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SWD(2024) 211 final

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION

Accompanying the document

Recommendation for a

COUNCIL DECISION

**authorising the opening of negotiations on behalf of the European Union for a new
Implementing Protocol to the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement with the
Government of the Cook Islands**

{COM(2024) 389 final} - {SWD(2024) 209 final}

Under the external dimension of the EU's common fisheries policy (CFP)¹, the Commission negotiates and implements the implementing protocols to sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) with third countries. The SFPAs create a legal, environmental, economic and social governance framework for fishing activities carried out by Union fishing vessels in third-country waters. In exchange, the EU provides a partner country with financial compensation for access to its waters and financial assistance to implement a national strategy for fisheries and the blue economy. The EU contribution is complemented by fees payable by EU vessel owners.

According to Article 31(10) of the CFP Basic Regulation¹, the European Commission must arrange for independent *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluations for each implementing protocol to an SFPA, before it submits to the Council of the EU a recommendation to authorise the opening of negotiations for a successor protocol.

This staff working document (SWD) makes an *ex ante* and an *ex post* evaluation covering the application of the current implementing Protocol (hereinafter, 'the implementing Protocol') of the SFPA concluded between the EU and the Government of the Cook Islands (hereinafter, 'the Agreement'). These evaluations are primarily informed by an independent evaluation study conducted by an external consultant².

The *ex post* evaluation covers most (up to March 2024) of the period of application of the current implementing Protocol of the Agreement, applying from 17 December 2021 to 16 December 2024. It provides an overall assessment of the implementing Protocol, drawing conclusions as to its effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and acceptance. It also draws conclusions on the EU added value of the intervention.

The *ex ante* evaluation analyses the relevant objectives for the Agreement and its implementing protocol, considering the current and future needs for this intervention. It considers the lessons learned from previous implementing protocols and the results of the *ex post* evaluation of the current implementing Protocol. Finally, it considers and draws conclusions on the possible impacts from the following two policy options:

- a negotiation of a new implementing protocol for the Agreement;
- no negotiation of an implementing protocol for the Agreement.

The *ex ante* evaluation identifies the following preferred policy option: the negotiation of a new implementing protocol for the Agreement, with some adjustments. On the access and technical component, these adjustments would aim to ensure, as far as possible, a certain balance between the fishing possibilities available and their effective use. On the sectoral-support component, adjustments should be sought to enable parties to effectively implement agreed priorities, in line with the national policies of the Cook Islands. It should ensure continued cooperation on: (i) ocean governance; (ii) fisheries science; (iii) monitoring and control; and (iv) the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU fishing). The implementation pace should be

¹ Regulation (EU) 1380/2013 of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy ([OJ L354, 28.12.2013, p. 22](#))

² *Ex post* and *ex ante* evaluation study of the Protocol to the Agreement on a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership between the European Union and the Cook Islands.

improved, by improving the part of the Agreement that deals with planning and programme design.