



MEPs set out fisheries policy reform priorities

More responsibility for fishermen, rules favouring good fishing practice and adjusting fisheries management models to complement and improve the traditional quota system should be among the key aims of common fisheries policy reform, say MEPs in an own-initiative report approved by the Fisheries Committee on Wednesday.

MEPs set out their common fisheries policy (CFP) reform priorities in the by Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (EPP, PT), which responds to a European Commission green paper.

"Ecological sustainability is the basic premise also for the economic and social future", says the report, reflecting MEPs' threefold environmental, economic and social concerns.

Away with the "top down" approach

The fisheries management system must abandon the traditional "top-down approach", instead laying emphasis on regionalisation and subsidiarity, and participation of professionals and other stakeholders, so as to take better account of the local particularities of Europe's seas and fleets, say MEPs.

Whilst rejecting "any attempt to adopt a single Community fisheries management model", they nonetheless warn against jeopardising equality of opportunity for fishermen.

Alternatives to TACs and quotas to be explored carefully

MEPs ask the Commission to consider carefully possible new management models to complement the traditional system of total allowable catches (TACs), of which each Member State gets an annual national quota. Where appropriate, these models could include limiting fishing periods ("effort management") or transferable fishing rights, which could be introduced on voluntary basis.

These complementary mechanisms should facilitate a gradual phasing out of discards of unwanted by-catches. MEPs view discards as an unsustainable practice which should be eliminated in future by means of both positive and negative incentives. The report suggests using safeguard clauses to prevent the concentration of rights, driven by transfers, which could harm small-scale fisheries.

Ensuring a decent livelihood for fishermen

The report recognises the importance of fishing in the EU's outermost regions, and suggests that their specific situation may justify positive discrimination, in particular to promote fleet modernisation. Specific programmes should be crafted to support small-scale coastal and non-industrial fisheries and also shell-fishing to help them to overcome their difficulties by taking greater advantage of the European Fisheries Fund, it says.

From catch to market

Press release

To increase market stability and boost profitability, the Common Organisation of Markets in this area urgently needs to be revised, says the report. MEPs also recognise the need to ensure higher first-sale prices of fresh fish and to reduce the number of middlemen in the market chain, by increasingly involving producer organisations in stock management and marketing.

To enhance the image of fishery products and promote healthy food, MEPs ask the Commission to draw up a specific eco-labelling programme.

Environmentally-sustainable fish farming

The report advocates a "strong, high-quality aquaculture sector that is environmentally sustainable" and has the potential to promote development in coastal regions and help meet increasing consumer demand for fish products.

Partnership agreements to be assessed against strong criteria

New fisheries agreements with third countries should be assessed against criteria defined by Parliament and designed, inter alia, to balance economic interests with promoting sustainable fishing, enhancing local employment and defending human rights and democracy.

Next steps

The report, which still has to be voted by Parliament as a whole, will contribute to a broad public consultation the findings of which are to be summed up in March this year. After conducting an impact assessment and further consultations, the Commission will then draft legislative proposals, on which Parliament will decide on an equal footing with the Council.

The report, based on compromise amendments agreed by rapporteur and political groups shortly before the vote, was approved in committee with 15 votes in favour and 9 against.

Fisheries Committee

In the chair: Carmen Fraga Estévez

Rapporteur: Maria Do Céu Patrão Neves (EPP, PT)

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