



MAC ADVICE

Roadmap on the Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security

Brussels, 22 January 2021

1. Background

On 4 December, the European Commission published a Roadmap on the Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security, which is open to feedback until 13 January 2021¹.

The development of a contingency plan by the Commission is envisaged in the Farm to Fork Strategy, part of the European Green Deal. The plan will be activated when there is a crisis that affects the entire or part of the food system in the EU and puts food security within the EU in danger. The plan will include the creation of a coordinated crises preparedness and response mechanism. According to the Roadmap, the Commission will draw on the lessons learned from past crises, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in developing the contingency plan. The Commission will coordinate this response, with the involvement of Member States.

The Market Advisory Council (MAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Roadmap on the Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security.

2. Resilience of the EU's seafood supply chain

The ongoing COVID-19 health crisis has demonstrated that the resilience and the sustainable development of the EU's seafood system depends on the operators in its supply chain, which play a key role in supporting the economic and social dimension of coastal and many inland

¹ Accessible on the European Commission's Better Regulation website: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12770-Contingency-plan-for-ensuring-food-supply-and-food-security>

communities. Nevertheless, the sector underwent and is still going through an unprecedented crisis due to work restrictions, slowing down of global seafood trade, and drastic reduction of sales to the hotel, restaurant and catering sector (HORECA). The EU's financial support to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was welcomed, but not sufficient or not foreseen at national level². The urgent and extraordinary measures adopted by the Commission were helpful, but were not applicable to all actors of the supply chain, for example *cofradías*. The pandemic demonstrated the need for increased food security and food sovereignty in the EU, in line with the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)³.

The European Commission's statement that during the recent Covid-19 crisis the EU's food supply chain responded well and that it proved to be resilient to large-scale disruption misses an important point. Being true that quantity wise the functioning of the EU's seafood supply chain held tight during the emergency, from a price point of view the situation was very different. A significant drop in average prices has been felt in almost all the species. This decrease has been strong enough to jeopardise the viability of numerous fishers, aquaculture farmers and other parts of the value chain. Without adequate profitability for primary producers, and for the rest of the parts of the food value chain, both food supply and food security will be in a fragile situation, especially in emergency times.

3. Current coordination mechanism

The MAC agrees that there is currently insufficient established coordination mechanism at EU level that cuts across all relevant policy areas and can organise the concerted response to crises

² On 11 December 2020, the MAC adopted an advice on the impact and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic on the seafood supply chain, which provides more detailed information on the problems faced by the sector as well as recommendations on further public support. It is available on the MAC's website: <https://marketac.eu/en/mac-advice-covid-19-pandemic/>. It also worth noting that the collapse of demand for some products and shortage of storage led to fears of food waste.

³ According to Recital (12), "The CFP should also contribute to the supplying of highly nutritional food to the Union market and to reducing the Union market's dependence on food imports".

affecting seafood supply contributing to food security in the EU. When answering to a crisis situation, timeliness and flexibility are key and were, to a certain extent, lacking. Reduced timeliness and effectiveness of response are a great threat to the livelihoods of people employed in the sector. Not all companies have the same ability to handle crisis and this poses a risk to employment, particularly if parts of the sector do not have access to the support measures. Considering the key role of the seafood sector in providing healthy and nutritious animal protein, it is clear that, when employment in the sector is at stake, it directly affects the food supply and security of the EU and global consumers. Therefore, while the continuity of usual control mechanisms needs to be ensured, the Commission should play a more prominent role in informing EU consumers of seafood as a safe and smart choice, plus trust in the high standards of EU seafood products needs to be ensured. The Commission should in this way consider supporting a greater role by the stakeholders in the provision of the mentioned information to EU consumers, in order to benefit from their knowledge of the local markets' preferences.

4. New coordination mechanism

The MAC welcomes the creation of a mechanism to enhance coordination at EU level, under the form of a permanent forum created by the Commission and in which Member States would be represented. Food supply chain stakeholders should be represented, and the MAC could advantageously represent the seafood supply chain in this context.

The MAC agrees with the Commission's considerations on an effective EU food crisis preparedness and response mechanism, namely the focus on a coordinated action and dialogue to support policy consistency across the Union, exchange of best practices and lessons learned, use of a solid and up-to-date evidence basis, continuous evaluation of threats and risks to the EU's food system, engagement with international partners and organisations, and the offer of transparent communication to stakeholders and the public.

The MAC also agrees with the development of a set of broad guidelines and recommendations to improve coordination at EU and Member State level on how better to monitor and respond to crisis affecting the EU's food supply and food security, which would be informed by the outcomes of the forum's work and promote non-binding agreements on how to respond rapidly and in a coordinated matter. As an example, during the COVID-19 health crisis, it was important for the Commission to communicate to national authorities and to seafood operators on the available EU funds and financial measures, such as the EMFF and *de minimis* aid Regulations, as well as to inform on temporary closures due to decisions by public authorities, declaration of risk areas, or market demands. The coordination of Member States is also needed to prevent restrictions in the functioning of the Internal Market and other disruptions to the movement of workers.

5. Recommendations

In summary, in the context of the Roadmap on the Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security, the MAC believes that the European Commission should:

- a) Take into account the important role of the seafood supply chain in ensuring continued seafood supply and contributing to food security in the EU as well as in the overall food supply when there is a crisis;
- b) Develop and implement public support measures to mitigate the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the EU market of fishery and aquaculture products, to improve economic perspectives, to ensure the continued supply of safe and healthy food, and to support a green recovery, in line with previous MAC advice;
- c) Proceed with the creation of a permanent forum, as a mechanism to achieve coordination at EU level, where food supply chain stakeholders should be represented and where the MAC could advantageously represent the seafood supply chain;
- d) Implement the considerations mentioned in the Roadmap on an effective EU food crisis preparedness and response mechanism;



- e) Proceed with the development of a set of broad guidelines and recommendations to improve coordination at EU and Member State level, which should ensure adequate communication with national authorities and seafood operators on available support measures, while also guaranteeing the proper functioning of the EU's Internal Market.