

MEPs close deal with Council on seal products

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Trading in seal products from hunts hitherto conducted to protect fishing stocks will be banned in the EU in future but the exemption for the trade in products derived from seal hunts carried out by the Inuit community will remain, under the preliminary deal struck by internal market MEPs and the Latvian Presidency of the Council on Thursday.

"I am very pleased with the outcome of the negotiations today and I am very confident that we will hear good news from the Council after the Coreper meeting next week. The final text will encompass a new set of criteria under which seal products resulting from hunts conducted by Inuit and other indigenous communities could be placed on the market, a clear reference to the needs of such communities for food and income to support a sustainable livelihood".

"The new article which refers to the need to inform citizens properly that the seal products originating from Inuit and other indigenous communities' hunts are legal, was obtained by Parliament," said the rapporteur, Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP, RO), after the agreement was reached.

The EU banned the trade in seal products in 2009 in response to animal welfare concerns. However, it allowed two exemptions, one for products derived from seals hunted by Inuit and other indigenous communities and the other for small-scale hunts to ensure the "sustainable management of marine resources" (the so-called MRM exception). Then in June 2014, a World Trade Organisation ruling challenged these exemptions on the grounds that they could have discriminatory effects, thus obliging the EU to update its rules on the trade in seal products.

Reinforcing Inuit exemption

MEPs backed a Commission proposal to align the EU rules with the WTO ruling by renouncing the MRM exception and keeping a reinforced Inuit exception, as seal hunting is an integral part of the Inuit community's culture and identity.

Inuits will be allowed to sell seal products in the EU only if their hunting methods have due regard to animal welfare, are a part of their tradition and contribute to its subsistence, the deal says. A body recognised by the Commission will issue a compliance document in this regard.

However, if the Commission uncovers evidence that Inuit hunts are conducted primarily for commercial purposes it may restrict or prohibit the placing on the market of seal products from these hunts.

Impact assessment and proper information

The Commission will have to report by the end of 2019 on the implementation of the new rules, paying particular attention to their impact on the Inuit community. Meanwhile, under the deal, at the insistence of MEPs, the Commission will be tasked to inform the public and customs officials about the new rules and the Inuit exception. Parliament's negotiators believe that this could help to counter the widespread negative portrayals and misunderstandings of seal hunts conducted by Inuits and other indigenous peoples.

Press release

Next steps

The provisionally agreed text still needs to be formally approved by the Council's Committee of Permanent Representatives and Parliament's Internal Market Committee.

Further information

- Profile of the rapporteur Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP, RO):
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/38420/CRISTIAN-SILVIU_BUSOI_home.html
- Procedure file:
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015/0028\(COD\)](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2015/0028(COD))
- Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/imco/home.html>

Contact

Gediminas VILKAS

BXL: (+32) 2 28 46396

STR: (+33) 3 881 64504

PORT: (+32) 498 98 33 30

EMAIL: imco-press@europarl.europa.eu

TWITTER: EP_SingleMarket