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Fisheries control: committee rewrites rules on recreational fishing

The EP Fisheries Committee rewrote the rules on recreational fishing in its consultative report, adopted Tuesday, on a proposed "control regulation" to ensure compliance with common fisheries policy (CFP) rules. It also replaced proposed rules to enable the Commission to close fisheries or reduce quotas with new ones on unused quota transfers, and said that EU budget aid should be available for installing vessel monitoring systems and electronic logbooks.

"If those involved in fisheries, from the people on the boats to those who sell the fish to consumers, do not respect the rules, the [common fisheries] policy is doomed to fail. Fish stocks will disappear, along with those who depend upon them", said the rapporteur, Raül ROMEVA I RUEDA (Greens/EFA, ES), adding that "probably the most important quality of a control system that applies to 27 Member States is that everybody be treated equally, that all those involved in the chain of production - fishermen, processors, buyers and others - feel that they are not discriminated against and carry their share of responsibility".

Recreational fishing

Recreational fishing has dominated all discussion of the proposal. In some cases, recreational fishing may have a significant impact on fish stocks, said the rapporteur. "Is it fair to commercial fishermen to continue to allow recreational fishermen to fish with no controls whatsoever?", he asked, adding that "it would be discriminatory to subject commercial fisheries to strict controls and limits while largely exempting non-commercial fisheries".

MEPs adopted amendments rewriting the recreational fishing article to say that such fishing from a vessel in Community marine waters on a stock subject to a multiannual recovery plan "may be evaluated" by Member States. But fishing with rod and reel from shore shall not be included, they added.

According to MEPs, recreational fishing means "non-commercial fishing activities (...) for recreation or sport and including, for instance, recreational angling, sports fishing, sports tournaments and other forms".

The committee also said that, within two years of the date of entry into force of the regulation, "Member States may estimate the impact of recreational fisheries conducted in their waters" and decide, with the Commission, "which recreational fisheries are having a significant impact on such stocks". For those with a significant impact, a "monitoring system that is able to accurately estimate the total recreational catches from each stock" will be developed.

Press release

Where a recreational fishery is found to have a significant impact, catches shall be counted against the relevant quota of the flag Member State. That Member State may then establish a share of the quota to be used exclusively for the purpose of that recreational fishery, said MEPs, adding that the marketing of catches from recreational fishing shall be prohibited except for philanthropic purposes.

Furthermore, fish released in recreational fisheries shall not be considered as discards or mortality for the purpose of this regulation.

Quotas

According to the proposal, powers should be conferred to the Commission to close a fishery when a Member State's quota or a total authorised catch is exhausted. The Commission should also be empowered to deduct quotas and refuse quota transfers or quota exchanges to ensure that Member States achieve CFP objectives.

The committee deleted the articles referring to the closure of fisheries by the Commission, the possibility of reducing a Member State's quotas on the Commission's initiative, and to the refusal of quota exchanges, arguing that these measures would mean that the Commission could unilaterally alter the relative stability among the Member States. Instead, the committee added rules on the transfer of unused quotas.

Sanctions

The Commission proposes minimum and maximum administrative sanctions, ranging from at least €5,000 to at least €300,000 for infringements of the common fisheries policy. MEPs add that vessels that have committed serious infringements should not be eligible for public aid.

"Penalty points" should also be assigned to vessels and captains that commit infringements. A holder of a fishing authorization who has been assigned penalty points should be excluded from receiving EU subsidies or national public aid, and repeat offenders may have their fishing authorisations suspended or withdrawn. Where there are no further offences, points would expire after three years.

The committee adds that operators found guilty of seriously infringing the CFP rules should be excluded from benefitting from the European Fisheries Fund, Fisheries Partnership Agreements or other public aid. The sanctions will be accompanied by other sanctions or measures, in particular the recovery of public assistance or subsidies received by illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) vessels during the financing period.

Electronic records

While original (paper) records could be destroyed after three years, MEPs want that data to be kept for a minimum of ten years in an electronic format.

The new regulation, after being approved by the Council, is to be the last of three regulations that will constitute the control system, after the adoption of the IUU regulation and the regulation on fishing authorisations.

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