Multiannual plan for Western Waters fisheries

During the February part-session, Parliament is to vote on giving formal approval to a multiannual plan for management of fisheries in the Western Waters – an area of the north-eastern Atlantic located along the western coast of the EU. The proposed plan covers fisheries exploiting stocks of fish and crustaceans living close to the sea bottom (known as demersal species), including deep-sea stocks.

Background

Under the common fisheries policy, multiannual plans form the framework for long-term management of fish stocks, by fishery and sea basin. Adoption of such plans became a priority for all EU waters after the 2013 reform, with a view to restoring and maintaining fish stocks at sustainable levels. A series of multiannual plans have therefore been launched for specific fisheries, in the Baltic Sea and in the North Sea (adopted in July 2016 and July 2018 respectively), as well as in the Adriatic Sea and in the western Mediterranean (currently being discussed by the Parliament and Council).

European Commission proposal

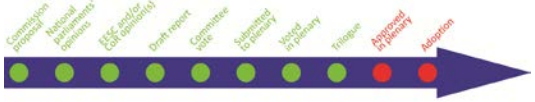
On 23 March 2018, the European Commission proposed a multiannual plan for management of demersal fisheries in the Western Waters. The plan introduces measures for exploitation in line with the maximum sustainable yield (MSY, i.e. the highest amount of fish that can be taken from a stock without affecting its reproduction), for certain economically important stocks, namely seabass, cod, megrims, anglerfish, haddock, whiting, hake, blue ling, pollack, plaice, common sole and Norway lobster. These measures also cover several deep-sea stocks: black scabbardfish, alfonsinos, roundnose grenadier and red seabream. The fishing fleets concerned mainly include vessels from Belgium, Germany, France, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

The plan aims to ensure that stocks are exploited sustainably, and that decisions on fishing opportunities are based on the most up-to-date scientific information. It is also intended to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation in the mixed fisheries that characterise demersal species. The plan follows the pattern set by the North Sea plan, and amends certain features of the Baltic plan along the same lines. It allows a certain flexibility in setting fishing opportunities, by defining ranges of fishing mortality based on the best available scientific advice, and requires safeguard measures if stocks fall below safe biological limits.

European Parliament position

On 9 October 2018, the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) adopted its report on the plan, but did not agree on a decision to enter into interinstitutional negotiations with the Council. On 25 October 2018, Parliament adopted amendments to the proposal by 437 votes to 103 with 11 abstentions, enabling the committee to open trilogue talks. After two rounds of negotiations, Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on 27 November 2018. The agreement, approved by the PECH committee on 23 January 2019, maintains Parliament's position on several points, such as expanding the area in which seabass is managed on the basis of MSY, and providing for the management of recreational fisheries when they have a significant impact on a stock. The agreed text now needs to be formally approved by Parliament, with the vote expected during the February plenary session.

First-reading report: 2018/0074 (COD); Committee responsible: PECH; Rapporteur: Alain Cadec (EPP, France). For further information see our 'EU Legislation in progress' briefing.



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