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Position on the EU-Seychelles SFPA

Introduction and transparency issues in the process

Tuna represents more than 90% of exports of Seychelles and the tuna industry is wide ranging and crucial for the viability of the Seychelles economy. In addition, a growing Seychellois-owned semi industrial fleet is pierced into a space once dominated by foreign fishing companies.

Typically, an SFPA constitutes a very valuable partnership for developing countries. As a partnership, it is expected to conform to democratic and transparent principles espoused by the EU as well as Seychelles. Nevertheless, the current SFPA was a closely guarded secret in its development and signing.

In Seychelles, it was never shared nor discussed with the Board of the Seychelles Fishing Authority, the governing body of the authority which is the implementing arm of government for fisheries. It was neither shared with the Seychelles National Assembly for discussions despite this body's demands and was only presented for ratification after it was agreed upon between the EU and presumably the government of Seychelles. The Chairman of the International Committee of the National Assembly expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with the process in the local media.

Moreover, the SFPA was never debated with the stakeholders in the fishing industry including the Seychellois' owned tuna fishing fleet. This complete lack of transparency leads us to an inevitable perception that deals have been made behind closed doors while many of the issues we could have raised remain unanswered.

For example, in 2017 and 2018, the Spanish fleet overshot its quotas and hence overfished yellowfin tuna. Since the process has been all but transparent, we have no way of knowing this issue was addressed during negotiations. The practice of overfishing by the Spanish fishing fleet is a threat to the viability of the Blue Economy of Seychelles, a threat to a responsible and sustainable fishery, a threat to food security of our people and the population of South West Indian Ocean islands.

As there are no indications from the SFPA and protocol texts that Seychelles will be compensated for the losses nor that the Spanish fleet will refrain from overshooting the yellowfin tuna quota yet again, we can only but wonder what measures will the EU put in place at regional level and in the framework of the SFPA to ensure its Member States, Spain in particular, stop overfishing, respect the marine environment of the Western Indian Ocean, and provide possibilities for future generations of Seychellois to fish tuna sustainably.

FADS

The text in the agreement is relatively weak: *“In addition, to reduce the impact of FADs on the ecosystem and the amount of synthetic marine debris, the Union vessels shall use natural or biodegradable materials for FADs and retrieve them in the Seychelles waters when they become non-operational FADs within the modalities of the Seychelles legislation.”*¹

We understand that FADs will remain an important means in tuna fishing especially skipjack tuna. However, **the indiscriminate use of FADs in the past has led to a very bad image for the EU fishing fleet. Both parties need to ensure that the impact of FADs on our environment is minimal.** FADs use a weight down to 80 metres and this contribute to its entangling on Mahe plateau and African banks and damage the environment. There is a need to review the use of this weight and its height.

Additionally, whereas the most discussed problem of FADs is its impact on the sea bottom, reefs and shores, there is **very little attention paid to the impacts of FADs on the stock, namely, on the aggregation of multiple species, and juveniles, which are indiscriminately caught when the purse seine is deployed, whether it be an ECO, untangling or Bio FAD. There should be a study to establish the minimum number of FADs required to maintain the viability of a tuna purse seine fishery.**

Purse Seiners

In the interest of a responsible and sustainable tuna fishery, it is important that the capacity of purse seining in the Indian Ocean is capped. **The number and capacity should be "frozen." Any vessel which is replaced should not be replaced with one of a greater capacity. This should apply to all purse seiners and we call upon EU to work towards this.** A sustainable fishery is in the interest of the EU fishing fleet also.

Supply/support Vessels

Supply vessels do not feature in the protocol, but *support* vessels do², which is confusing as IOTC refers to these as supply vessels. **The support vessels individually contribute as much to the output of the fishery as a fully operational purse seiner and should be considered as so.**

Supply vessels contribute substantially to the landings of the purse seiners and their activity cannot be considered as sustainable. Again, the activities of the supply vessels in the past has also contributed to a bad image for the purse seining. **IOTC Resolution 19/01 calls for the reduction of supply vessels, as from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020: 2 supply vessels in support of not less than 5 purse seiners, all flying the same flag. EU and Seychelles must work towards further reduction of the number of supply vessels and towards their elimination in this Indian Ocean fishery.**

Sectoral support

The text in the agreement is clear: *"INTENDING, to those ends, to maintain a dialogue on the sectoral fisheries policy of Seychelles and to identify the appropriate means of ensuring that that policy is effectively implemented and that economic operators and civil society are involved in the process."*³

Civil society and domestic operators were completely left out of the negotiations of the Fisheries partnership agreement. Furthermore, as already mentioned, there were no consultations either. In

¹ Chapter II.5 of the annex of the protocol "Conditions for the pursuit of fishing activities by the union vessels in the Seychelles fishing zone."

² Article 2.1. of the protocol

³ Preamble of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Seychelles.

effect, there has been a lack of transparency in the process. The end results would simply be imposed on civil society and Seychellois fishermen.

Our past experiences with little or no consultation with the domestic sector and no participation in the implementation are not encouraging that the process will be better this time. A clear example is the catastrophe at Providence fishing port where 9 processing fish units were handed over in 2014 but remain mostly unutilised to date due to major deficiencies in their construction.

As aquaculture features under the sectoral support, **we remain concerned that a disproportionate amount may be allocated to aquaculture, whilst we would like to see more funds directed to the management of fisheries, the fight against IUU, and to the improvement of export capacities especially for Seychelles currently struggling semi-industrial fishery.**

Less than 9% of the sectoral support has been allocated to Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS), which is a major component if we are to effectively implement conservation management measures to ensure the rebuilding of the stocks. **Given the challenges Seychelles is facing in fulfilling its port state obligations, a more significant portion of the sectoral support should have been allocated to boost up our struggling MCS unit.**

Finally, regarding Seychellois employed on board of EU vessels, there is little transfer of knowledge on this fishery as most of Seychellois are employed as deck hands. **We would want increased capacity building for Seychellois employed on purse seiners, by establishing training programmes for seamen, so that the local crew can benefit from transfer of knowledge.**