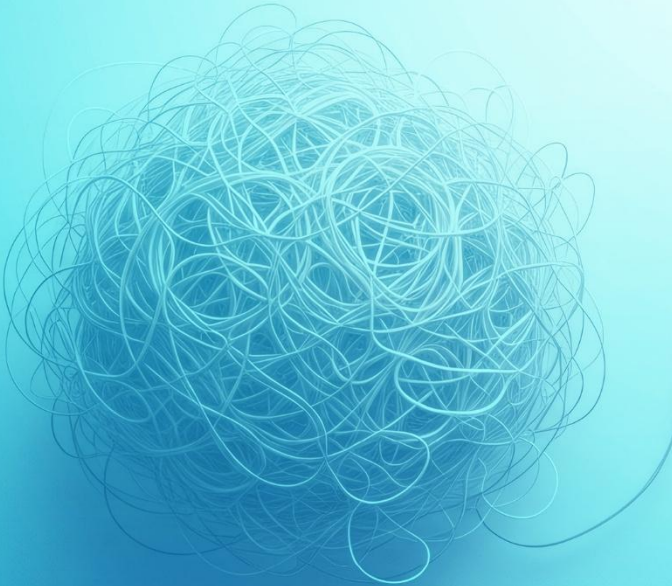




2026

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Simplification, Implementation & Enforcement

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for Fisheries and Oceans*



1. Introduction

As entrusted to me by President von der Leyen in my mission letter, and as part of our broader work to secure European food sovereignty, I am tasked with developing and implementing a long-term vision for resilient, competitive and sustainable European fisheries, aquaculture and other blue economy sectors¹, as well as to ensure that the EU leads global efforts to restore the health and security of the world ocean and support coastal communities across Europe with the unique challenges they face..

I am also tasked with ensuring the effective implementation of the [Common Fisheries Policy](#) (CFP) across all Member States, as well as other policy objectives and targets under my portfolio. To achieve this, the Commission has a range of instruments at its disposal, including infringement proceedings and, in the fisheries field, control action plans or administrative inquiries. I am further tasked with reducing administrative burden and simplifying the implementation of the EU acquis covered by my portfolio, in close cooperation with stakeholders.

This second Annual Progress Report on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement covers the progress achieved during the period from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026.

2. Executive Summary

As regards **simplification**, my services continued to work on a targeted amendment of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund ([EMFAF](#)), reflection on potential amendments to the [multiannual fisheries management plans](#) (MAPs), and the adoption of new delegated and implementing acts under the [revised Fisheries Control Regulation](#).

DG MARE further launched a dedicated simplification project, with three work packages: (i) costs and benefits of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation, (ii) regulatory burdens on businesses throughout the fisheries value chain, and (iii) [reality checks](#) with practitioners across Member States.

In relation to **implementation**, we advanced the European Ocean Pact through practical guidance, digital tools, and financial support, and supporting Member States in implementing the revised Fisheries Control Regulation.

Building on top of last year's [implementation dialogue](#) on Maritime Spatial Planning (July 2025), DG MARE further strengthened stakeholder engagement through two implementations dialogues on small-scale coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The Commission also published [guidelines on the allocation of fishing opportunities](#).

Significant progress has also been made in modernising fisheries monitoring and control through new digital tools, such as the mandatory [CATCH IT tool](#) and the [RecFishing](#) platform.

As regards **enforcement**, an infringement file concerning non-compliance with weighing provisions of the Fisheries Control Regulation was closed after receiving reassurance from the Member State on the resolution of the outstanding problems, while two further infringement cases concerning breaches of that Regulation were launched. DG MARE will continue to support Member States in implementing EU law, and ensure its effective enforcement, while harnessing digital tools and artificial intelligence to enhance the efficiency of the implementation and enforcement of the fisheries and maritime affairs acquis.

¹ See [here](#) the list of my responsibilities within the 2025-2029 European Commission

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification and costs savings²

Building on the simplification work launched last year, this section presents the most relevant developments for the European Parliament and the Council, focusing on the main simplification initiatives, the stress-testing of DG MARE's acquis and progress made under the in-house simplification project.

With the aim of eliminating outdated provisions, overlaps, inconsistencies and redundant procedural requirements, and based on the first results of the stress tests, during the reporting period DG MARE identified a number of **regulatory deep cleaning measures**.

