

Conclusions and recommendations of the workshop on improving the influence of the EMFF through cooperation

24th and 25th of September 2015
Tallinn, Estonia

At the initiative of Finland and Estonia, experts from ten member states (DK, EE, FI, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, PL, SE) as well four observers from the European Commission (DG MARE) and COFASP ERA-NET discussed how to improve the influence of the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) through cooperation both at implementation level as well as at project level. The workshop was financed and supported, by an ERA-NET/Horizon 2020 project "Cooperation in Fisheries, Aquaculture and Seafood Processing" (COFASP) as synergies between the EMFF and COFASP were expected. COFASP's principal objective is to facilitate, through research and innovation, an effective and efficient implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

After two days of informal discussion the participants concluded that deeper and more efficient cooperation could increase significantly the quality of implementation and lead to better use of public money of the EMFF. Improved cooperation would lead in practice to decrease of error rates, increase the dissemination of knowledge and good practices between Member States, reduce the time and resources spent on the implementation questions and interpretation issues and to improve the dialogue between the Member States and the Commission.

After reviewing the formal and informal cooperation models used by Member States implementing other EU funds it was decided that a light administrative structure and informal communication would best suit to the EMFF and that the cooperation should take place at the expert level of the Managing Authorities as very large part of the issues that Managing Authorities deal with are common and non-political.

In order to improve cooperation the following steps were identified:

1. Continue to meet regularly and informally face-to-face in Brussels during the EMFF meetings as well as annually in other Member States;
2. Time (and resources) need to be reserved to Managing Authorities for cooperation activities;
3. Launch a pilot project "EMFF Learning Network" by building an IT tool for Managing Authorities of the EMFF following the example of Agriculture Learning Network. An informal task force will be set-up with voluntary Managing Authorities to steer the development work;

4. Launch a questionnaire to map potential cooperation themes and projects under direct and shared management in order to find joint cooperation needs and to recognize the possible themes and projects of common interest of Member States;
5. Report in the EMFF expert group meetings the progress of cooperation activities;
6. Ensure that SCAR Fish and COFASP are aware of the conclusions and recommendations of the workshop as well as discuss with possible collaboration with the EMFF and these bodies;
7. Establish a sub group under BALTFISH at Managing Authority expert level to discuss mapping of needs, selection and priorities with a view to cooperation at regional level. In future other regional fisheries groups might develop a similar Managing Authority sub-group.

The Member States present requested the Commission to:

1. Share the interpretation questions and answers of the legal framework of Managing Authorities dealing with of the EMFF regulation to ensure transparency and a level playing field across Member States;
2. Ensure that the Managing Authorities are aware of the financing possibilities of direct management of the EMFF as well as that Member States are consulted in an early phase of the preparation of annual work plans;

The workshop was concluded by the Member States thanking COFASP for providing them with a platform to discuss the cooperation between Member States. COFASP stated that it was clear from the discussions that cooperation between Member States has lot of potential at the level of projects but that more urgent issues (interpretation uncertainties and building the national legal framework) have currently higher priority. Once these needs are dealt with and clarified there are clearly good prospects for cooperation and a great deal of potential in the EMFF to implement joint activities and thus support even better the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy.