



MEPs set out fisheries reform priorities

The planned overhaul of the EU common fisheries policy should take better account of the huge differences across European fleets and fisheries, give greater responsibility to fishing regions, address the problem of fleet overcapacity and improve the traditional quota system, according to a non-binding report adopted by Parliament on Thursday. MEPs also call for the creation of a strong aquaculture sector and an eco-labelling system.

The report, drafted by Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (EPP, PT), which is a contribution to a wider public consultation process, was approved with 456 votes in favour, 50 against and 65 abstentions. It asks for a radical reform, warning that failure to adopt it could lead to being neither fish nor a fishing industry in the future.

Doing away with the "top-down" approach

Fisheries management must abandon the traditional "top-down approach", instead emphasising regionalisation, subsidiarity and stakeholder involvement, to reflect the local particularities of Europe's seas and fleets, say MEPs.

Whilst firmly rejecting any attempt to adopt a single Community fisheries management model, they nonetheless warn against jeopardising harmonisation of conditions of competition and equality of opportunity for producers.

MEPs also urge the Commission to work for a separate, less bureaucratic model for managing small-scale and coastal fisheries and to improve their access to the European Fisheries Fund. The report recognises that the special situation of the outermost regions may justify positive discrimination in some areas, in particular as regards fleet modernisation.

Towards no-discards policy

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. This should pave the way for phasing out discards of unwanted by-catches. MEPs view discards as an unsustainable practice which should be eliminated by means of both positive and negative incentives, including discard bans if incentives prove insufficient.

Overall, MEPs demand long term science-based management plans for all fish species, to move away from the current decision-making system that encourages a short term focus.

Historical rights

Parliament believes that local fishing communities should always be given primary access to fish stocks, although access rights should be based on updated criteria and no longer solely on the criterion of historical catches, and that environmental and social criteria should gradually be introduced to determine who has the right to catch fish. They could include, for instance, the selectivity of the fishing gear, the contribution to the local economy or CO2 emissions.

Strong fish farming sector, eco-labelling

Press release

The report advocates a strong, high-quality and environmentally sustainable aquaculture sector that can help to meet the increasing demand in the EU, where 60% of fish consumed is caught outside EU waters.

Another demand by Parliament is for a specific eco-labelling programme to boost the image of fish products and promote healthy food.

Fisheries agreements to be assessed against strong criteria

Any new fisheries agreements, which allow EU boats to fish in third countries' waters, should be assessed against criteria defined by Parliament and designed, inter alia, to promote sustainable fishing, enhance local employment and defend human rights and democracy.

Next steps

MEPs want the legislative reform to be finalised at the beginning of 2011 so that it is taken into account in discussions on the next long-term EU budget for 2014-2020, which they believe should include increased funding for the CFP to ensure that reforms can be implemented.

The Parliament report is a response to a Commission consultation paper, the findings of which are to be summed up in March this year. After a further assessment, the Commission will draft legislative proposals, on which Parliament will co-decide with the Council, using its new legislation powers in fisheries policy acquired with the Lisbon Treaty.

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Procedure: Own-initiative report

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