These measures include a **targeted amendment of the EMFAF Regulation**, ongoing reflection on a potential **omnibus amendment of the MAPs**, the **simplification of fisheries control and enforcement rules through targeted delegated and implementing acts** and the **cleaning-up of the [Common Organisation of the Market \(CMO\)](#) rules**, including outdated marketing standards and commercial designation requirements.

The **EMFAF amendment** is intended to make the Fund easier to use by increasing flexibility for Member States, reducing administrative burden for beneficiaries and national administrations, and clarifying rules that currently create implementation difficulties. It addresses problems identified in the [mid-term evaluation](#), to help Member States make better use of EMFAF resources during the remainder of the programming period. The amendment is also expected to incorporate the new elements stemming from the World Trade Organisation agreement on fisheries subsidies.

The ongoing work on the **MAPs** responds both to experience gathered from their implementation and to calls from Member States and stakeholders to make the plans easier to apply. In December 2025, 15 EU countries tabled a joint statement at the AGRIFISH Council asking the Commission to act swiftly, while the Advisory Councils also called for changes and the Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries signalled willingness to work on a proposal. The overall aim is to simplify implementation by addressing overlaps and bottlenecks in the current rules and ensuring that the framework remains fit for purpose without weakening the core objectives of the CFP.

In addition, the Commission adopted delegated and implementing acts establishing detailed rules³ necessary for the application of the **revised Fisheries Control Regulation**. These measures simplify and update the regulatory framework by repealing Regulation (EU) No 404/2011 and provide technical specifications and clarifications required by Member States and operators. These acts are the result of an important simplification and update effort. The preparation of these acts involved streamlining the regulatory framework by reducing noticeably the relevant provisions and annexes in Regulation (EU) No 404/2011 across the new acts.

Building on the first list of seven **designated ports** adopted in May 2025, the Commission expanded the list during the reporting period by adding two EU ports in October 2025 and the first non-EU port in June 2026, bringing the total to ten. These designated ports may apply the derogation to the margin of tolerance for unsorted pelagic and tropical tuna landings, provided they meet specific weighing and fisheries control requirements, helping simplify catch reporting while maintaining effective controls⁴.

In parallel, DG MARE continued the **stress-testing** and structured screening of its acquis to identify simplification potential, regulatory overlaps and areas where implementation can be made clearer and less burdensome.

- For [markets](#) of fishery and aquaculture products, the stress testing, studies⁵ and legal analyses under the CMO have identified potential areas for simplification and burden reduction to **streamline the CMO framework**.

² [Simplification - European Commission](#)

³ [Implementing regulation - 2025/2196 - EN - EUR-Lex](#), [Delegated regulation - EU - 2025/1766](#) [Implementing regulation - 2026/1932](#)

⁴ http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2025/897/2026-06-09

⁵ European Commission: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Renault, S., Caillart, B., Herry, L., Souidi, S. et al., *Common Market Organisation (CMO) provisions on professional organisations and consumer information – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/0246060>

- Work on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of marine biological resources has progressed significantly, with the [evaluation of the CFP Regulation](#), including Advisory Councils and scientific advice, completed⁶, while implementation reporting under the Technical Measures Regulation continues.
- Regarding the funding policy, both the [mid-term evaluation of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund \(EMFAF\)](#) and the [ex-post evaluation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund \(EMFF\)](#) was completed during the reporting period.
- **External policy instruments:** the [evaluation of the SMEFF Regulation](#) was launched in December 2025 notably to assess the administrative burden and costs borne by operators, national administrations, scientific institutions and the Commission as well as to evaluate whether and where simplification or burden reduction could be achieved. During the reporting period, the stepwise removal of email and paper-form logbook reporting obligations for operators under the 11 active [Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements \(SFPAs\)](#) continued, generally through the use of electronic reporting system already mandated by the fisheries Control Regulation and supporting needed equipment of partner countries. My services also continue working on [evaluating the current Autonomous Tariff Quota \(ATQ\) regime](#) and the possible ways forward without imposing any additional costs on importers, processors or national authorities.

