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Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

2005/2189(INI)

26.4.2006

OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Fisheries

on launching a debate on a Community approach towards eco-labelling
schemes for fisheries products
(2005/2189(INI))

Draftswoman: Frédérique Ries

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Fisheries, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Welcomes the Commission communication and, whilst acknowledging the difficulty of introducing a labelling scheme that is effective without restricting companies excessively, insists that the essential objective of eco-labels should be to allow the consumer to make informed choices that promote the conservation of fisheries resources;
2. Considers that this system will complement the legislative framework for the preservation of fisheries resources, which should remain the common fisheries policy's fundamental objective;
3. Considers that, given the over-exploited and depleted status of many fish stocks in EU waters and around the world, any eco-labelling scheme that is to be credible and effective must accept the principle that eco-labels for certain stocks simply are not possible and that consumption of fish must decrease until such time as stocks recover;
4. Regrets that the current rules on labelling of fish products laid down in Article 4 of Council Regulation (EC) No 104/2000 of 17 December 1999 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products¹ are badly implemented and enforced in the Member States;
5. Regrets that it has no detailed analysis in order to assess more precisely the consequences of such measures for the fishing sector and the maritime environment;
6. Deplores the Commission communication's lack of ambition and considers that the chosen option (which consists of establishing minimum requirements for voluntary eco-labelling schemes) does not fully address the issues in question; considers that whatever labels are used in the marketplace must be independently monitored in order to be absolutely reliable and credible for the consumer;
7. Calls for better recognition at European level of non-industrial fishing; before the possible establishment of an eco-labelling scheme, calls for the parties concerned, including representatives of the non-industrial fishing sector, to be consulted and their suggestions taken into account;
8. Calls, therefore, for a uniform development and certification procedure to be set up that, in the long run, allows sustainable methods of producing and exploiting fisheries resources to be promoted, provided that the labels entail strict requirements regarding:
 - minimising by-catches,
 - catches regulated on the basis of the 'maximum sustainable yield' principle,

¹ OJ L 17, 21.1.2000, p. 22.

- effective enforcement and supervision in order to combat illegal practices;

9. Considers, therefore, that such a procedure should be developed at European level in consultation with sector stakeholders and in observance of a number of essential conditions such as transparency, accessibility, ***availability at low cost*** and credibility;

Considers, therefore, that a label of this kind should be developed at European level in consultation with sector stakeholders and in observance of a number of essential conditions such as transparency, accessibility, availability at low cost and credibility;

10. Advocates the continued existence of national and other labels for fishery products indicating, inter alia, particular features of catch methods, such as harmlessness to dolphins or the quality of the product;
11. Believes that a label will be fully effective only if it is uniform and easily comprehensible to consumers, allowing them to choose products that maintain the sustainability of fisheries resources;
12. Calls for the label's criteria not to be directly related to the European fisheries management measures and for them to be fully in line with the requirements under the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, so as to ensure accessibility to the label, and insists that eco-labels developed in the EU should not discriminate against non-European fisheries, particularly those of developing countries;
13. Recommends that participation in the system should be on a voluntary basis and suggests that there should be incentives to encourage companies, particularly SMEs, and non-industrial fishermen to participate in the system put in place;
14. Recognises that, in order to be effective, accessible and credible, the system should be managed in a centralised manner, but without creating unnecessary administrative constraints; suggests that the Community Fisheries Control Agency might be able to play a part in the awarding, monitoring and management of this label but recognises that this would necessitate a significant widening of its mandate and a substantial increase in its financial and other resources.

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

In December 1997, the Commission first addressed the need to discuss non-discriminatory, voluntary eco-labelling schemes. In 2002, it adopted a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy and announced its intention to launch a debate on the eco-labelling of fisheries products. On 29 June 2005, the European Commission presented its Communication launching a debate on a Community approach towards eco-labelling schemes for fisheries products.

The recent reform of the Common Fisheries Policy makes it necessary to discuss the issue of the introduction of eco-labelling schemes as a means of better integrating environmental protection concerns into the fisheries sector. In addition, the recent emergence of various "eco-labelled" products in this sector raises questions with respect to competition, external trade, and consumer protection.

Among its objectives, the Commission aims to promote sustainable fisheries and an adequate level of protection of the marine eco-system, a harmonised approach to eco-labelling schemes and transparent and objective information for consumers.

The Commission considers three options:

1. Non-action and freedom to develop eco-labelling schemes on the market, without any intervention and control from the public sector.
2. Create a single Community eco-labelling scheme for fish and fisheries products.
3. Establishing minimum requirements for voluntary eco-labelling schemes.

In its Communication, the Commission clearly favours Option 3.

However, the draftswoman wants to express her concerns about this option which would not be sufficient if it aims to achieve the ambitious objectives defined by the Commission.

The single establishment of minimum requirements for voluntary eco-labelling schemes would only regulate the current situation and prevent the emergence of misleading certifications. It would not send a clear message able to stimulate awareness to both consumers and producers. Moreover, a proliferation of labels risks weakening the role an eco-label can play.

These are some of the reasons why the draftswoman is in favour of the creation of a single Community eco-labelling scheme with ambitious criteria. In the light of the objectives defined in the Communication and with the involvement of the stakeholders, the Commission should establish a transparent, accessible and credible eco-labelling system.

The Commission must ensure that this label does not act as a barrier to trade. Therefore, such a label has to be fully coherent with the international guidelines for eco-labelling schemes, as agreed by the FAO and based on its *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*¹.

¹ Report of the twenty-third Session of the Committee on Fisheries (Rome, Italy, 15-19 February 1999), *FAO Fisheries Report*. No 595.

In order to prevent the creation of a new structure, the draftswoman also suggests involving the European Fisheries Control Agency in the management of this label.

In any such scheme, the importance of clear communication to the consumer must be of particular consideration in order to ensure the greatest possible impact of the label.

Ultimately, the label must generate concrete results in terms of protecting and enhancing the sustainability of fish stocks in EU waters.

PROCEDURE

Title	Launching a debate on a Community approach towards eco-labelling schemes for fisheries products
Procedure number	2005/2189(INI)
Committee responsible	PECH
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	ENVI 27.10.2005
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	0.0.0000
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Frédérique Ries 14.12.2005
Previous drafts(wo)man	
Discussed in committee	21.3.2005 25.4.2005
Date adopted	25.4.2005
Result of final vote	+: 30 –: 1 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Johannes Blokland, John Bowis, Hiltrud Breyer, Dorette Corbey, Chris Davies, Mojca Drčar Murko, Edite Estrela, Jillian Evans, Matthias Groote, Gyula Hegyi, Dan Jørgensen, Christa Klač, Eija-Riitta Korhola, Urszula Krupa, Riitta Myller, Vittorio Prodi, Frédérique Ries, Dagmar Roth-Behrendt, Guido Sacconi, Carl Schlyter, Richard Seeber, Jonas Sjöstedt, María Sornosa Martínez, Antonios Trakatellis, Anja Weisgerber and Åsa Westlund.
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Dariusz Maciej Grabowski, Vasco Graça Moura, Miroslav Mikolášik, Claude Turmes and Glenis Willmott.
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	
Comments (available in one language only)	...