



2024/2030(DEC)

30.1.2025

OPINION

of the Committee on Fisheries

for the Committee on Budgetary Control

on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the EU agencies
for the financial year 2023
(2024/2030(DEC))

Rapporteur for opinion: Giuseppe Lupo

PA_NonLegDec

OPINION

The Committee on Fisheries calls on the Committee on Budgetary Control, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following into its motion for a resolution:

1. Takes note of the report of the Court of Auditors (the ‘Court’) on the annual accounts of the European Fisheries Control Agency (the ‘Agency’) for the financial year 2023, the Agency’s 2023 annual activity report and the analysis and assessment of that report by the Agency’s Administrative Board;
2. Expresses its satisfaction concerning the activities carried out by the Court and the Court’s statement that the Agency’s accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023 are in compliance with the Union’s Financial Regulation and with the accounting rules adopted by the Commission’s accounting officer; notes with concern the observations of the Court regarding some irregularities in the use of framework contracts and the reiterated use of carry-overs resulting from particular circumstances; welcomes the Agency’s explanations and its commitment to address these issues;
3. Notes that the Agency received a EUR 30,1 million contribution under the general budget of the Union in 2023, representing an increase of 2.58 % in respect of 2022; points out that both the Agency’s annual budget and its complement of staff are among the lowest among Union agencies; stresses that, meanwhile, the activities of the Agency increased;
4. Acknowledges that in the financial year 2023 the Agency was able to implement 98 % of its annual work programme compared to 95,4% in 2022; notes that the Agency was able to carry out its operations and implement its budget as planned, with an overall budget implementation of 99,9 % in terms of commitments and 74,8 % in terms of payments, restoring the usual levels of payments’ implementation after the sharp decrease registered in 2022;
5. Recalls the Unions ‘zero tolerance’ approach to IUU fishing and the Agency’s vital contribution in the implementation of the common fisheries policy (CFP), in particular of fisheries control and the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; welcomes, in this regard, the increase of the seaborne Offshore Patrol activities coupled with the intensification of its chartered Aerial Surveillance; notes that expenses for chartering Off-Shore Patrol Vessels augmented by 105 %; takes note of the explanation of this increase, which is attributed to the charter of three vessels in 2023; observes that expenses for Aerial Surveillance chartering increased eight-fold due to a significant increase in the intensity of the services;
6. Notes the successful conclusion of the PESCAO project which involved the Agency in major international coalitions against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in Western Africa entailing a steady flow of revenue amounting to a total EUR 3,6 million since 2018, financed by the European Development Fund; stresses the importance of the Agency’s further participation to similar projects, in particular projects related to the implementation of the recently reformed Fisheries Control Framework;
7. Stresses that it is the Member States that are primarily responsible for the control of fishing activities, while the Agency’s tasks are limited to support, coordination, as well as to providing assistance in this area to the Member States; stresses that the newly

adopted revision of the Fisheries Control Regulations will increase the Agency's supportive workload to enable a more harmonised application of the rules among Member States; emphasises the importance that growing obligations without sufficient resources to do so would be incoherent; stresses, therefore, that the financial and human resources available to the Agency need to be coherently adequate to the increase of the activities carried out in the coming years and avoid any additional pressure on the staff's activity and the quality of their working conditions; invites the Agency to continue its efforts to ensure the optimal use of the allocated appropriations;

