



20th September 2016

Mr Karmenu Vella
Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
European Commission
200, Rue de la Loi
B-1049 Brussels

CC: Ana Paula Vitorino, Minister of Sea, Portugal
Ségolène Royal, *Minister of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs, responsible for International Climate Relations, France*
Alain Vidalies, *Minister of State for Transport, Marine Affairs and Fisheries, France*
Isabel Garcia Tejerina, *Minister for Agriculture, Food and Environmental Affairs, Spain*
Joke Schauvliege, *Minister for the Environment, Nature and Agriculture, Flanders (Belgium)*
Martijn van Dam, *Minister for Agriculture, The Netherlands*

Subject: Suspension of activities by environmental NGOs at the SWW AC in response to the admission of fishing organisations as ‘other interest group’ members.

Dear Commissioner Vella,

We, the undersigning environmental organisations, as members of the South-Western Waters Advisory Council (SWW AC), are writing to you to inform you about our disagreement with the outcome of the SWW AC General Assembly, held in Bordeaux on July 20th, and the harmful consequences of the adopted decisions.

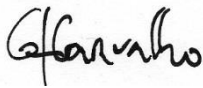
For many years our organisations have been active members in the SWW AC and believe in and live by the intention of Advisory Councils – to provide decision makers with recommendations, agreed by all parties whenever possible, that reflect the interests and expertise of stakeholders directly impacted by and involved in the CFP policies (i.e. from fishing industry to consumers). We believe that to guarantee the best functioning of the Councils and the relevance of the advices produced, it is fundamental to create an environment of trust and understanding among its members. Advisory Councils exist to provide all stakeholders with fair and balanced participation to decision-making processes – only then their existence is meaningful.

This fundamental vision has been breached at the last General Assembly of the SWW AC, where three fishing interest organisations (FREMSS, BlueFish and AGLIA) have been accepted as “other interest groups”, despite efforts from environmental NGOs to avoid this disruption of the AC structure and its purpose. We want to stress that the admittance of representatives of the fishing industry to the “other interest group” stands in stark contrast to the binding principles outlined in the CFP and the Commission Delegated Regulation on the functioning of Advisory Councils (EU 2015/242). Furthermore, it creates an unacceptable precedent that shatters the credibility and functioning of the SWW AC and discredits stakeholder involvement in general.

Due to the erroneous outcome of the General Assembly we regret to inform you that **as of now we will suspend all activities in the SWW AC**. We indicated this possibility in the letter we sent you on July 18th. **Consequently, advice coming out of the SWW AC does no longer represent a balanced stakeholder view as it lacks the voice of environmental NGOs. If no appropriate solution is taken in the near future, we will consider leaving the currently malfunctioning SWW AC completely.**

We remain confident that with the cooperation of all involved parties this situation can be solved to regain a basis of trust and cooperation. We call on you as guardian of the Treaties to collaborate with determination in this effort and to defend the intention and spirit of the Advisory Councils by demanding the relocation of the named organisations to the “fisheries interest group” of the SWW AC and by generally clarifying that organisations as closely related to fisheries and representing their interests must be part of the 60% group of fisheries representatives.

Yours sincerely,



Gonçalo Carvalho
President of the Board
Sciaena



Dr Monica Verbeek
Executive Director
Seas at Risk



Lasse Gustavsson
Executive Director
Oceana in Europe



Geneviève Pons
Director
WWF European Policy Office



Tito Rosa (Eng.)
President
LPN National Board of Directors