To support the Commission's broader objective of reducing regulatory and administrative burden and simplifying EU legislation, DG MARE launched an 18-month-long **dedicated simplification project** in January 2026. This aims to assist the stress-testing or structured screening, of MARE legislation by identifying their simplification potential, improving the understanding of the costs and benefits of key rules, and contributing to the Commission's targets of reducing administrative burdens by at least 25% for all enterprises and 35% for SMEs. It does so while safeguarding the economic, social and environmental objectives of the CFP and the fisheries Control Regulation. This work is built around three work packages:

- The **first work package** focuses on the **costs and benefits of the revised fisheries Control Regulation**. It analyses how the Regulation and its implementing and delegated acts function and interact, maps the provisions that generate costs for Member States and stakeholders, and assesses administrative activities such as reporting, registration, data provision, monitoring and enforcement.
- The **second work package** takes a **bottom-up perspective by assessing regulatory costs for business operators in the fisheries and aquaculture sector** across the fisheries value chain through surveys and interviews. It identifies and maps compliance costs, including adjustment costs and administrative burden, unnecessary reporting requirements, possible gold-plating and opportunities for simplification.
- The **third work package** supports [DG MARE in carrying out 18 reality checks with practitioners](#) across Member States to gather first-hand feedback from fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders on implementation challenges, administrative burdens and practical simplification opportunities – by July 2027⁷. These reality checks are delivered in a workshop format and take into account linguistic considerations of the Member States, sea basin coverage, and the diversity of economic activities concerned. They collect first-hand feedback from businesses and other practitioners in the fisheries and aquaculture sector on how EU rules, policies and spending programmes work in practice. The **first reality check with Belgian and Dutch practitioners** was held on 16 June 2026 in Brussels with 21 fishers present. The remaining workshops will take place between September 2026 and February 2027.

⁶ [SWD\(2026\)120 final](#)

⁷ https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/common-fisheries-policy-cfp/reality-checks_en

B. Implementation

In the context of the ongoing implementation of the [CFP and maritime policy](#), the Commission focused during the reporting period on key actions of particular relevance, including strengthening governance arrangements, supporting Member States in implementing the revised fisheries control system, and accelerating the delivery of the European Ocean Pact through practical tools, guidance and financial support measures.

Delivering the European Ocean Act by supporting implementation of maritime spatial planning

The [legislative proposal for a European Ocean Act](#) is under preparation. It will build on the revision of the [Maritime Spatial Planning \(MSP\) Directive](#) and is being prepared in coordination with the revision of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It will aim to make EU ocean governance more coherent and easier to implement, as announced by the [European Ocean Pact](#). The Commission is using the feedback gathered from the [implementation dialogue on the MSP Directive](#) on 1 July 2025 to inform the ongoing revision of the MSP Directive and the preparation of the Ocean Act. This input also contributed to the evidence base for the Commission's second [implementation report on the MSP Directive](#), which will support further work to strengthen MSP as a central tool for coherent and integrated ocean governance⁸. The results of the report were used as a basis for the evaluation of the MSP Directive.

On **capacity-building and practical support for Member States**, the Commission continued to support MSP through the [EU MSP Platform](#), financed by the Commission. The platform provides information on MSP practices, processes and projects, carries out technical studies, and offers a Q&A service. EU-funded MSP cross-border projects and conferences also support cooperation between Member States in managing maritime space and implementing MSP legislation. The [European Blue Forum](#), also contributed by promoting dialogue between users of the sea and helping develop synergies between maritime activities.

On **governance and coordination**, the Commission established the **European Ocean Board** in February 2026 as a key implementation mechanism for the European Ocean Pact. Bringing together 28 members from ocean, maritime, coastal and fisheries policy, including representatives from business, academia, research institutes, NGOs and youth organisations, the Board is tasked with providing strategic advice on translating the Pact's objectives into practical action, supporting policy coordination, and fostering coherence between EU policies, scientific knowledge, innovation, data and private-sector initiatives. Its first meeting took place on 31 March 2026 in Brussels, during which the Commission provided an update on the state of play of the Ocean Pact and heard from the Board Members and Observers on how the group can support the implementation of the Ocean Pact and contribute to a more coherent EU ocean policy. On 8 July, the Commission presented to the Board its ongoing work on the Ocean Pact dashboard and the State of the Ocean report, aiming at collecting feedback from the different sectors represented.

The Commission continued to support the **implementation of the MSP Directive through EMFAF-funded projects**, notably [MEDIGREEN](#)⁹ and [NESBp](#)¹⁰, which provide practical support for Member States in applying MSP in line with green transition and sea-basin cooperation objectives.

