

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

---

*Session document*

FINAL  
**A5-0360/2002**

24 October 2002

## REPORT

on the communication from the Commission setting out a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy  
(COM(2002) 186 – C5-0331/2002 – 2002/2175(COS))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Dominique F.C. Souchet



CONTENTS

	Page
PROCEDURAL PAGE .....	4
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION.....	5
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT .....	9

## PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 28 May 2002, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication setting out a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2002) 186 – 2002/2175(COS)).

At the sitting of 2 September 2002, the President of Parliament announced that he had referred the communication to the Committee on Fisheries as the committee responsible and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy for its opinion (C5-0331/2002).

The Committee on Fisheries had appointed Dominique F.C. Souchet rapporteur at its meeting of 19 June 2002.

The committee considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 19 June, 9 July, 11 September and 21 October 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 16 votes to 3, with 1 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Struan Stevenson (chairman), Rosa Miguélez Ramos (vice-chairman), Brigitte Langenhagen (vice-chairman), Dominique F.C. Souchet (rapporteur), Niels Busk, Yves Butel (for Nigel Paul Farage), Giovanni Claudio Fava (for Vincenzo Lavarra), Ian Stewart Hudghton, Salvador Jové Peres, Carlos Lage, Camilo Nogueira Román (for Patricia McKenna), Juan Ojeda Sanz (for Arlindo Cunha), Seán Ó Neachtain, Neil Parish (for Giorgio Lisi), Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bernard Poignant, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre (for Ioannis Marinos), Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna and Herman Vermeer (for Elspeth Attwooll).

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy decided on 9 September 2002 not to draw up an opinion.

The report was tabled on 24 October 2002.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### **European Parliament resolution on the communication from the Commission setting out a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2002) 186 – C5-0331/2002 – 2002/2175(COS))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2002) 186 – C5-0331/2002<sup>1</sup>),
  - having regard to its resolution of 17 January 2002 on the Commission communication to the Council and the European Parliament entitled ‘Elements of a Strategy for the Integration of Environmental Protection Requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy’<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 14 March 2002 on the Biodiversity Action Plans in the areas of conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fisheries and development and economic cooperation<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 17 January 2002 on the Commission Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A5-0360/2002),
- A. whereas environmental concerns should be fully integrated into the management of the Common Fisheries Policy, without prejudice to the economic and social objectives thereof, as made clear in Articles 6 and 174 of the EC Treaty and the undertakings given by the European Council after the Cardiff Summit in June 1998,
- B. whereas those working in the fisheries sector are the first to be concerned and the first to become aware of these concerns, and whereas they are also the first victims of any impairment of the quality of the marine environment,
- C. having regard to the need to ensure the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture, particularly in the light of the recent undertakings on sustainable fisheries given at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg,

---

<sup>1</sup> Not yet published in the Official Journal.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted P5\_TA(2002)0018.

<sup>3</sup> Texts adopted P5\_TA(2002)0121.

<sup>4</sup> Texts adopted P5\_TAPROV(2002)0016.

- D. having regard to the work, research, discussions and experiments carried out by fishermen, their organisations and independent scientists with a view to improving environmental protection,
- E. whereas decisions on fisheries management in Community waters should be based on a rational, scientific and accurate knowledge of ecosystems and fish stocks, as well as of the impact of fisheries activities on those ecosystems and stocks,
- F. whereas there is a need for the progressive implementation of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management which takes into account the role in the ecosystem of those working in the fisheries sector,
- G. whereas a continuation of previous reductions in fleet capacity below the levels needed to secure sustainable development might jeopardise the sustainability of fishing communities, particularly in regions which are heavily dependent on fishing,
- H. whereas no impact assessment has proved that further reductions in capacity would benefit the environment,
- I. whereas public aid, the aim of which is to improve working conditions, hygiene and living conditions on board, safety, energy-saving, conservation and the quality of fisheries products, should not be affected by measures aimed at achieving optimum protection of the environment,
- J. whereas technical measures should be taken as close as possible to the actual situation and should, therefore, not necessarily be uniform or determined centrally, although they must respect EU-wide standards for effectiveness,
- K. whereas technical measures which reduce by- and incidental catches and the volume of under-sized fish taken also have the added bonus of improving yield and working conditions,
- L. whereas there is an urgent need to clarify the environmental impact of industrial fishing,
- M. whereas fisheries and aquaculture are not the only factors influencing the marine environment, as this is also affected by natural factors (for example, climate change and an increase in the numbers of certain predators) and anthropogenic factors (for example, maritime transport, aggregate mining and oil extraction, pollution from land-based activities, and the increasing urbanisation of the coast),
- N. whereas, finally, the fisheries sector is directly exposed to the consequences of marine pollution and, in particular, to the consequences of accidents involving hazardous or polluting cargo,
  - 1. Emphasises that fishermen share the goal of protection of the marine environment and are amongst the victims of any impairment of that environment;
  - 2. Considers that the most important environmental protection requirement that must be integrated into the CFP is a rigorous and effective precautionary approach to fisheries

management, one which ensures that fish stocks, both commercial and non-commercial, and other marine species are not reduced to levels below which their functioning in the marine ecosystem is impaired;

3. Acknowledges and encourages the research, discussions and experiments carried out also by fishermen, their professional organisations, coastal local authorities and marine scientists with a view to improving the protection of the marine environment, of commercial and non-commercial species and of their habitats;
4. Calls for the encouragement of research to be undertaken by those working in the sector, by communities that are directly affected and by marine scientists and for funding to be made available for such research on a selective basis;
5. Calls on the Council to instruct the Commission to draw up a precise action plan with a view to improving the system of stock evaluation by integrating into it the practical, empirical and pragmatic knowledge of fishermen, as well as checks on landings, and by putting the interdisciplinary nature of the sciences (including Economics and Social Sciences) at the heart of the process of formulating scientific opinions;
6. Considers that the issue of fishing pressure on resources must not be tackled in a global and uniform manner, since it requires an approach which takes account both of the characteristics specific to each fishing zone and of the specific features of the various fish species, particularly their life-cycle;
7. Calls for urgent measures to achieve a sustainable balance between exploitation and living aquatic resources, including both commercial and non-commercial species, on a zone-by-zone and species-by-species basis, and the habitats on which they depend, in keeping with the objective under the Sustainable Development Strategy of the EU 'to protect and restore habitats and natural systems and halt biodiversity loss by 2010 with a view to achieving the Johannesburg target of all depleted stocks to be at a level that can produce the maximum sustainable yield not later than 2015';
8. Approves the guiding principle proposed by the Commission aimed at the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach, provided that man's action through fishing is demonstrably a full part of this approach;
9. Rejects a negative perception of the fishing industry which adversely affects its image;
10. Considers that the question of the recovery of vulnerable stocks should be dealt with primarily through flexible management instruments which enable fishing effort to be adjusted to match the state of resources as part of an on-going process, such as TACs and quotas, in preference to rigid instruments which have an irreversible and socially dramatic impact, such as the scrapping of vessels;
11. Proposes the maintenance of public aid for the modernisation of fleets, the aim of which is to improve working conditions, safety, energy-saving and product quality;
12. Welcomes the Commission's decision to give high priority to the improvement of fishing methods, with a view to reducing discards, by-catches and the impact on

habitats, and looks forward in particular to the proposals aiming to protect cetaceans and sea birds from the adverse effects of fishing;

