For a SAFER and Greener Seafood sector

To be approved at CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission General Assembly - 26 June 2020

Context of the Declaration

In 2017, based on the priorities of the Atlantic Arc Commission Presidency, Pays de la Loire, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission (AAC) joined an INTERREG Atlantic Area Project on innovation in the seafood sector, SAFER. The SAFER project was aimed at improving the innovation performance of the seafood industry by increasing technology adoption and transnational cooperation to respond to the challenges faced by the sector, a sector of particular importance to Atlantic Regions.

The implementation of the project was led by ERNACT and brought together partners from Brittany (France), Northern and Western Regional Assembly (Ireland), Northern Ireland (UK), Norte (Portugal), and Cantabria (Spain). Over the past 3 years, SAFER has developed a series of services and pilot projects to encourage technology adoption in Atlantic seafood enterprises.

As a network of regions, the CPMR Atlantic Arc Commission led the capitalisation activities of the project and shared SAFER’s results with Atlantic Regions, in particular with members of its Fisheries Working Group. Through participation in such projects, the Atlantic Arc Commission was able to act as a capacity building network for regions. As a European network, the Atlantic Arc Commission was also able to connect the results of the SAFER project with the EU policy context, such as the measures to address the impact of COVID-19 on the seafood sector, the EU Recovery Plan, and the Green Deal and its Farm to Fork Strategy.

This document sets out a series of recommendations addressed to the EU Institutions based on the results of SAFER project.
For a SAFER and Greener Seafood Sector

Recommendations of CPMR Atlantic Arc Regions to the EU Institutions

The Atlantic Arc Commission,

- **Recalls** the difficulties met by the seafood sector during the confinement period triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which stopped tourism activities and forced restaurants to close. Seafood products were not traded as usual and the aquaculture industry suffered in particular from an excess of stock;

- **Reminds** decision-makers that these difficulties are expected to be repeated from December following a hard Brexit, thus plunging the seafood sector into a second crisis;

- **Emphasises** the strategic importance of the seafood sector for Atlantic regional economies, as evidenced by the prominent place given to the sector in Atlantic Regions’ Smart Specialisation Strategies;

- **Welcomes** the EU Recovery Plan and additional funding made available to ensure a Green Recovery of the EU, notably the REACT-EU instrument which provides a top-up to Cohesion Funds, and the additional resources proposed for the 2021-2027 European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;

- **Highlights** the important role of the INTERREG Atlantic Area programme in contributing to the resilience of the Atlantic seafood sector through its support to projects that foster innovation, as evidenced by SAFER. The SAFER project implemented a manufacturing production control system in seafood companies in Ireland, Portugal, and France, which directly contributed to a reduction in production costs, and improved logistics and stock management;

- **Welcomes** the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy and the New European Green Pact for they represent an opportunity to promote fairer, more democratic and more sustainable agricultural, fisheries and food systems;

- **Underlines** that the SAFER project has contributed to test new ideas and working methods for greening the seafood sector and ensuring animal welfare. Example pilot actions include an Oyster Tank Remote Monitoring System in Derry and Strabane (UK), or an innovative process for the treatment and reuse of marine and brackish water in Cantabria (Spain);

**Promotes** Smart Specialisation as a key tool to ensure the implementation of the Green Deal and the digital transition on the ground (including in rural areas), and in traditional sectors, such as the seafood sector; and highlights how INTERREG projects can ensure peer-to-peer learning for regions developing their Smart Specialisation Strategies.

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1 Seafood sector is included in the RIS 3 strategies of Atlantic Regions under different headings such as Sustainable Food Production and Processing (Border, Midland and Western-IE), Agrofood specialised in very high quality products (Cantabria-ES), Food and Environmental Systems (Norte-PT), Sustainable food supply chain (Bretagne – FR) and Agrofood technology (Northern Ireland – UK).

2 The project also developed a transnational catalogue of 80 innovation services

3 This innovation ensures optimal conditions of the water in the tanks for oyster wellbeing

4 This innovation reduces the environmental impact of recirculating aquaculture systems
In this context, Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission,

- **Strongly recommend** that the EU extends the COVID-19 flexibility measures to ensure a full recovery of the seafood sector from the crisis. While the increased resources allocated to the EMFF are welcomed, the flexibility measures introduced in April 2020 to support the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the face of the COVID-19 crisis have not been extended, and the EMFF has been excluded from the REACT-EU Programme, which means the fund cannot benefit from the flexibility offered as part of this programme;

- **Further recommend** that the flexibility measures be broadened to support Brexit affected sectors and regions. Many businesses in the fisheries and aquaculture sector may not survive this double shock;

- **Request** the involvement of regions in the programming and funding allocation for REACT-EU, as per the partnership and multilevel governance principles of Cohesion Policy. The Atlantic Arc Commission also recalls the CPMR position to open the possibility for EMFF regional operational programmes;

- **Expect** the European Commission to take into account the regional dimension in the implementation of the Farm to Fork Strategy, by associating regions to policy developments and initiatives, such as the upcoming revision of the Strategic Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture and the National Strategic Plans. Atlantic Arc Commission Regions **remind** policy-makers that all food transition experiments start locally in the regions, and thus have a greater potential for changing practice since they are based upon real situations;

- **Proposes** that Macro-Region and Sea-Basin Strategies, such as the Atlantic Strategy, contribute to the capitalisation of cooperation projects, such as SAFER, and the implementation of the EU Recovery Plan and the Green Deal at a sea-basin level, by helping to streamline the different funding sources for the recovery of the whole Atlantic area, and specifically its seafood sector.

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The Atlantic Arc Commission is one of the six Geographical Commissions of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe, and its action, although specific to the requirements of its Member Regions, is part of this more general framework.

The Atlantic Arc Commission was established in 1989 in Faro (Algarve, Portugal). It covers five States (France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom) in a territory spreading from Andalucía to Scotland. With some 60 million inhabitants, it represents 12% of the European population. The presidency of the Atlantic Arc Commission is currently held by the Pays de la Loire Region (France).