confirmed by EU ambassadors on behalf of the Council, the regulation will be submitted to the European Parliament for a vote at **first reading**, and will subsequently go back to the Council for adoption.

The new rules will apply on the day after their publication on the Official Journal of the European Union (poss. Spring 2019).

## Background

Western Waters comprise the North Western Waters (ICES subareas 5 (excluding 5a and only Union waters of 5b), 6 and 7) and the South Western Waters (ICES subareas 8, 9 and 10 (waters around Azores), and CECAF zones 34.1.1, 34.1.2 and 34.2.0 (waters around Madeira and the Canary Islands)). Seven member states fish in this area with various types of fishing gears, targeting numerous fish and shellfish species.

The new regulation will replace existing single-species multi-annual plans for: (1) herring in west of Scotland, (2) sole in the western Channel, and (3) sole in the Bay of Biscay, as well as the current recovery plans for the northern stock of hake and hake and Norway lobster in the Iberian Peninsula.

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## [Social protection in 2016 – Share of EU GDP spent on social protection slightly down – Highest ratios in France, Finland and Denmark](#)

Social protection expenditure in the **European Union** (EU) stood at 28.2% of GDP in 2016, slightly down compared with 28.4% in 2015, according to data from **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. In 2016, the two main sources of funding of social protection at **EU** level were social contributions, making up 55% of total receipts, and general government contributions from taxes at 40%.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## [State aid: Commission clears Italian rescue aid to Condotte d'Acqua](#)

Margrethe **Vestager**, Commissioner in charge of competition policy, said: *“Many companies would be impacted and many jobs would be lost if Condotte abruptly exited the market. The Italian rescue aid that the Commission has approved today will allow Condotte to continue its work and avoid immediate delays to important infrastructure works, whilst giving the company’s administrators time to return the company to viability.”*

Condotte d’Acqua S.p.A. in Amministrazione Straordinaria (“Condotte”) is Italy’s third largest construction company. It employs over one thousand people and is active in the construction sector, including infrastructure works such as roads, high-speed railways, energy projects and other large infrastructure projects.

Condotte is experiencing financial difficulties due to internal and external factors, in particular the economic context of construction companies involved in public works. In Italy, public investments involving civil engineering have decreased between 2008 and 2015, there are persistent issues concerning payment delays by public administrations and adjudication processes and settlement of disputes with contracting authorities involve long proceedings. All of these factors combine to put Italian construction companies under financial strain.

On 30 November 2018, Italy notified the Commission of plans to grant a temporary €190 million guarantee on loans and bonds for Condotte. This will allow the company to meet its liquidity needs for the next six months at an appropriate interest rate.

Rescue and restructuring aid are among the most distortive types of State aid and can only be granted to companies once these have exhausted all other market options. The [Commission's rescue and restructuring guidelines](#) allow Member States to support companies in difficulty, provided in particular that the public measures are limited in time and scope and contribute to an objective of common interest.

The Commission assessed the plans notified by Italy and found that:

- the planned aid is necessary to allow Condotte to keep operating and avoid disrupting the ongoing public infrastructure projects. If Condotte were to exit the market abruptly, it would be difficult for a competitor to step in immediately to fully replicate Condotte's role without risking further delays in infrastructure projects; and
- Condotte plays an important role in the construction sector not only because of the large number of direct jobs it provides but also because of the much larger number of indirect jobs and commercial links it sustains with subcontractors and suppliers;
- the company's liquidity needs over the next months are based on reasonable assumptions.

Italy also committed to notify to the Commission the end of the State guarantee, the liquidation of the company or a restructuring plan within six months.

The Commission therefore concluded that the measure is in line with EU State aid rules as it will allow Condotte to keep operating and prevent delays to public infrastructure projects, while the short duration of the measure will reduce the distortion of competition potentially triggered by the State support to a minimum.

## **Background**

Condotte operates as a sole contractor or in joint ventures with other construction companies through consortia or similar legal entities, which participate in varying proportions and/or phases of the works. Condotte ranks third among the 50 largest Italian construction companies, and 31st in Europe.

After getting into financial difficulties and being declared insolvent by the competent court, Condotte is at present managed by three commissioners appointed by the Italian government with the mandate to dispose of the company. Restarting business operations now depends on Condotte meeting its payment obligations for existing projects and works as soon as possible. This will in turn help support the transfer of the assets to one or several interested investors taking over Condotte in an open procedure.

The non-confidential version of today's decisions will be made available under the case number SA.52170 in the [State Aid Register](#) on the Commission's [Competition website](#) once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. New publications of state aid decisions on the internet and in the Official Journal are listed in the [State Aid Weekly e-News](#).

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## [State aid: Commission finds no aid in €1.1 billion extension of Athens International Airport concession](#)

Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The Commission has found that the €1.1 billion fee that will be paid by AIA for the 20 year extension of the Athens airport concession corresponds to a market price. This means that AIA will not benefit from any State aid in the form of an unduly low fee for the concession. The Commission cooperated actively with the Greek authorities to reach this positive result, which is one of the most important economic transactions under the Greek privatisation programme."*

Athens International Airport Eleftherios Venizelos is operated by the Athens International Airport S.A. (AIA) under a concession agreement covering the period 1996 to 2026. Under the measure notified by Greece to the Commission, this concession will be extended until 2046, against the payment of an increased fee.

Under EU rules, a concession for the commercial operation of infrastructure can be considered free of State aid if it is awarded on terms that a private company operating under market conditions would also have accepted when granting a concession for similar assets.