Implementation Dialogues

During the reporting period, I held two [implementation dialogues](#), one on **small-scale and coastal fisheries** on 24 November 2025 and one on **EU aquaculture policy** on 30 June 2026.

The [implementation dialogue on small-scale and coastal fisheries](#) focused on the practical implementation of EU policies supporting the sector. It explored challenges facing small-scale and coastal fishers such as climate change,

⁸ [COM\(2026\)174 - Register of Commission Documents](#)

⁹ MEDIGREEN focuses on the Mediterranean and helps seven EU Member States integrate European Green Deal objectives into their maritime spatial plans, with particular attention to offshore renewable energy, fisheries, aquaculture and nature protection, while also strengthening cooperation with non-EU Mediterranean partners. The project has delivered 13 national actions to strengthen these plans and is fostering cooperation with non-EU Mediterranean partners through the Mediterranean MSP Community of Practice.

¹⁰ NESBp supports maritime governance and ecosystem-based MSP in the North Sea and Baltic Sea regions by strengthening cross-border coordination, knowledge sharing, multi-level governance, cumulative impact assessment, and the integration of renewable energy and biodiversity considerations into national maritime spatial plans. The project results include a visual guide and checklist on to develop ecosystem-based maritime spatial plans, a policy brief on transboundary cooperation, a shared glossary on energy transition and biodiversity terminology, alongside developing the methodological framework for 'Mariparks'

market pressures, energy costs, access to fishing opportunities and finance, competition for coastal space, limited uptake of innovation, difficulties in attracting younger generations, and the potential of new technologies and income diversification to strengthen sustainability and competitiveness. The feedback received was used to further identify implementation gaps and possible follow-up actions, feeding into ongoing Commission action on legislative and policy simplification, guidance documents and digital tools, enhanced coordination and peer-exchange mechanisms, and targeted training and technical assistance.

The second implementation dialogue took stock of progress in [implementing the EU aquaculture policy](#) and provided an opportunity to identify, together with stakeholders concerned, outstanding bottlenecks to the sustainable growth of aquaculture in the EU, as well as opportunities and good practices for improvement. This dialogue also provided a key opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the EU policy and legal framework for aquaculture in contributing to the sustainable development of aquaculture activities in the EU and thereby to food security and employment in coastal and inland communities. The main conclusions are that the current voluntary approach under Article 34 of the CFP Regulation, combined with the lack of political attention to the aquaculture sector in Member States and the lack of coherence between different pieces of legislation applying to aquaculture, have made the legal and policy framework for aquaculture ineffective in achieving the sustainable growth of the sector in the EU. In particular, further progress is necessary in the simplification of licensing procedures and in facilitating access to space for aquaculture activities. Moreover, consumer information on the origin of aquaculture products (including processed and preserved and products in HORECA) is required to address the lack of level playing field for EU aquaculture products vis-à-vis imported products.

These dialogues helped align EU policy implementation more closely with realities on the ground and ensured that practical stakeholder experience could feed into future policy work.

Providing practical guidance on the allocation of fishing opportunities

To support the implementation of the CFP, the Commission published [guidelines on the application of Article 17 of the CFP Regulation](#), which governs the allocation of fishing opportunities by Member States. The guidelines aim to help Member States apply Article 17 in a more transparent, objective and consistent manner, while fully respecting their competence to design national allocation systems. They invite Member States to reflect on whether their current allocation methods adequately address emerging challenges faced by EU fisheries, in particular small-scale and coastal fishers. The guidance encourages greater use of environmental, social and economic criteria, and promotes clearer information on the criteria used. By providing practical guidance and highlighting good practices, it contributes to reducing legal uncertainty, strengthening trust among operators and stakeholders, and supporting fairer, more transparent and more sustainable fisheries governance.

Supporting the implementation of the fisheries monitoring and control system

The Commission continued to provide extensive support to Member States and fishers in implementing the revised Fisheries Control Regulation and the legislation on combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

In implementing the revised fisheries control rules, the Commission provided detailed **implementation support on electronic catch registration and data exchange** by developing the ‘technical format translator’ to align previous formats to the new one. Member States were given additional transitional period to adapt their national vessel catch reporting systems and the related data exchange infrastructure with the Commission. In addition, technical assistance and validation activities support consistent implementation of the new requirements across the Union.