13. Proposes that the Commission works with fishermen and fisheries organisations to draw up an Action Plan to search for methods of fishing that are most responsible and most beneficial to the environment and to the biological balance;
14. Draws attention to the specific environmental impact of industrial fishing, which has already been highlighted by Parliament, and renews the call made to the Commission in paragraph 9 of its resolution of 17 January 2002 on the communication 'Elements of a Strategy for the Integration of Environmental Protection Requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy'<sup>1</sup> to carry out 'a thorough study on the environmental impact of industrial fishing';
15. Expresses its concern at the new risk to the environment which would be posed by the proliferation in the sea of genetically modified fish originating from aquaculture;
16. Calls on the Commission to assess the impact of global warming upon fish stocks in EU waters and the location of the main species fished by the Community, on the basis of migration and the development of certain characteristics of the food chain, in particular in phytoplankton-rich areas;
17. Calls for an effective and rigorous implementation of all legislation relating to the marine environment and, in particular, the provisions of the 'Erika I' and 'Erika II' packages relating to maritime safety;
18. Calls for the fulfilment of requirements under the Habitats and Birds Directives (92/42/EEC and 79/409/EEC), for the monitoring of populations of marine species and for action to ensure that incidental killing does not have a significant negative impact on the species listed;
19. Calls for high priority to be given to the development of common environmental standards in the aquaculture sector;
20. Calls for a stronger integration of environmental policy concerns into the fisheries agreements drawn up between the EU and third countries;
21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission and to the parliaments of the Member States.

---

<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted P5\_TA(2002)0018



## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

There can be no doubt about the urgent need to integrate environmental protection requirements into the fisheries policy. Gone are the days when the boundless sea appeared to be an inexhaustible source of bounty and when man's actions appeared negligible compared with the ability of the marine ecosystem to absorb and regenerate. It is, therefore, only right and proper that an in-depth discussion should be held on the subject at a time when the CFP is coming up to a crucial date on which the Council must lay down new rules.

Those working in the fisheries sector are the first to be concerned and the first to become aware of these concerns, motivated by an urgent need to ensure the sustainability of their activities, and they are also the first victims of any impairment of the quality of the marine environment. The fisheries sector depends on the health of the environment in which it operates, and this environment includes the fish, their food chain and the other components of the ecosystem which are not linked to fish. It is also interesting to note that, at various locations in the European Union, fishermen, their professional associations and coastal local authorities are carrying out research, discussions and experiments aimed at improving the protection of the environment, of commercial and non-commercial species and of their habitats. These initiatives are focused on four main areas:

- some aim to improve the selection of the fishing gear used, with the dual aim of reducing by-catches (and therefore discards) and limiting catches of juveniles,
- some aim to promote an increase in exploitable biomass of the main species affected by coastal fishing, for example by creating biological rest areas, protected areas and nursery areas and, in particular, by means of the very promising technique of artificial reefs,
- some aim to improve the quality of seafood products, in particular with a view to guaranteeing maximum freshness,
- some aim to adapt vessels and fishing gear so they may be used for specific environmental protection activities, for example by using modified trawls to mop up oil spills.

There should be clear recognition and encouragement of the right to experiment of those working in the fisheries sector and the communities which are directly affected and responsible: pilot projects in this area should be eligible for public aid. Emphasis should be placed on the role of those working in the sector and their commitment to taking control of decisions on fisheries which aim to ensure the sustainability of fisheries and correct its adverse impact on the environment, so that the requisite decisions are taken with the fishermen and not against them. Recent experience has shown that decisions on fisheries management should be taken in close consultation with fishermen: their support is essential. Although it is necessary for the authorities to put in place checks and repressive measures, these should not be seen as a substitute for consultation. This clear recognition of the role of those working in the fisheries sector will make it possible to escape from the deadlock caused by an approach which regards fishermen as environmental vandals.

The main problem to be faced is the inadequacy of sound scientific knowledge on stock evaluation. The Commission formally recognises this inadequacy, for example in the Green Paper. However, although it proposes objectives, a timetable and specific funds for the scrapping of excess fleet capacity, it makes no such proposals with regard to the urgent need to upgrade knowledge on the state of stocks. Even though the situation varies greatly for the

various stocks and the various fisheries, even though major errors have been found in certain assessments and acknowledged by the scientists themselves, even though differing opinions sometimes place those working in the sector in conflict with scientists and sometimes even different scientific sources in conflict with each other, the Commission offers an overall diagnosis which states that stocks are declining, without distinguishing between species or fisheries, and which places the blame on overfishing. Your rapporteur proposes that a recommendation be made to the Council that it instruct the Commission to draw up a precise action plan. This action plan should set up, as a matter of urgency, a genuine and appropriate system of stock evaluation, one which integrates the practical, empirical and pragmatic knowledge of fishermen, as well as checks on landings. The interdisciplinary nature of science (include Economics and Social Sciences) should be put at the heart of the formulation of scientific opinions, and the transparency and dissemination of these opinions should be promoted. Serious decisions affecting an entire sector, with major economic and social consequences for coastal communities, should not be taken on the basis of criteria which are inaccurate or which are emotional rather than scientific.