The Commission found that the initial value of the extended concession proposed by AIA, amounting to €484 million, was based on financial and business parameters that were not in line with market conditions. A private operator would not have accepted such an offer, and therefore the extension of the concession on these terms would have constituted State aid.

Greece cooperated actively with the Commission to determine the adequate market value of the extended concession, which would no longer entail State aid. Following these exchanges, the fee to be paid by AIA to Greece was significantly increased to €1,115 million.

In the light of this increased price, the Commission found that the extended concession involves no State aid because AIA will pay an adequate market fee to continue operating Athens International Airport.

Today's Commission decision finding no aid in the extension of the concession is one of the conditions that needs to be satisfied before the agreement to extend the concession can become effective.

The Commission services have also assessed the extension under the "[Public procurement ex-ante assessment mechanism](#)" launched in [October 2017](#) and concluded that it does not raise concerns regarding its compatibility with EU law in the field of public procurement.

## **Background**

The extension of the Athens International Airport concession is one of the transactions included in the Greek Government's privatisation programme, to which Greece committed under the ESM stability support programme (which was successfully concluded on 20 August 2018).

The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number [SA.48509](#) in the [State Aid Register](#) on the [DG Competition](#) website, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. New publications of state aid decisions on the internet and in the Official Journal are listed in the [State Aid Weekly e-News](#).

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## **[Speech by Vice-President Katainen on behalf of President Juncker at the Plenary Session of the European Parliament on the debate on the Future of Europe with Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus](#)**

President Tajani,

President Anastasiades,

Honourable Members,

Our thoughts and hearts are with the victims of last night's horrible attack against humanity that we condemn with great firmness. We are grateful for the

tireless work of the first responders, and we trust in the work of the law enforcement services to bring those responsible to justice. We will continue to defend our free and open societies by all means in our use. The city of Strasbourg is a symbol of European peace and democracy, values that we will always defend. The European Commission stands alongside France and the French people at this very difficult moment.

Honourable Members,

I wished we would have had a better situation to talk about the future of Europe than where we are today. Nevertheless we cannot give up. We need to continue building a better and safer Europe for our citizens. Intolerance and hate do not belong to our societies and they do not represent our values.

I want to thank Mr President, my good friend Nicos, for being here today to debate the future of Europe. I remember when we talked about the future of the EU in the Prime Minister's office in Finland many years ago. We have continued this discussion during all these years, and now we are here in the European Parliament to discuss with the Honourable Members on the challenges, opportunities and direction of the European Union.

Mr President,

You and your country have always shown a great European solidarity. You have shown this time and again over the years. When it comes to migration, you have always been there and taken much more than your fair share of responsibility.

The financial and economic crisis also hit Cyprus harder than most. The effects will not go away overnight. But today, I see a recovering labour market and economy, growing by over 4% in 2017 and continuing at an impressive rate this year. I see a more stable financial sector, with a lower – although still too high – rate of non-performing loans.

I also see investment returning, thanks in part to the Juncker Plan which has helped trigger EUR 109 million of additional investment. It has also supported 125 smaller companies or start-ups to grow and create jobs locally. I will visit Cyprus at the end of January to discuss further use of the Juncker Plan in order to help boost growth and job creation. But if the situation has turned around, it is because of the strength and hard work of the Cypriot people. I want to pay tribute to them in particular for everything they have done.

I also want to pay tribute to you, Mr President, dear Nicos, for your commitment to the programme of recovery. The tough decisions made and the commitment to making them work should never be overlooked by anyone in Europe.

We know there is still a long way to go. And the Commission will assist you every step of the way, including through tailored support offered by the Structural Reform Support Service. It has already provided EUR 520 million to support the economic integration of the island and improved links and

contacts between its two communities. But it also continues to support Cyprus across the board, including to meet its climate and energy targets.

The point is that as we look to our future, Europe will stand in solidarity with Cyprus, just as Cyprus has always stood in solidarity with Europe. And nowhere is that more important than when it comes to bring to an end the division of the island. The Commission will stand ready to assist any efforts. The Commission will always answer your call to support any negotiations or discussions held under the auspices of the United Nations that work towards a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement. This would be beneficial for Cyprus, for Europe and for the wider security and stability in the region. There would be no more important message for our common future.

But we must prepare that future as of today. Later this week, European leaders – including the President – will have a real discussion on our future long-term budget. This is not only about numbers or figures. It is about our future. It is about deciding what Europe should achieve. And it is about deciding where to invest in our future, on the issues that matter the most to the people of Cyprus and to the whole of Europe. This is why the Commission has put forward a fair, modern and balanced budget. A budget that is more efficient and more focused on the issues that matter the most – just as Cyprus has so long been calling for.

For instance, there will be an almost three-fold increase in funding for migration and security to make sure that Europe can protect its citizens. This will be especially important for Cyprus as a country that has taken so much responsibility in this area. Funding for research and innovation will be increased by 50%. We have also proposed to double the means of Erasmus+ and a new Digital Europe Programme worth EUR 9 billion will support Europe's digital transformation. All of these will provide real opportunities for Cypriots and further boost the productivity of the Cypriot economy. We have also proposed an enhanced Reform Support Programme with EUR 22 billion earmarked for key reforms identified in the European Semester.

All of this will make a real difference on the ground in Cyprus and across our Union. So it is crucially important that we can agree on our new budget as swiftly as possible. Mr President, I count on your support, your counterparts' support and of course this House's support in order to make all this happen.

Thank you.