The Commission also published two technical **guidance documents on the monitoring and control of fishing vessel engine power**^{11, 12}. These documents assist Member States in setting up harmonised systems for engine power certification, verification and monitoring, and support timely preparation for the mandatory introduction of continuous monitoring of certain engine power for vessels which pose a high risk of non-compliance with the rules

¹¹ [Technical guidance for the monitoring, certification and verification of engine power in EU fisheries control - Publications Office of the EU](#)

¹² [Technical specifications and guidance for the implementation of devices for the continuous monitoring of catching vessels' engine power - Publications Office of the EU](#)

of the CFP concerning engine power, as from January 2028. The guidance was developed with input from Member State experts and other external experts and relevant stakeholders.

Since 1 August 2025, the Commission has also made further progress in deploying **digital tools to support the implementation of fisheries control and Illegal, Unreported and Unauthorised (IUU) fishing rules, simplify reporting, and improve the availability of reliable data for fisheries management**.

[The CATCH IT tool](#) became mandatory in January 2026 for EU operators and authorities for imports of fishery products into the EU market. By digitalising the IUU catch certification scheme, CATCH replaces paper-based exchanges with a single electronic workflow for submitting and verifying catch certificates, thereby simplifying checks for authorities, improving traceability and helping prevent products stemming from IUU fishing from entering the EU market and ultimately levelling the playing field for importers.

[RecFishing](#) became operational in January 2026, to support the implementation of the new recreational fisheries reporting requirements. The system provides a harmonised EU-wide digital tool for collecting recreational fisheries data, reducing costs, improving transparency, data quality and consistency across the Union. It is designed to serve up to 11 million recreational fishers and to support national authorities by reducing costs and administrative burden.

Support for Advisory Councils' efforts to improve their functioning

The Commission worked together with the 11 Advisory Councils' on guidelines for their functioning and a code of conduct. This work was carried out through a bottom-up process, drawing on good practices already developed across the Advisory Councils and encouraging wide consultation with members, chairs and secretariats.

Fisheries and environment

The Commission released new guidance¹³ on 17 October 2025 to help Member States better protect marine Natura 2000 sites while supporting a sustainable future for Europe's fisheries. The guidance, prepared by DG ENV with DG MARE's assistance, provides practical tools for managing the relationship between commercial and recreational fishing activities and the EU's most valuable marine ecosystems. It also contributes to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Marine Action Plan by strengthening biodiversity protection, supporting the long-term resilience of the fishing sector, and encouraging dialogue with fishers and other stakeholders in the management of marine protected areas.

C. Enforcement

In 2026, DG MARE has been working on establishing strategic priorities for its enforcement work, to structure more strategically its enforcement action in years to come, further building on the Commission's enforcement priorities set out in the [2016](#), [2022](#), [2025](#) and [2026](#) Commission Communications. My objective is to target the most important breaches of Member States, which undermine the achievement of the CFP, whilst securing a level-playing field and ensuring equal treatment across Member States. While doing so, my services have continued to closely monitor [compliance by Member States](#) with the fisheries and maritime legislation and to follow up on systemic breaches.

As regards the [Fisheries Control Regulation](#), the infringement case against [the Netherlands](#) concerning weighing and registration of catches was closed in April 2026, following the resolution of the remaining breaches by the Dutch authorities. The case was the last infringement procedure pending on this subject.

Two new infringement cases were launched in July 2026 against [Italy](#) and [Portugal](#) for failure to remedy shortcomings identified in their national fisheries control systems. Portugal has still not established a system for automated cross-checking, analysis and verification of fisheries data, which should have been done by 2013, making it impossible to identify and investigate errors in the fisheries control data. Concerning Italy, a significant number of actions set out in its 2019 Fisheries Control Action Plan remain outstanding and the Commission decided to pursue

¹³ [Natura 2000 and fishing - Publications Office of the EU](#)

a Member State for failure to comply with obligations directly set out in a [Control Action Plan](#). These prolonged breaches by Italy and Portugal undermine the level playing field in the EU.

Pre-infringement dialogues were launched with Spain and France to inquire on suspected violation of the fisheries control requirements regarding the use of automatic identification systems by fishing vessels. Such systems aim to avoid vessels collision and also have an important role in preventing illegal fishing. These dialogues were launched following complaints received by the Commission, which remain a valuable source of information for my services, complementing data from other sources.