In this context, the main priority cannot be an overall and uniform reduction in fishing pressure, as proposed by the Commission in its draft action plan, since that does not take into account the specific features of the various species and the various areas. Your rapporteur proposes that this inadequate formulation should be replaced by that laid down by the European Council of Santa Maria de Feira, i.e. a search for a sustainable balance between resources and exploitation. This balance should be pursued on a zone-by-zone and species-by-species basis, with the help of solid scientific knowledge, and achieved by both working to increase resources by appropriate measures and reducing exploitation, where necessary.

The consequence of this negative approach to fishing activities favoured by the Commission is the indefinite extension of a policy of fleet capacity reduction, which does not take sufficient account of reductions already carried out in the past and does not provide any guarantee of efficiency in the future backed up by an impact assessment proving that further reductions would benefit the environment.

The Commission is also mistaken when it includes the abolition of public aid for the modernisation or renewal of fleets as a priority measure for environmental protection. Public aid, the aim of which is to improve working conditions, hygiene and living conditions on board, safety, energy saving, conservation and the quality of fisheries products, should not be artificially opposed to the objective of achieving optimum protection of the environment.

On the other hand, your rapporteur agrees with the Commission that the improvement of fishing methods should be a priority measure, with a view to reducing discards, by-catches and the impact on habitats, so that ecosystems are not altered and biodiversity is not reduced. It must be stressed here that technical measures should be taken as close as possible to the actual situation and that these measures cannot be uniform or determined centrally. Fishermen have developed several programmes to improve the choice of their gear, for example the SAUPLIMOR programme in the North Sea, the aim of which is to reduce catches of cod and plaice juveniles, or the ASCG programme in the Bay of Biscay, which aims to promote the escape of undersized hake in general fisheries and small Norway lobsters in lobster fisheries. A test programme involving escape grids for dolphins in pelagic trawls is also being prepared.

It appears that technical alterations which reduce by- and incidental catches and the volume of under-sized fish taken also have the added bonus of improving yield, both in quality and quantity, and working conditions (less sorting, increased levels of safety).

The Commission should strongly encourage such initiatives by people working in the fisheries sector, and it should also assist them financially and take them into account when introducing technical measures for the recovery of threatened stocks. Decisions in this area should be guided by the actual impact of each fishing method and not by an emotional focus on a certain type of gear, so that the methods are promoted which are most responsible and most beneficial to the environment and to the biological balance.

Specific reference should be made to the impact that industrial fishing has on the environment. Catches from industrial fishing, which are used for the production of fish meal and oils, account for one third of Community fishing. Industrial fishing has a much greater environmental impact per euro of added value than fishing for species for human consumption.

Fisheries and aquaculture are not the only factors influencing the marine environment. It is therefore essential that we also improve our scientific knowledge about other factors which have a significant impact on marine ecosystems.

Little is known about the effects of global warming on the biology of commercial species, on their prey, their predators and their competitors. Certain stocks are migrating because of the effects of global warming, and that has significant economic consequences for the fleets which depend on them.

Little is known about the impact of an increase in the number of certain predators, birds or marine mammals, and little has been done to bring the problem under control.

The impact of contaminants originating from industry, urbanisation, the development of coastal areas and some agricultural activities should be measured and taken into account, as should the impact of certain uses of the marine environment, for example oil extraction, the laying of submarine cables and aggregate mining.

Finally, the fisheries sector is directly exposed to the consequences of marine pollution and, in particular, to accidents involving hazardous cargo: the future protection of resources is therefore closely linked to the severity and the effective implementation of the provisions set out in the 'Erika I' and 'Erika II' packages relating to maritime safety.