**Follow-up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution on the impact on the fishing sector of offshore windfarms and other renewable energy systems**

1. **Rapporteur:** Peter VAN DALEN (EPP / NL)
2. **Reference number:** 2019/2158 (INI) / A9-0184/2021 / P9\_TA-PROV(2021)0338
3. **Date of adoption of the resolution:** 7 July 2021
4. **Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee onFisheries (PECH)
5. **Brief analysis/ assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

This resolution analyses the current and future impacts of offshore windfarms and other renewables on the fisheries sector. More particularly, it calls for more research and knowledge on impacts, a life-cycle approach to offshore renewables developments – notably looking at decommissioning impacts - and a better integration of fisheries and nature protection in the offshore windfarms areas with an early spatial planning including all relevant stakeholders (co-design approach).

The resolution also contains calls for action to the Commission in the following areas:

* upscaling and commercialisation of sustainable floating offshore wind technology;
* special attention and funding to the development of offshore renewable energy in outermost regions and islands;
* research on socio-economic and socio-cultural effects of offshore renewables on fisheries;
* maritime spatial planning guaranteeing the fair inclusion of fishers, shellfish gatherers and aquaculture producers;
* cross-border cooperation in maritime spatial planning, including with the United Kingdom;
* stimulating local economies and economic activities offshore and enhancing synergies between sectors.

1. **Response to requests and overview of action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

The Commission welcomes the resolution and agrees with most of the EP’s findings. More particularly, the need to avoid the potential negative impact caused by offshore wind turbines on certain ecosystems, fish stocks and biodiversity, is a central element of the Commission Communication of 19 November 2020 entitled 'An EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future' (COM(2020)0741).

Regarding the need to upscale and commercialise sustainable floating offshore wind technology (par. 8), it is already emphasised in the above-mentioned Commission Communication of 19 November 2020, especially for EU countries and regions with deeper seas in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The Commission committed to continue its support to the development of new wind, ocean energy and solar floating technology designs, notably through its Horizon Europe programme[[1]](#footnote-1). For the years 2021-2022, EUR 60 million were allocated to research on floating wind, on top of the more than EUR 78 million already granted via the FP7 and H2020 funding programmes since 2009. The new Innovation Fund and the European Investment Bank also provides some specific opportunities for the development of floating offshore renewables.

On the call to support specifically outermost territories and islands (par. 31), the Commission is already considering the special needs and threats that those regions are facing. In particular, these are acknowledged in all European Green Deal strategies, notably in the EU Strategy to harness the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future. In addition, the Clean Energy for EU Islands Initiative[[2]](#footnote-2) was launched in 2017 to provide a long-term framework to help islands generate their own sustainable, low-cost energy.

Regarding the call for further research on environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural effects of offshore renewables on fisheries and marine life (par. 37 and par. 48), the Commission is well aware of the lack of data in this field, as acknowledged in a recent study financed by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund[[3]](#footnote-3) (EMFF) providing an overview of the effects of offshore wind farms on fisheries and aquaculture[[4]](#footnote-4). That is why in the Horizon Europe work programme of 2021-2022, the Commission ring-fenced EUR 10 million for the topic “Wind energy in the natural and social environment”. Projects selected should notably promote the use of modelling tools and objective holistic assessment metrics for realistic in-depth analysis of cumulative impacts of wind installations on the environment and on local communities. It must be noted that all offshore renewable energy projects need to fully comply with EU environmental legislation and the precautionary principle. The Commission adopted in November 2020 an updated guidance on wind energy developments and EU nature legislation (C(2020) 7730) in order to provide assistance on the procedures that need to be followed in the development of wind energy plans and projects. The guidance includes a separate chapter on offshore wind energy and several case studies which should support Member States and project developers in their environmental impact assessment and monitoring at all stages of a project. The Commission also follows closely the work of the International Council for the Exploitation of the Sea (ICES) Working Group on Offshore Wind Development and Fisheries, which notably organised an international workshop the Socio-Economic Implications of Offshore Wind on Fishing Communities in March 2021. In addition, circularity is at the centre of the European Green Deal and the Commission will continue to encourage the offshore renewables sector to look at the full life cycle of their projects (including decommissioning) and to reduce waste to the furthest extent possible. The EU provides support for initiatives towards circular economy through InvestEU, Horizon Europe and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)[[5]](#footnote-5).