After the successful launch and resolution, in 2025, of two first pre-infringement dialogues concerning fisheries closure periods for European eel in the Atlantic, further pre-infringement dialogues were initiated with Greece, Spain, France, Croatia and Italy to address the incorrect implementation of EU rules concerning fisheries closure periods for silver eel under the [Mediterranean and Black Seas Fishing Opportunities Regulation](#). With this, the Commission is continuing its efforts to reduce the risk of a further decline of this critically endangered species and to ensure equal treatment across Member States.

Another pre-infringement dialogue was launched with Spain, related to a possible breach of the [Regulation on the Sustainable Management of External Fishing Fleets](#), the aim of which is to ensure that Union fishing activities outside Union waters follow the same conservation and sustainability principles as set out internally under the CFP.

As regards the [IUU Regulation](#), the aspects concerned by the infringement procedure launched in June 2025 against [Portugal](#) – namely its failure to prevent illegal imports of large quantities of fishery products from a number of third countries – were further discussed with the Member State authorities in the first ever DG MARE [package meeting](#) organised in December 2025. The meeting also offered an opportunity to discuss other situations of possible non-compliance, such as aquaculture practices in Madeira and their compatibility with the [Regulation on Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture](#), an issue currently under discussion in the context of a pre-infringement dialogue.

Finally, we continued to closely monitor the progress of [Greece](#) and Croatia in adopting [their maritime spatial plans](#) – the last two Member States that were yet to adopt such plans. [Croatia](#) confirmed in June 2026 the adoption of its maritime spatial plan, meaning that all breaches are now solved and the infringement case should soon be closed. [Greece](#) is now the only remaining Member State in breach of its obligations under the [Maritime Spatial Planning Directive](#), as confirmed by the Court of Justice in [February 2025](#).

Further information on infringement cases and pre-infringement dialogues in the policy areas covered by the present report are available on this [Europa webpage](#), where the public can perform targeted searches and customise graphs.

4. Way forward

Beyond the preparation of the Ocean Act legislative proposal, DG MARE has started setting up the **European Ocean Pact governance framework**, starting with the High-level European Ocean Board which held its first meeting on 31 March 2026. By the end of the year, the governance is expected to be complemented by the Ocean Pact Dashboard and the first State of the Ocean Pact Report.

Supporting the **implementation of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation** through the adoption of the necessary secondary legislation remains a key priority. This work is conducted through an inclusive and transparent process, in close cooperation with Member States and stakeholders.

The Commission finalised the preparation of the [implementing regulation on the weighing of fisheries products](#) during the reporting period¹⁴. These new rules will contribute to a smarter, harmonised, proportional, accurate and simplified fisheries control system, while ensuring the effectiveness of the measures necessary to achieve the

¹⁴ The implementing regulation was adopted on 10 August 2026.

objectives of the CFP. In so doing, the Commission has carefully taken into account the practical implementation challenges raised by Member States and stakeholders. In view of the obligations that will apply as from January 2028, DG MARE will develop the legislative acts related to **control of fishing capacity concerning engine power** and the use of **remote electronic monitoring** (REM) for the control of the landing obligation.

DG MARE is currently developing an **IT solution for small-scale fisheries** to facilitate the implementation of the revised fisheries control requirements. This work is being done in close collaboration with the Member States that requested it. The system will enable fishing vessels under 12 metres to comply with new obligations on vessel position and activity reporting. Development remains on track for completion in early 2027, allowing sufficient time for Member States to customise and deploy the system ahead of the entry into force of the new requirements in January 2028.

DG MARE will continue engaging with Member States and stakeholders on the expansion of the current **list of ports** where the conditions for the use of margin of tolerance derogations are fulfilled.

I will continue discussing key topics through the framework of the **implementation dialogues**, with the next dialogue, focusing on the implementation of the **landing obligation**, scheduled for November 2026. Furthermore, my services will actively follow up on the findings and outcomes of the previous dialogues.

Finally, the **DG MARE's in-house simplification project** will continue until July 2027, including through the organisation of a **total of 18 reality checks with practitioners** to identify practical simplification opportunities.

Annex: examples

More transparent and sustainability-oriented allocation of fishing opportunities (Commission support for Member States in applying Article 17 of the CFP Regulation)

Through the guidelines on the implementation of Article 17 of the CFP Regulation, the Commission provides **practical support to Member States in reviewing and improving how they allocate fishing opportunities**. The guidelines do not replace national allocation systems but help administrations assess whether their existing approaches are sufficiently transparent, objective and aligned with the objectives of the CFP.