8. Calls on the Agency to support Member States' monitoring and identifying serious infringements linked to the application of Article 90(2), point (p) of Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 concerning forced labour, and providing adequate training for inspectors on these serious infringements;
9. Notes that, in 2023, the Agency reported 44 993 inspections (at sea and ashore), which led to the detection of suspected infringements in at least 4230 of those inspections; notes that these data collectively represent a slight decrease in the total number of inspections (5% less inspections compared with 2022), as well as a 18% decrease in the total number of inspections where suspected infringements were detected; points out that inspections and other follow-up activities play a key role not only in the proper management of fish stocks but also in ensuring a level playing field for Union fishers;
10. Reconfirms our commitment to a rules based international system and highlights the important role of the Union in Ocean Diplomacy; highlights, in this regard and in relation to the fight against IUU fishing, that the agency has an important role to encourage an increased and harmonised application of the EU control systems in place to combat illegal fishing;
11. Notes with appreciation the Agency's continued cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) to support national authorities carrying out coastguard functions in line with Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2019/473; considers to be a good example of cooperation and synergies between Union agencies that should be encouraged and inspire agencies in other areas; calls on the Agency to continue its efforts in that regard and considers it appropriate also to increase the cooperation between the Agency and the European Environment Agency (EEA), especially on data sharing, and the European Space Agency (ESA); welcomes in that regard the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the EEA to exchange information, knowledge and conduct pilot projects at sea, notably a project dedicated to marine litter including monitoring, retrieval, collection, and recycling of abandoned or lost fishing gear in designated maritime areas;
12. Highlights the role of the Agency in offering capacity-building and training to third countries and the Agency's crucial role in securing a level playing field with all coastal states;
13. Notes that, on 31 December 2023, the establishment plan was 96% fulfilled, with 74 temporary agents appointed out of 77 temporary agents authorised under the Union budget; takes note of the increase of staff expenses by EUR 1,4 million in comparison with 2022;

14. Takes note of the Agency's policy of promoting equal treatment of staff and of its goal of gender equality in terms both of numbers and of grades and responsibility levels; acknowledges with concern that women account for 38 % of staff employed at grade AD 8 or higher, with no change since 2021, although the overall percentage of female staff members is 54%; notes that more must be done in order to attain parity at management level; reiterates its call on the Agency to step up its efforts with regard to its gender parity policy with a view to making progress towards parity at management level as well;
15. Underlines as well the importance of a balanced geographical representation among staff in order to meet one of the Commission's fundamental goals, i.e. to be close to the citizens and to reflect the diversity of Member States as well as ensuring that the Agency have knowledge of the Control regimes and administrative traditions in the Member States; calls on the Agency to ensure a diverse and inclusive workplace when conducting its recruitment process;
16. Calls on the Agency to regularly update and publicly share information about executive director and staff meetings with stakeholders involved in EU policy-making and implementation to ensure transparency and trust in its activities;
17. Expresses its satisfaction regarding the advancements and achievements of 2023 in the areas of digitalisation of procedures and electronic workflows which continues to increase the efficiency and traceability of all administrative procedures;
18. Proposes that discharge be granted to the Executive Director of the Agency in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for the financial year 2023.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur for the opinion declares under his exclusive responsibility that he did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION BY COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	28.1.2025
Result of final vote	+: 22 -: 4 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Sakis Arnaoutoglou, Thomas Bajada, Stephen Nikola Bartulica, Asger Christensen, Carmen Crespo Díaz, Ton Diepeveen, Paulo Do Nascimento Cabral, Siegbert Frank Droese, Nicolás González Casares, Anja Hazekamp, France Jamet, Isabelle Le Callennec, Isabella Lövin, Giuseppe Milazzo, Francisco José Millán Mon, Jessica Polfjärd, André Rodrigues, Bert-Jan Ruissen, Sander Smit, António Tânger Corrêa, Emma Wiesner
Substitutes present for the final vote	Oihane Agirregoitia Martínez, Mélissa Camara, Sofie Eriksson, Sebastian Everding
Members under Rule 216(7) present for the final vote	Kinga Kollár

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

22	+
ECR	Stephen Nikola Bartulica, Giuseppe Milazzo, Bert-Jan Ruissen
PPE	Carmen Crespo Díaz, Paulo Do Nascimento Cabral, Kinga Kollár, Isabelle Le Callennec, Francisco José Millán Mon, Jessica Polfjärd, Sander Smit
Renew	Oihane Agirregoitia Martínez, Asger Christensen, Emma Wiesner
S&D	Sakis Arnaoutoglou, Thomas Bajada, Sofie Eriksson, Nicolás González Casares, André Rodrigues
The Left	Sebastian Everding, Anja Hazekamp
Verts/ALE	Mélissa Camara, Isabella Lövin

4	-
ESN	Siebert Frank Droese
PfE	Ton Diepeveen, France Jamet, António Tânger Corrêa

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention