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REPORT

on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance
between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities
(2007/2108(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Paulo Casaca

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities (2007/2108(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities (COM(2006)0872),
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 of 20 December 2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy¹,
 - having regard to Commission Regulation (EC) No 1438/2003 of 12 August 2003 laying down implementing rules on the Community Fleet Policy as defined in chapter III of Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002²,
 - having regard to the proposal for a Council Regulation concerning the establishment of a Community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2007)0196),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament entitled 'A policy to reduce unwanted by-catches and eliminate discards in European fisheries' (COM(2007)0136),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission on rights-based management tools in fisheries (COM(2007)0073),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on improving fishing capacity and effort indicators under the common fisheries policy (COM(2007)0039),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A6-0297/2007),
- A. whereas the protection and conservation of marine resources and their exploitation in accordance with the principles of sustainable development must be one of the central planks of Community fisheries policy,
- B. whereas the sustainability of fishery resources is essential for guaranteeing fishing activity and the viability of the fishing industry in the long term,

¹ OJ L 358, 31.12.2002, p. 59.

² OJ L 204, 13.8.2003, p. 21.

- C. whereas since the beginning of the 1980s the overcapacity of the Community fleet by comparison with the available resources has been one of the factors causing constant concern for the viability of fisheries,
- D. whereas the final declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002, envisages an ecosystem-based analysis for the exploitation of fisheries, proposing that destructive fishing practices be eliminated and calling for the precautionary principle to be used in the exploitation of resources,
- E. whereas the goal was set at the above summit to achieve, by 2015, the recovery of fish stocks for species in danger of collapse, the aim being that, by that date, all fishery resources will be subject to a level of exploitation in keeping with the maximum sustainable yield,
- F. whereas in recent years the European Union has approved various recovery and management plans for overexploited stocks (hake, sole, eel and lobster) and it is foreseeable that these plans will have to be extended to other species of commercial value in the future,
- G. whereas, despite the progress made since the first guidance plan for the fleet was introduced in 1983, with the aim of reducing fleet capacity and power in line with available resources, the specific features of national fleets and fishing industries have not been taken into account and this goal has not been achieved by some Member States, certain of which have even increased their fishing effort,
- H. whereas it is necessary to promote environmentally friendly fishing methods, in line with scientific fisheries research, through improved fishing gear, greater selectivity and a ban on fishing gear that destroys marine ecosystems,
- I. whereas, even after several years, the data sent by the Member States are still not homogeneous, which makes a comparative assessment of the fleet difficult or indeed virtually impossible,
- J. whereas many Member States have sent data on the fleet register with a significant delay, and some States have failed to send data within the deadlines set by Community legislation,
- K. whereas sound management of resources in line with the precautionary principle and the principle of sustainable development requires strengthening existing control mechanisms so that the flag State and the coastal State where vessels are operating can access information in real time on the vessel's location and the fishing operations being carried out whenever they wish,
- L. whereas dialogue and the industry's participation in all measures laid down to achieve a balance between the fleet and the state of resources are essential conditions if these measures are to prove effective,
- M. whereas fishermen and their representative associations should be involved in determining