The guidelines therefore invite Member States to reflect on the methods and criteria they use to allocate fishing opportunities and provide good practices that can help address these challenges. They clarify how administrations can make greater use of environmental, social and economic criteria, document and explain those criteria more clearly, and better recognise low-impact fishing, selective gears and practices that deliver broader sustainability benefits. Some of the examples highlighted are particularly relevant for small-scale and coastal fishers, as they can help improve predictability, fairness and access to fishing opportunities for operators that contribute to local employment, coastal communities and more sustainable fishing practices.

In practical terms, the guidelines give national administrations a common reference framework for assessing and improving their allocation methods. For fishing companies and fishers, this can lead to greater transparency and trust in the allocation system, as well as better recognition of sustainable practices. For citizens and coastal communities, it supports a more transparent and sustainability-oriented use of public fishing opportunities, contributing to environmental protection, fairer access and the long-term viability of the sector.

RecFishing: simplifying recreational fisheries data collection

The Commission supported the implementation of the revised Fisheries Control Regulation by launching RecFishing on 9 January 2026, a Union-wide digital system for collecting recreational fisheries catch data across EU marine areas. The system was developed in collaboration with EU countries to support the new requirements applying from 2026. By providing a common digital solution in marine recreational fisheries, the Commission helps Member States implement these obligations while limiting costs and administrative burden for national authorities.

In practical terms, RecFishing consists of a European central database and server, which acts as the back-end hub for harmonised transmission of aggregated catch data from coastal Member States, and a mobile app allowing recreational fishers to report their catches. Coastal Member States submit data monthly and annually for certain species and stocks, making it possible to compile information consistently across countries. 13 Member States asked the Commission to develop a single pan-European mobile app, while the remaining nine coastal Member States interoperate through their own national applications.

For national administrations, RecFishing reduces fragmentation between national systems, facilitates harmonised reporting and helps reduce costs linked to developing separate IT solutions. For recreational fishers, it provides a clearer and more user-friendly reporting channel, while each Member State remains responsible for national implementation, user guidance, support services and the rules applicable in its territorial waters. For scientists and fisheries managers, better and more comparable data from marine recreational fishing will improve understanding of catches, support scientific advice and enable fairer, evidence-based management decisions across fishing sectors. By replacing fragmented approaches with a common EU-wide framework, RecFishing simplifies implementation, improves data quality and supports the sustainable management of fish stocks.

CATCH IT tool: digitalising import controls to fight IUU fishing

The Commission supported the implementation of EU rules against IUU fishing by making CATCH mandatory from 10 January 2026 for the digital submission and verification of catch certificates for fishery products entering the EU market – around 70% of EU consumption. CATCH replaces the previous paper-based process with a harmonised digital workflow, making import controls more effective and consistent across the Union. It is also a key deliverable of the European Ocean Pact and contributes to the EU's broader simplification efforts, while supporting global action against IUU fishing and helping protect marine biodiversity.

In practical terms, CATCH streamlines the exchange of information between EU traders and control authorities, making it easier to verify that products entering the EU are legal and comply with EU regulatory standards. As the system is progressively used and populated with data, it should speed up administrative procedures, reduce administrative burden for EU operators, improve cooperation between Member States and strengthen exchanges between operators and national authorities. In addition, for legitimate operators and EU fishers, it helps create a more level playing field by ensuring that imported products are subject to the same legality requirements. For citizens and consumers, it reduces the risk that illegally caught fishery products enter the EU market.

Reality check with Belgian and Dutch practitioners

The Fisheries Sector 'Reality Check' workshop for Belgium and the Netherlands was organised as part of DG MARE's broader simplification work, and it formed part of a wider series of reality checks designed to gather first-hand evidence from fisheries practitioners on how EU rules and policies work in practice. It brought together 21 fisheries practitioners from Belgium and the Netherlands, representing nearly all fleet segments. Participants were invited to assess both EU-wide and country-specific challenges through interactive exercises.

Stakeholders identified marine protected areas and maritime spatial planning as the most severe challenge, both in terms of operational impact and limited capacity to adapt. The landing obligation was described as particularly difficult to implement in mixed fisheries. Quota allocation was another major concern. Several participants also underlined the need for more flexibility and innovation. Finally, stakeholders highlighted regulatory complexity and uneven enforcement.