European Parliament

Denouncing the EU-Comoros fisheries agreement

Following the listing of the Comoros as a non-cooperating country in fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the Commission has initiated the termination of the EU-Comoros fisheries agreement. Parliament's consent, requested for this first ever denunciation of a fisheries agreement on grounds of IUU fishing, will be subject to a plenary vote planned for the March plenary session.

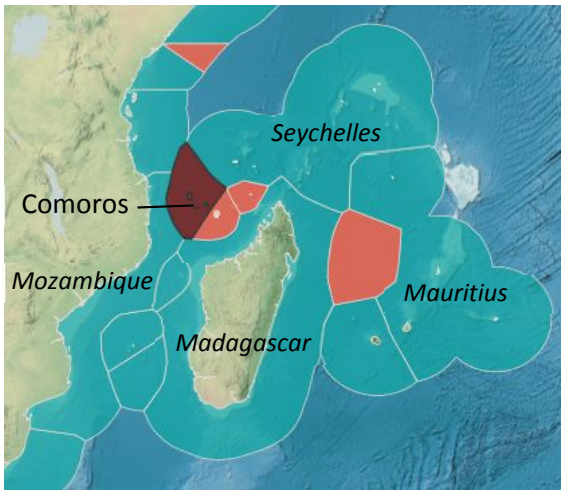
Background

Since 1988, a succession of fisheries agreements between the EU and the Comoros has provided for access of the EU tuna fleet to Comorian waters, as part of the network of EU tuna agreements in the western Indian Ocean (see Map). The current agreement, covering the 2005-2011 period and tacitly renewed until 31 December 2018, has ensured fishing possibilities for tuna vessels from Spain, France and Portugal, with a reference tonnage of 6 000 tonnes per year. The financial contribution of the EU is €600 000, half of which represents sectoral support for the Comoros' fisheries policy, intended to promote sustainability in its waters. However, the last protocol expired on 31 December 2016, and was not renewed due to IUU fishing concerns.

European Commission proposal

The IUU Regulation 1005/2008 empowers the Commission to identify, through a multiple-step procedure, third countries considered non-cooperative in fighting IUU fishing. In conformity with this procedure, the Comoros was pre-identified on 1 October 2015, identified on 23 May 2017 and listed on 11 July 2017. The shortcomings mentioned include the Comoros failing to carry out its duties as a flag state (with a flag of convenience policy and evidence of illegal activities by the Comorian fleet), and as a coastal state (poor monitoring and control capacity). Listing of a country as non-cooperating involves specific measures, among them the denunciation of any bilateral fisheries agreement in place. The Commission has therefore initiated the termination of the fisheries agreement with the Comoros, and proposed a Council decision to denounce it. After adoption, the Commission is to notify the Comoros of the decision, with six months' notice and a consultation between the parties before the agreement is terminated.

Map – EU fisheries agreements in the western Indian Ocean and Comorian waters

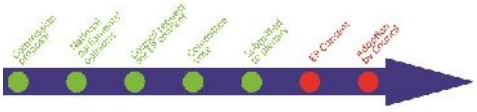


Source: MarineRegions.org, consulted on 28.2.2018. The exclusive economic zones of the coastal states are in light blue (200 NM) and light red (overlapping claims).

European Parliament position

On 27 February 2018, Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) recommended that Parliament gives its consent to the Council decision denouncing the agreement, with the Committee on Development providing a favourable opinion. This recommendation will now be considered in plenary in March. PECH also adopted a motion for a non-legislative resolution, deploring the lack of more tangible results in the development of the Comorian sector after almost 30 years of fisheries agreements, including in fields such as monitoring and control. The motion maintains that the denunciation must not mark the end of the fisheries cooperation and provides a series of recommendations for a more long-term vision.

Consent procedure: 2017/0241(NLE); Committee responsible: PECH; Rapporteur: João Ferreira (GUE/NGL, Portugal).



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