measures to protect the marine environment and to rebuild fish stocks,

- N. whereas Fisheries Advisory Councils are effective bodies for cooperation and dialogue between the various interests involved in the fisheries sector (environment, nature conservation, people working in various parts of the industry, including production and processing, and aquaculture) provided that there is a close link between the geographical scope and the problems they are analysing,
- O. whereas the fishing industry in the European Union's island and outermost regions faces specific problems, characterised by marine habitats, the nature of which merits special protection arrangements, and the existence of a small-scale coastal fleet operating in difficult conditions stemming from the morphology of the continental shelf and the fact that resources are located in areas of open sea that require special conditions to ensure the safety of vessels and of fishing operations,
1. Congratulates the Commission on the annual report on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fish stocks since, in spite of the difficulties arising from the diverging information supplied by the Member States, it provides an overview of the development of the national fleets that makes it possible to analyse their development;
 2. Reiterates the need for a more wide-ranging approach to measures to protect the marine environment and to rebuild fish stocks, in particular by considering and studying certain factors which have a significant impact on the marine environment and the state of fish stocks, such as coastal and offshore pollution, industrial and agricultural effluents, bottom dredging and maritime transport, to complement current management methods; considers a Community initiative in this area to be a priority;
 3. Notes that there has been a gradual reduction in the overall capacity and power of the fleet (approximately 2% per year) but there has been no reduction in the level of exploitation of stocks, since the technical improvements made to vessels cancel out or exceed the possibilities as regards yield and fishing effort that these modest reductions represent;
 4. Considers it unacceptable that Member States fail to comply with their obligations to gather and forward data in relation to matching their fishing capacity to the state of stocks and calls on the Commission to consider this non-compliance as serious misconduct and penalise it accordingly, as is the case for fishermen's obligations as regards catch data;
 5. Stresses that matching national fleets to existing resources must take account of the reduction in fishing effort already brought about - in particular the degree of compliance with Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes;
 6. Recalls the need for all national fleet adjustment and stock recovery measures to be taken with the involvement of fishermen and to be based on scientific fisheries research;
 7. Urges the Commission rapidly to submit proposals for guidelines that will ensure that the Member States present harmonised information making it possible to carry out comparative analyses of developments in the various national fleets and provide each of the Member States with disaggregated information on the level of catches by vessels

operating in its coastal areas;

8. Points out that, in view of the current situation and the continuing existence of overcapacity, it might be desirable to reconsider the usefulness of the current schemes for bringing the Community fleet into line with fishing opportunities, leaving room in the Community policy on fisheries conservation and management for other more efficient systems which may themselves lead to capacity reductions even greater than those laid down by Community legislation;
9. Calls on the Commission to adopt the relevant initiatives for the possible transition from a fleet management system based on restricting vessel tonnage and power, to a scheme under which fishing effort can be controlled through management by geographical fishing areas and the use of appropriate technical measures for the sustainable management of resources;
10. Calls on the Commission to submit proposals to improve the safety of small-scale coastal and artisanal fishing vessels in the European Union, aimed at increasing the size and power of engines and renovating vessels so as to improve the hygiene and safety conditions on board, without thereby implying an increase in fishing effort;
11. Calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for the setting up of a specific Regional Advisory Council for the outermost regions of the European Union;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and to the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Article 14 of Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002¹ and Article 12 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1438/2003² require Member States to submit to the Commission, before 1 May each year, a report on their efforts during the previous year to achieve a sustainable balance between fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities. Member States' reports are available on the 'Europa' website (http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/fleet/index.cfm?method=FM_Reporting.menu).

2. CONCLUSIONS OF THE 2005 ANNUAL REPORT

The annual report that the Commission has submitted to Parliament and the Council in compliance with the legal mandate concerning information on the state of the fleet and measures taken to bring it into line with available resources describes the situation of the fleet and its development over the three-year period 2003-2005, broken down by data for the continental fleet and for the fleet in the outermost regions, together with a series of assessments of the content of reports forwarded by national administrations in the Member States and data from the register of entries and exits available to the Commission. The rapporteur's remarks relate to this information, which is as follows:

(a) Results for the mainland fleet (Community fleet except vessels registered in the outermost regions):

According to the Community Fleet Register for the three-year period 2003 – 2005, the overall capacity of the Community fleet of the EU-15 Member States was reduced by 117,000 GT and 499,000 kW, which represents a net reduction of 6.27 % of the tonnage and 7.28 % of the power of the EU-15 fleet. The net reduction during 2005 was of approximately 50,000 GT, while it was of 23,000 GT in 2004 and 44,000 GT in 2003. These reductions appear to be relatively small, if one considers the high levels of fishing pressure in most Community fisheries, particularly for demersal species.

In the new Member States, starting from 1 May 2004, fleet capacity has been reduced by 41,000 GT and 101,000 kW, which represents a reduction of 18 % in tonnage and 18 % in power for their fleets compared to their fishing capacity on the accession date.

During 2003, 2004 and 2005 approximately 132,000 GT and 427,000 kW were withdrawn from the EU fleet with public aid, which means that this capacity cannot be replaced.

Of this capacity withdrawn with public aid, the overwhelming majority (112,000 GT and 373,000 kW) came from the EU-15 Member States. The capacity withdrawn by the new Member States with public aid since 1 May 2004 was 20,000 GT and 54,000 kW.

¹ Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 (OJ L 358 of 31 December 2002, p.59-80).

