

Recommendation n.º: 37

Fleet Renewal in the Outermost Regions - EC Support

Fleet renewal in the Outermost Regions (OR) is an urgent need, arising from their aging and the difficulty in complying with European regulations for on-board safety and hygiene using current vessels.

Considering that the opinion of our members is in line with the resolution of the European Parliament (EP) *on the small-scale fisheries situation in the European Union (EU) and future perspectives*, we should highlight the following:

- *“System/equipment failures are the second most common cause of accidents/incidents at sea;*

- *The current definition of small-scale fishing included in the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) Regulation excludes certain types of vessels, such as those using some traditional gears, which in turn struggle to obtain EU funding because of this exclusion;*

- *Resources to support vessels under EMFAF are limited, small-scale fishing is the least supported segment, and this fleet is generally characterized by aging segments with inadequate technology;*

- *This clearly old (small-scale) fleet does not guarantee the best safety and operability conditions, increasing risks and making operations more costly;*

- *Situations where vessels have become obsolete, increasing the costs of operation, maintenance and reclassification must be resolved. This, in turn, compromises the safety conditions guaranteed during operations;*

- *By including space for crew facilities and comfort, gross tonnage criteria for measuring fishing capacity may hinder vessel modernization and improvement of working conditions;*

- *The need to renew and update the small-scale fishing fleet is intended to improve safety and living conditions on board, improve energy efficiency, and make the segment more environmentally friendly.”¹*

Considering that one of the difficulties in renewing the fleets of the ORs has been the lack of data collection, leading to a formal unknown state of fish stocks.

¹ [European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2023 on the small-scale fisheries situation in the EU and future perspectives \(2021/2056\(INI\)\)](#)

Considering also, the lack of studies to calculate the balance of the fleets in the ORs, the CCRUP sends the following information, based on information from scientific studies and interested Member-States:

Saint Martin:

There are about 10 vessels (under 12 m)² (photo 1).

NB: We had difficulty obtaining data on vessels operating in the Region.

Guadeloupe:

Has about 614 vessels, most of them less than 10 m. The number of vessels has been increasing in the Region, and by 2022 the average age of the vessels was 20 years² (photo 2).

Considering the prohibition to fish close to the coast (due to chlordecone pollution), the need to renew the fleet with more modern boats has increased, to increase the safety of the fishermen during their longer trips.

Martinique:

There are about 814 vessels, most of them less than 12 m. The number of vessels has been increasing in the Region, and by 2022, the average age of the vessels was 25 years² (photo 3).

This Region has also been facing problems due to chlordecone pollution, causing fishermen to be restricted from fishing near the coast.

French Guyane:

It has about 133 vessels. The fleet is divided into two main segments: vessels under 12 m and those over 20 m².

The number of boats has decreased since 2018³ and their average age has been increasing, standing at 24 years². Note that the boats are very degraded (photo 4).

Azores:

It has about 711 vessels⁴. The artisanal fleet (less than 12 m) predominates, and the number of vessels has been increasing since 2018³. In 2022, the average age of the vessels was 32 years⁴ (photo 5).

Considering that in the data provided by the European Commission (EC) and the Member States, there are no data from vessels larger than 24 meters in the Azores, however, we know that there are vessels of these dimensions practicing artisanal fishing, we believe that this gap, may distort important data for the identification of the needs to renew the fleet.

² French government data, 2022

³ Study Data “Overview of the State of Data Collection and Scientific Advice in the EU (CE) ORs”, 2021

⁴ Portuguese government data, 2022

Madeira:

It has about 412 vessels⁴. The fishing fleet is predominantly artisanal (less than 12 m) and is the oldest fleet in Portugal (and the Outermost Regions). The number of vessels has been increasing (since 2018³) and, in 2022, the average age was 43 years⁴ (photo 6).

Whereas the black scabbardfish (*Aphanopus carbo*) fleet - of high socio-economic importance - travels long distances and is made up of very rudimentary and ageing vessels, and whereas this threatens the future of a regional product and the fisheries sector itself.

Canary Islands:

It has about 741 vessels⁵. The fleet consists predominantly of artisanal vessels (less than 10 m) and, the number of vessels has been increasing (since 2018³). The average age in 2022 was 32 years⁵ (photo 7).

Mayotte:

It has about 140 boats. The fleet is predominantly artisanal (under 10 m)². The number of boats has been decreasing (between 2018 and 2022) and the average age is increasing. On average the boats are 21 years old, but they are very degraded and do not meet European standards (photo 8)².

The fishermen of Mayotte consider that there is an unfair competition with tuna seiners (vessels with greater power and tonnage) that do not belong to the Region and that fish in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The regulation and limitation of fishing by the Marine Natural Park, forces small vessels to fish outside the lagoon, however, the *mahoraises* vessels do not have conditions for this distant fishery.

La Réunion:

It has about 219 boats. The fleet is predominantly artisanal (less than 10 m)². The number of vessels has been decreasing since 2018³, but its average has increased, standing (in 2022) at 21 years² (photo 9).

⁵ Spanish government data, 2022

Considering that Article 349 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU⁶) gives the ORs, fully integrated into the EU, a specific status which gives the EU the ability to adapt all its policies, programs, and law to these regions, the CCRUP considers:

- The definition of artisanal fishing is not consensual, since, according to the EC, it is directly related to the length of the vessels, while for some fishermen in the ORs it is related to the fishing gear practiced on board, the CCRUP thus considers that these discrepancies cause obstacles to the renewal of our fleets;

- A fleet renewal is crucial to not compromise the safety and competitiveness of the workers. Better vessels allow for better quality fish, offering the possibility to install the right equipment. On the other hand, it will in no way lead to an increase in fishing effort;

- The system imposed by Europe for fleet renewal is complex and composed of several conditions. The OR must submit a capacity report (proof of the balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities) and in the French OR, the studies have not been carried out, which compromises the assessment of the French capacity report by the EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), so no aid is granted by the EC;

- Locally, stakeholders in the fisheries sector are working to provide better conditions for fishermen in the ORs to secure their future, yet Europe does not seem to have the same goals;

- CCRUP members note a serious lack of attractiveness of the trade and a consequent aging of the profession. There needs to be good working conditions on board, especially safety, comfort, and habitability, to attract the younger generations. CCRUP members also want to highlight that this is a matter of human dignity, the basis of all fundamental rights⁷;

- There are vessels with evident structural weaknesses, which cannot be renewed, only fully replaced by new vessels, and it is necessary to adapt the investments to the needs and capabilities of each member of the sector;

- In the ORs there are many bad weather conditions, the improvement of the boats should not be considered as an increase in the fishing effort, because it allows the trips to be made more quickly and in good conditions, ensuring their safety;

- The ORs with greater difficulties in data collection cannot wait for a deep and time-consuming investigation to obtain data and subsequently renew fleets;

- Fleet renewal will allow vessels to be more environmentally friendly, causing less environmental impact.

⁶ [Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#)

⁷ [Aims and Values | European Union](#)

Thus, and considering the above mentioned, the CCRUP **recommends to the European Commission that:**

1- Allow an exception for the ORs, so that they can obtain financing to quickly renew their fleets and improve fishing support infrastructure, ensuring safety at sea and the standardization of fishing practices;

2- In the long term, allow the change of data collection methods in the Outermost Regions where reduced knowledge of stock status prevails, with the possibility of realizing studies, for a short period of time, through direct observation in the field along with the communities and the organizations that represent the sector in each region, so that one can conclude on the state of stocks, through mathematical projections.

*Opinion of Sciaena:

They agree that it is necessary and urgent to improve working conditions for the small-scale fishing sector, but they also express concern about the environmental, social, and economic risks that this proposal may initiate. They are willing to participate in a joint solution that does not necessarily include a flexibilization of the rules for allocating funds that are in place. They recognize the greater difficulty of the small-scale fleet - and the outermost fleet in particular - in accessing funding, but they consider that public funds should be applied to projects and initiatives that result in or contribute to public benefits.

Ensuring the good environmental status of the ocean, improving scientific knowledge, and combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing are just a few of examples where public funds should be applied as a priority. Sciaena's view is that this type of public investment is the safest and most efficient way to ensure sustainable and resilient fisheries in the short, medium, and long term.

In addition, they consider that this may even free companies and private operators to make their own investments in new and improved vessels. Thus, Sciaena is not opposed to the use of private funding to finance the modernization of vessels and, eventually, the construction of new vessels. Another hypothesis would be, for example, to establish partnerships with local hospitality companies that could finance investments in the vessels, ensuring the sale of part of the catch, potentially with better financial returns, and thus improving the relationship of the tourism sector with the fishing sector.

It should be recalled that in the past the modernization or replacement of older vessels has resulted in a general increase in the fishing capacity of the EU fleet, which has led to an increase in fishing effort and catches and therefore to overfishing, which the end is one of the main objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Indeed, the large funds allocated to the construction of new vessels in the EU has led to a disproportionate increase in fishing capacity in relation to available resources and have resulted in the widespread depletion of many stocks, particularly in the Northeast Atlantic, from which it is only slowly recovering.

It is therefore recommended, in Sciaena's opinion, that this should not happen again and that fishing activity in the ORs should contribute to this and to enjoying good environmental status, supported by fair financial instruments that increase the economic and financial resilience of the sector.

Annexes (photographs)



Photo 1: Fleet *Saint Martin*



Photo 2: Fleet *Guadeloupe*



Photo 3: Fleet *Martinique*



Photo 4: Fleet French Guyane

(modified on 19/07/2023, by request of the *Comité Régional de Pêches Maritimes et Élevages Marins de Guyane*)



Photo 5: Fleet Azores



Photo 6: Fleet Madeira



Photo 7: Fleet Canary Islands



Photo 8: Fleet *Mayotte*



Photo 9: Fleet *La Réunion*