

Seal products: internal market MEPs strengthen EU trade ban

[04-06-2015 - 12:00]

An exception to the EU ban on trade in seal products was deleted by the Internal Market Committee on Thursday. MEPs ruled out EU sales of seal products from “maritime resource management” hunts, in line with a 2014 World Trade Organisation ruling. But another exception, for the Inuit community, whose way of life depends on these products, remains.

"There was a large majority for the Inuit exemption and our agreement reflects the right to self-determination of the Inuit and other indigenous communities. Seal hunting is an integral part of the culture and identity of these communities, making a major contribution to their subsistence, preserving and continuing their traditional lifestyle and the cultural heritage of bartering", said rapporteur Cristian-Silviu Buşoi (EPP, RO). "Because we have a very tight timeline, we will start negotiations immediately with the Council and I am very optimistic that a consensus will be reached quickly", he added.

To answer animal welfare concerns, the EU banned trade in seal products in 2009. However, it allowed two exceptions, for products from hunting by Inuit and other indigenous communities and for small-scale hunts to ensure the “sustainable management of marine resources” (MRM exception). Then in June 2014, a World Trade Organisation ruling challenged these exceptions, arguing that they could have discriminatory effects. This prompted the European Commission to table a proposed update of the EU rules in February 2015.

Protect Inuit culture and identity

MEPs backed a Commission proposal to align EU rules with the WTO ruling by renouncing the MRM exception and clarifying the Inuit one.

Seal hunting is an integral part of the Inuit community’s culture and identity which makes a major contribution to its subsistence by providing food and income, say MEPs. Inuits may sell seal products in the EU only if their hunting methods have due regard to animal welfare, are a part of their community’s culture and contribute to its subsistence, they add.

If the Commission uncovers evidence that Inuit hunts are conducted primarily for commercial purposes, rather than for subsistence needs, it may restrict or prohibit the placing on the market of seal products from these hunts, say the amended draft rules.

Counter negative portrayals of Inuit hunters

To stop the EU ban harming the interests of local communities, MEPs call on the Commission and EU member states to mount awareness-raising campaigns to counter widespread negative portrayals and misunderstandings of seal hunts conducted by Inuits and other indigenous peoples.

Assess impact on Inuit community

MEPs regret that the Commission did not include an impact assessment in its proposal, and ask it to supply Parliament with a report on the implementation of new rules by the end of 2017, with particular attention to their impact on the Inuit community.

Next steps

Press release

The amendments to the EU rules on trade in seal products were approved by 33 votes to 2. The rapporteur was also given a green light, by 31 votes to 1, with 2 abstentions, to start informal talks with the Council of Ministers on the final shape of the legislation.

In the chair: Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (EPP, SE)

Procedure: Co-decision, first reading

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