² Commission Regulation (EC) No 1438/2003 (OJ L 204 of 12 August 2003, p.21-28).

(b) Results for the fleets registered in the outermost regions:

With regard to the capacity of the fleets registered in the outermost regions and its variation between 1 January 2003 and 31 December 2005, the results show that the fleet registered in the Spanish and Portuguese outermost regions has been significantly reduced both in terms of tonnage and power. For the French overseas departments there has been a slight decrease in the total number of vessels and their tonnage and an increase in power.

(c) General remarks in the Commission report:

The quality of the reports submitted by Member States has improved compared to that of 2004. Some Member States provided very detailed reports, whose content exceeded the information they were obliged to provide. Nevertheless, other Member States did not respect the submission deadline or the requirements in terms of format and content established in Article 13 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1438/2003; at the time this report was drafted the United Kingdom had not submitted its annual report.

Member States emphasised in their reports the implementation of the national fleet management regime, but the assessment of the balance between fishing fleet capacity and available fishing opportunities is more complete than in previous reports.

The summary report is based on the Member States' annual reports and on the data extracted from the CFR. Some marginal discrepancies remain between the figures presented by Member States in their reports and those resulting from their declarations to the CFR. Thanks to the Member States and Commission's efforts to synchronise their data, these discrepancies are not important from the fleet management point of view. However, work on eliminating these differences should be continued. In any case, the data presented by Member States in their national reports do not modify the conclusions of the report.

According to Article 16 of Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002, those Member States that do not comply with Articles 11, 13 and 15 of this Regulation shall be obliged to reduce their fishing effort to a level which would have existed if they had complied with the above-mentioned articles. Additionally, they may be subject to a proportionate suspension of Community financial assistance under the FIFG.

In order to improve the quality of annual reports the Commission, together with the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, intends to establish more detailed guidelines for their content and to introduce a common harmonised methodological approach with greater emphasis on an analysis of the development of fishing capacity in relation to the available fish stocks. These issues will be discussed in forthcoming meetings of the Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture.

In forthcoming annual reports more attention should be paid to the contribution of the new regime adopted in 2002 to manage the Community fleet to achieve a better balance between fleets and fish stocks. The impact of national decommissioning schemes, in particular on fishing effort reductions in fisheries subject to management or recovery plans, should be better identified and assessed.

3. Rapporteur's remarks

The 2006 FAO report on the state of fishery resources points out that overcapacity, an issue which has been on the agenda of all countries with significant commercial fishing fleets for at least two decades, is still far from being resolved.

China and Asian countries figure among the main fishing powers, representing 86.1% of the world fleet. In 2002 China adopted a fleet-reduction programme with subsidies amounting to 33 million dollars per year for voluntary scrapping of vessels. Expectations are uncertain, since according to the data forwarded to the FAO in 2003 and 2004 the number of vessels operating under the Chinese flag has risen. With regard to the Philippines and Indonesia, also fishing powers, there has been an expansion in their fleets over the same period.

The pattern is similar for America. The US fleet with a capacity over 100 GT increased by 3.55% between 2003 and 2005. Argentina and Chile reduced the number of industrial vessels but, like other countries in the area, have experienced an increase in the coastal fleet.

Developments have been moderate in non-Community European countries. The available data indicate that Iceland, Norway and Russia have slightly reduced the number of vessels, but at the same time larger vessels are being built that permit ship owners to boost economic efficiency. This means that fishing effort is not falling.

With regard to the state of marine resources, overall they have tended to remain stable over the past 15 years, although with some variation. In some areas such as the Atlantic, the decline in fish stocks due to the overexploitation of commercial species such as cod and hake has been striking. Ever since the FAO started recording the state of stocks in the mid 1970s there has been a constant decline. There has been a growing trend towards overexploitation, which affected only 10% of species in 1970 and increased to 25% in the 1990s, since when the figures have stabilised. Fully exploited stocks also rose over the same period from 50% in the 1970s to 52% at present.

Against this backdrop, the rapporteur cannot but reiterate the remarks made by the European Parliament in the past, when reduction efforts were based on compliance with the multiannual guidance programmes (MGPs). The change in systems resulting from the introduction of the new Community fisheries policy, with the introduction of a record of vessel entries and exits, has not altered the basic problems of our fleets' overcapacity in relation to the available resources.

