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PRESS RELEASE: **EAPO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

UK MEMBERS CONFIRM THEIR COMMITMENT UNTIL BREXIT WOULD DICTATE OTHERWISE

The European Association of Fish Producers Organisations held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Knokke-Heist, Belgium, on Friday 29 September. The local member, Rederscentrale, hosted the event and explained at the opening of the assembly that the venue was chosen, taking into account the history of the fishermen's village Heist, where till the beginning of the 20th century vessels landed on the beach. This changed when the port of Zeebrugge opened over a hundred years ago and the Heist fishing vessels gradually moved to the quayside in this new port.

The meeting itself was opened by Ms. Patricia De Clercq, deputy head of Flemish minister Joke Schauvliege's cabinet for agriculture, fisheries and countryside. Both Ms. De Clercq and the attending representatives of the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission, emphasized the fact that POs are seen as cornerstones for successfully reaching the objectives of the European Common Fisheries Policy.

Thereafter the President reported on the activities of the association, including the current issues, such as the development of Multiannual plans and the final phase of the implementation of the Landing Obligation. He said: "*We are extremely afraid of a 'big bang' in 2019*". Some chairmen of EAPO Working Groups expressed regret that the Brexit already looms up and that therefore there is a clear loss of momentum in EAPO's activities. The UK members on the other hand pointed out that for them it is too soon to think about changes in the European representation. They intend to remain active members of EAPO until Brexit will determine otherwise. Within EAPO the Brexit topic shall be avoided as much as possible until the European Common Market Organisation would no longer affect all current member POs.

The representatives of the European Commission attending the meeting positively commented on the work done by EAPO in the Market Advisory Council on the PO's Production and Marketing Plans and the financing of those plans. They were also looking for EAPO's input into the intended review of the market standards for fishery products. The third topic was the preparatory work on the new EU multi-annual financial framework as of 2021. EAPO was requested to give a view on the successes and failures of the current framework and to contribute to the upcoming public consultation.

After the meeting EAPO President Pim Visser said: "*I consider this a successful General Assembly. Our work over the last year bared its fruits for our members and the way the challenges have to be addressed in the coming year has been agreed. It was my intention to look for an interim optimal*

structure that suits best the fishermen represented by our members. The direct needs and interests of these fishermen, going out to sea week in week out, must be the main driver for our dedicated working group to come up with a well-documented proposal on the future of best possible fisheries representation in Europe.”

Around the meeting the hosts organised visits to the fish auction in Zeebrugge and to the Zwin nature reserve in Knokke-Heist. It is also a tradition to have an annual EAPO golf tournament in or around the venue of the AGM. This year there were four competitors and the EAPO challenge cup remained with Esben Sverdrup Jensen, the CEO of the Danish Pelagic PO.

===== Ends =====

The EAPO represents 39 Producers Organisations from 10 EU Member States, with approximately 10,000 vessels of all sizes, 3.6 million tonnes of landings and a first sale value of around € 3 billion.

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