On the role of Maritime Spatial Planning (par. 40 and 56), the 2014 Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD, 2014/89/EU) establishes a framework for all Member States aimed at promoting the sustainable development of marine areas and the sustainable use of marine resources. Nevertheless, it is for Member States to develop a vision of how they see the use of their seas, and to decide what marine space will be allocated to each activity at sea. Article 15(3) of the MSPD fixed 31 March 2021 as the maximum deadline for Member States to establish maritime spatial plans. Under Article 14(1) of the MSPD, Member States have a maximum of three months following publication of the plans to send copies of them to the Commission and to any other Member States concerned. The Commission services have started to analyse the plans submitted by mid-2021. The Commission will then report to the Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Directive by 31 March 2022, pursuant to Article 14(2) of the MSPD. In its report, the Commission will address, among other issues, the contribution of maritime spatial plans to environmental protection and to the European Green Deal as a whole. The fair consultation and inclusion of all sectors, notably fisheries, will also be analysed in this report. In addition, maritime spatial plans should apply an ecosystem-based approach as referred to in Article 1(3) of Directive 2008/56/EC - the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), with the aim of ensuring that the collective pressure of all activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of good environmental status.

Cross-border cooperation is embedded in the MSPD. Through the EMFF, the Commission supports cooperation projects on maritime spatial planning in all EU sea basins. By the end of 2020, it has funded 13 projects for a total amount of around EUR 25 million. An example of such a project is the Strategic Environmental Assessment North Sea Energy[[6]](#footnote-6) (SEANSE). The Commission contributed with EUR 1 million to support a process for a coherent approach to Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) with a focus on renewable energy. In order to better coordinate and communicate about maritime spatial planning, harmonised data for all EU coastal countries, will be made available through the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet), on the Human Activity Portal[[7]](#footnote-7). Work is ongoing with Member States to integrate their maritime spatial planning data online and visualisation is already available for Belgium, Finland and Denmark.

Concerning the cooperation with the UK, cooperation in the development of offshore renewable energy is part of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the UK[[8]](#footnote-8) (Article 321) and is currently under discussion within the Specialised Committee on Energy.

Stimulating local economies and economic activities offshore and enhancing synergies between sectors (par. 49) is a clear goal of the Commission Communication on offshore renewable energy mentioned earlier. The Communication notably announced the creation of a Community of Practice which should steer the exchange of good practices and experience in the field. In addition, the Commission proposed in May 2021 a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU for the industries and sectors related to oceans, seas and coasts (COM/2021/240 final). In this Communication, acknowledging the important role of the blue economy in the European Green Deal and recovery, the Commission proposes to launch a Blue Forum for users of the sea to coordinate a dialogue between offshore operators, stakeholders and scientists engaged in fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, tourism, renewable energy and other activities. It will develop recommendations to Member States and stakeholders on how to reconcile competing uses of the sea, notably via maritime spatial planning and multi-use of the space. A dedicated working group within the Commission is in the process of identifying the main stakeholders and defining a clear mandate for the Forum. The Forum will tap into the work of existing networks of experts, such as the EU MSP Expert Group (MSEG - E01682) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) -UNESCO MSP-Global initiative[[9]](#footnote-9).

Finally, the EU will continue to finance the above-mentioned initiatives through InvestEU[[10]](#footnote-10), Horizon Europe, the EMFAF and other regional and cohesion funds. The Commission will also organise in October 2021 a conference for Member States to share their experiences regarding the development of offshore renewables, including maritime spatial planning and public acceptance.

1. https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\_en [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/markets-and-consumers/clean-energy-eu-islands\_en [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. REGULATION (EU) No 508/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2328/2003, (EC) No 861/2006, (EC) No 1198/2006 and (EC) No 791/2007 and Regulation (EU) No 1255/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council, L 149, 20.5.2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/publications/overview-effects-offshore-wind-farms-fisheries-and-aquaculture_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. REGULATION (EU) 2021/1139 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/1004, OJ L 247, 13.07.2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://northseaportal.eu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.emodnet-humanactivities.eu/view-data.php> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-trade-and-cooperation-agreement_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.mspglobal2030.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://europa.eu/investeu/home_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)