The conclusions of Parliament's 1998¹ and 1999² resolutions might perfectly well be restated today. The problems are the same. Even though several years have passed, the Member States are still not sufficiently involved in matching the size of the fleet to the available resources.

One sometimes gains the impression that, perhaps in view of the economic and social consequences of adopting measures which would be consistent and necessary but also highly unpopular, the Member States are pursuing a policy of 'laissez faire, laissez passer', in the

¹ A4-0046/98 Annual Report to the Council and to the European Parliament on the results of the multiannual guidance programmes for the fishing fleets at the end of 1996, COM(1997)0352.

² A5-0096/1999 Annual Report to the Council and to the European Parliament on the results of the multiannual guidance programmes for the fishing fleets at the end of 1997, COM(1999)0175.

hope that normal developments, the ever sharper fall in catches, will themselves cause the fleet to cease operating owing to the lack of any economic interest, since exploiting the resources will no longer be viable.

The report presented by the Commission shows that some public administrations have insufficient technical and human resources to analyse developments in their fleets effectively.

States with large fleets such as Italy and France were late submitting their reports, and one of the main states, the United Kingdom, did not submit any report at all, making it impossible for the Commission properly to fulfil its obligations as regards drawing up a summary report so that the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries and the Committee for Fisheries and Agriculture can deliver a balanced opinion on fleet developments.

At all events, even without a precise overview of the fleet, the conclusion that can be drawn is that the fleet is still excessively large measured against the level of catches which would correspond to the sustainable exploitation of fisheries. Efforts to reduce fleet capacity in terms of tonnage and power amount to barely 2% per year, which does not offset the increase in economic profitability resulting from technological improvements that have made it possible to exploit marine resources more efficiently.

Given this situation, rather than continuing with the same policy of capacity reduction based on tonnage and power, which has yielded such scant results, it might be preferable to explore other ways of containing fishing effort such as strict fisheries control by geographical area, management geared to the characteristics of the various areas where fishing activity is carried out, taking account of the marine environment, the conservation of natural resources and habitats and the economic and social circumstances of the industry, as well as effort management schemes based more on the selectivity of the fishing gear used than on the reduction of capacity and power.

It appears that the Commission is starting to see the merits of this reasoning, since it has very recently forwarded to the Council and Parliament four documents which together represent the launching of an in-depth debate on changing the management systems laid down as part of the CFP reform under Regulation 2371/2002:

Proposal for a regulation concerning the establishment of a Community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy. COM(2007)196 final

Communication on a policy to reduce unwanted by-catches and eliminate discards in European fisheries. COM(2007)136 final

Communication from the Commission on rights-based management tools in fisheries. COM(2007)73 final

Communication on improving fishing capacity and effort indicators under the common fisheries policy. COM(2007)39 final.

The explanatory memorandum accompanying the proposal for a new Council regulation on the collection of data in the fisheries sector submitted by the Commission appears to confirm

that new guidelines are being explored that will make improvements possible in other areas such as fishing vessel safety, independently of the vessel's size and power.

'The revised data collection regulation is intended to meet new demands generated by the need to move towards fisheries management (i.e. fleet- and area-based management, rather than fish stock-based) and towards the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. A significant innovation in the proposal is the inclusion of collection of environmental data with the primary purpose of monitoring the impact of fishing activity on the marine ecosystem'.

PROCEDURE

Title	Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities
Procedure number	2007/2108(INI)
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	PECH 6.6.2007
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary	ENVI 6.6.2007
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision	ENVI 3.5.2007
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary	
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Paulo Casaca 14.2.2007
Previous rapporteur(s)	
Discussed in committee	3.5.2007 11.6.2007
Date adopted	17.7.2007
Result of final vote	+ 23 - 1 0 0
Members present for the final vote	Alfonso Andria, Elspeth Attwooll, Iles Braghetto, Paulo Casaca, Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Duarte Freitas, Ioannis Gklavakis, Pedro Guerreiro, Ian Hudghton, Heinz Kindermann, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, Marianne Mikko, Philippe Morillon, James Nicholson, Seán Ó Neachtain, Willi Piecyk, Joop Post, Struan Stevenson, Catherine Stihler, Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Carl Schlyter, Thomas Wise
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Francesco Ferrari
Date tabled	23.7.2007
Comments (available in one language only)	