



Mr Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice President
Mr Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
CC: Mr Diederik Samson, Head of Cabinet Timmermans
CC: Ms Sarah Nelen, deputy Head of Cabinet Timmermans
CC: Mr Marius Vaščega, Head of Cabinet Sinkevičius

Brussels, 30 April 2020

Subject: Beyond COVID-19 – Build back a better blue

Dear Vice President Timmermans and Commissioner Sinkevičius,

The Covid-19 pandemic is having a dramatic impact on people’s health, jobs and livelihoods. The health and social measures taken by governments to ensure the wellbeing of their citizens will lead to massive socio-economic fallouts.

We welcome the EU’s plans to make substantial funds available to address this emergency situation and develop public stimulus packages to relaunch and transform the economy, create millions of jobs and support people – especially the most vulnerable – through this difficult time. These packages must plan for a more resilient socioeconomic model; one that provides social well-being and justice, secures green jobs, and promotes the sustainable use of natural resources within planetary boundaries, with the European Green Deal guiding this transition.

More than ever, the Covid-19 crisis shows us the importance of preserving ecosystems and biodiversity, and marine biodiversity is no exception. A healthy ocean – and thus the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems – is of the utmost importance in combating the climate and biodiversity crises and in delivering a sustainable blue economy.

We therefore call on you to ensure that Europe’s public stimulus investments to maritime sectors and all economic sectors which have impacts on the ocean are conditional on protecting and restoring the ocean’s health.

As you know, last January European Blue NGOs, supported by over 100 other NGOs, launched the [Blue Manifesto](#) as the blue answer to the Green Deal. In the context of the current crisis, and the challenges it poses for the future, we believe, more than ever, in the relevance of the vision for EU seas by 2030 laid out in the Manifesto. The roadmap of the actions that need to be taken to achieve this vision should guide recovery efforts to build a more resilient and sustainable marine future.

The ten principles set out in the joint NGO paper “Setting the right safety net: A framework for fisheries support policies in response to Covid-19” in annex to this letter, should be applied in the upcoming decisions on recovery measures to ensure they will lead to long-term benefits to people, nature and the economy. With a first phase of emergency measures targeting the fisheries sector approved by EU institutions, the paper provides guidance on which fisheries support policies will

address the Covid-19 pandemic and aid the path towards a healthier fishing sector and marine environment.

By ensuring that public stimulus investments and support policies to help people and the economy will also support the implementation of the Blue Manifesto roadmap, the following long-term benefits can be delivered:

- **Restoring coastal and marine biodiversity** to rebuild the ocean's resilience and to safeguard its capacity to stand between us and the worst impacts of the climate breakdown.
- **Strengthening food security in Europe and empowering coastal communities** by making the transition to low-impact fisheries and aquaculture thus ensuring the long-term viability of the sectors and building a seafood production system in Europe that respects ecosystem boundaries.
- **Achieving a clean, pollution-free ocean which protects environmental and human health** by making a transition to a truly circular economy and society, curbing plastic use, moving towards zero-emission shipping, transforming the way we produce food on land, better treating and managing waste waters and, overall, ensuring a non-toxic environment for future generations.
- **Managing all maritime activities in an ecosystem-based approach** and prohibiting the most harmful extractive activities to preserve unique marine genetic material for scientific research and biomedical breakthroughs.

The decisions and investments made now for the recovery of the economy will be decisive. While Covid-19 response measures may offer support for one year, a sustainable marine environment supports livelihoods for years to come.

With the climate and biodiversity crises unfolding, any policy proposal needs to answer the fundamental question: how does this policy allow us to build back better?

We count on your leadership to support building back a better blue.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Monica Verbeek, Executive Director Seas At Risk
also on behalf of

New Economics Foundation
Birdlife
The Fisheries Secretariat
Deutsche Umwelthilfe

Our Fish
ClientEarth
Environmental Justice Foundation
Surfrider Foundation Europe

Oceana
Global Fishing Watch
Sciaena