

Recommandation n° 49

**EU-Maldives discussions for Maldives to join the interim Economic Partnership Agreement of the Eastern and Southern Africa group with the European Union**

During the joint parliamentary assembly between the countries of the Organization of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS, formerly ACP countries) and the EU in June 2023, the Maldives expressed their desire to join the interim Economic Partnership Agreement of the Eastern and Southern Africa group with the European Union, which provides for a customs exemption for many products.

According to information provided by the European Union External Action Service (EAS) on its website<sup>1</sup>, the Fourth Senior Officials Meeting between the European Union (EU) and the Maldives took place in Brussels on 13 June. At this occasion, Maldives specified their expectations: the removal of all taxes on their tuna exports to the European Union<sup>2</sup>. According to EU's EAS, "EU and the Maldives discussed the concrete steps in the coming months towards this end [integrating the EPA]".

Maldives tuna fishery relies mainly on pole-and-line. The fishery involves a large number of vessels, predominantly small to medium-sized boats that are locally built. As of the latest data available up to 2023, several hundred boats are engaged in this fishery. The Maldives is one of the world's leading producers of pole-and-line caught tuna, with annual catches often exceeding 70,000 metric tons. Tuna products are a major export commodity for the Maldives, with the European Union being a key market.

This production would be directly competing with EU's artisanal pole-and-line fisheries in Ultra Peripheral Regions, while not complying with such high maritime, hygienic, social, and environmental standards.

The Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) is deeply concerned about the detrimental consequences that the massive influx of lower quality but cheaper tuna products from Maldives, entering EU market duty free, could have on the fragile economies of the Outermost Regions and their artisanal pole and line fisheries.

In addition, in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the Maldives have

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/430605\\_fr](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/430605_fr)

<sup>2</sup> Article de la revue en ligne Atuna en annexe « Maldives making headway on EU free trade deal » du 19 juin 2023

been strongly and consistently supporting policies through the G16 group that clearly undermine the interests and fishing opportunities of the EU. These positions are especially adverse within the Technical Committee on Allocation Criteria, where they regularly deny to EU its coastal state status and actively strive to drastically decrease EU quotas in the Indian Ocean. Over the years, they have refused to cooperate with the EU in building fair allocation criteria, insisting on a complete disclosure of the EU's catch history to developing coastal states. The Outermost Regions Advisory Council stresses that such a strong decrease of EU quotas as they ask would deeply affect both artisanal and industrial European fleets operating in or from La Réunion and Mayotte.

Therefore, in the context of the ongoing discussions on Maldives joining the interim Economic Partnership Agreement of the Eastern and Southern Africa group with the European Union, the **Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) recommends to the European Commission** that they:

- a) Ensure the involvement of the relevant stakeholders, including both industry and an empowered civil society, at all stages of the discussions;
- b) Identify tuna products as “sensitive”, keeping in;
- c) Take into consideration the highly negative consequences duty free Maldivian tuna products would have on artisanal fisheries and associated communities in EU’s outermost regions;
- d) Link the on-going discussions with Maldives’ position on EU quotas in the Indian Ocean.

#### Opinion of the International Pole & Line Foundation (IPNLF)

IPNLF disagrees with this recommendation because it believes that providing duty-free access to Maldivian tuna products on EU markets will not necessarily have serious negative consequences for artisanal fisheries and communities in the EU's outermost regions. It therefore argues that this recommendation needs to be better

substantiated by credible analyses of the species, catch methods and relevant markets before declaring these serious negative consequences as fact.

IPNLF also disagrees that the Maldives' accession to the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU should be linked to discussions on the allocation of fishing opportunities in the IOTC.

Opinion of the *Asociación Tinerfeña de Amigos de la Naturaleza (ATAN)*

ATAN disagrees with this recommendation. Like the IPNLF, it believes that statements should not be made without any study to back them up.

It also believes that, in the event of an agreement, it should be carried out applying the same rules as EU countries: vessels, fishing methods, conservation, traceability, etc. all the way to the end consumer, including inspection and control. In this way, the Maldivian fisheries sector would have no competitive advantage over the European sector, thus protecting our economic sector.

The President of the Executive Committee of the CCRUP,

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(David Pavón González)