

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

Session document

FINAL
A5-0171/2003

21 May 2003

REPORT

on a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy
(COM(2002) 535 - 2002/2281(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Giorgio Lisi

CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| PROCEDURAL PAGE | 4 |
| MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION..... | 5 |
| EXPLANATORY STATEMENT | 9 |

PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 9 October 2002 the Commission forwarded to Parliament its communication on a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2002) 535), which was referred for information purposes to the Committee on Fisheries.

At the sitting of 16 January 2003 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Fisheries had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report on the topic, pursuant to Rules 47(2) and 163 of the Rules of Procedure.

The Committee on Fisheries had appointed Giorgio Lisi rapporteur at its meeting of 12 November 2002.

At its meetings of 18 March, 22 April and 20 May 2003 it considered the draft report.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Struan Stevenson, chairman; Rosa Miguélez Ramos, Brigitte Langenhagen and Hugues Martin, vice-chairmen; Giorgio Lisi, rapporteur; Elspeth Attwooll, Niels Busk, Arlindo Cunha, Nigel Paul Farage, Ian Stewart Hudghton, Salvador Jové Peres, Heinz Kindermann, Carlos Lage, Vincenzo Lavarra, Ioannis Marinos, Patricia McKenna, Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bernard Poignant, Catherine Stihler, Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna and Liam Hyland (for Nello Musumeci pursuant to Rule 153(2)).

The report was tabled on 21 May 2003.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament on a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2002) 535 - 2002/2281(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2002) 535),
 - having regard to Rules 47(2) and 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A5-0171/2003),
- A. having regard to the importance of the Mediterranean for the fisheries sector in the European Union, in terms of both the diversity of species caught and the socio-economic and, in some cases, cultural role which fishing plays,
- B. having regard to the specific nature of the region's fishing fleet, which is mostly artisanal, multi-purpose and relatively obsolete; having regard, further, to the development of aquaculture and the impact of leisure fishing in some Mediterranean tourist areas,
- C. whereas, however, the specificity of the Mediterranean cannot be allowed to act as an obstacle to the implementation of joint management measures, but instead calls for a flexible management approach, given that the system of derogations employed hitherto is proving counterproductive and may undermine the prospects for the development of the fisheries sector in the Mediterranean,
- D. whereas the many experiments in local and responsible management carried out by fishermen's associations (in particular the one dealing with management of the fishing effort), together with alternative measures such as protected underwater parks, can make a valuable contribution to the preparation of a systematic management plan for the Mediterranean,
- E. having regard to the structural adjustments which the reform measures will entail and the resulting economic and financial impact on the sector, which will create a need for appropriate instruments to support the reform,
- F. whereas the geographical specificity of the Mediterranean and the resulting legal arrangements for the management of fisheries resources call for a multilateral dialogue involving all Mediterranean countries, with a view to achieving the reform objectives by means of a systematic approach to both research and the implementation of the measures concerned,

- G. having regard to the shortcomings in scientific research in the Mediterranean, in terms of both quality and the piecemeal approach employed, the result of which is a lack of reliable information concerning the exploitation of resources and the continuing ability of species to reproduce,
- H. having regard to recent experiments and the Commission's efforts to encourage studies more closely tailored to the specific characteristics of the Mediterranean, in particular within the GFCM and the ICCAT, a prerequisite for the drawing-up and implementation of new management measures based on reliable scientific data,
- I. having regard to the growing concern for the environment and the official response in the form of measures to protect and conserve ecosystems as part of an approach geared to the sustainable exploitation of resources,
- J. whereas, however, fishermen are generally more sinned against than sinning when it comes to damage to the environment in some areas of the Mediterranean, damage which is chiefly due to urban and industrial pollution and a lack of integrated management of coastal areas,
- K. having regard to the serious concerns which have been voiced at both Community and international level with regard to the persistence of illegal fishing and the need to establish a monitoring system which is both effective, from the point of view of the authorities, and sustainable, from the point of view of operators,
 - 1. Welcomes the communication from the European Commission, which represents a response to the calls made by politicians, scientists and professionals for measures to secure the sustainability of the fisheries sector in the Mediterranean;
 - 2. Shares the view that the sustainability of fisheries and the specificity of the Mediterranean must be the main criteria governing the reform and acknowledges the need for flexible measures to achieve the objectives of that reform;
 - 3. Acknowledges the need to overhaul the system of derogations which has served to make Regulation 1626/94 so ineffective, provided that the revision is carried out on the basis of new, more reliable, scientific data; moreover, that revision should take into account other socio-economic, cultural and tourism-related criteria, for example with a view to safeguarding the special forms of fishing currently authorised under Regulation 2341/2002;
 - 4. Welcomes the decentralised approach promoted in the action plan, in particular the delegation to the Member States of responsibility for managing coastal fishing and the promotion of local measures to reduce the fishing effort; calls, further, for shared-stock fisheries to be extended solely on the basis of properly substantiated data;
 - 5. Regards as contradictory and counterproductive the proposal to extend the TAC system, whose limitations, in the context of the Mediterranean, the Commission itself has acknowledged; stresses the need for flexible instruments designed to achieve the same objectives;

6. Considers that the implications of introducing minimum sizes must be carefully assessed (particularly in the light of the objectives pursued under the Action Plan) and that alternative forms of management must also be studied, such as the legal use of specific, selective equipment;
7. Welcomes the proposal that the future rules should also govern leisure fishing; however, such a step should not act as a deterrent to this activity, which generates substantial tourism-related earnings in some Mediterranean areas; as regards aquaculture, endorses and refers to the recommendations made by Parliament in the report entitled 'Aquaculture in the European Union – present and future' (2002/2058(INI))¹;
8. Calls on the Commission to assess in greater depth the impact of the reform of the CFP on the Action Plan for the Mediterranean (with particular reference to the socio-economic repercussions on the areas concerned) in order to contain the effects thereof, and for that purpose to make provision for, inter alia, innovative support measures such as the extension to the fisheries sector of the *de minimis* rule;
9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in the implementation of the FIFG, to favour as much as possible the small-scale fisheries sector, which is responsible for creating the most employment in the sector;
10. Emphasises the need for the involvement of the Mediterranean third countries and for a multilateral approach to the management of Mediterranean fishery resources; calls for priority to be given to multilateral decision-making with a view to the ensuring that the relevant objectives are achieved; this multilateral approach should also take account of the structural and organisational shortcomings of the fisheries sector in non-EU Mediterranean countries, by means of partnership projects and exchanges of good practice;
11. Applauds the proposal that organisations representing fishermen should join international fisheries bodies, including - as a matter of necessity - fishermen using small vessels, and the proposal to set up a Regional Advisory Council for the Mediterranean; hopes that these forums will not proliferate and that they will both continue to provide innovatory impetus and retain international credibility;
12. Calls on the Commission not to encourage the establishment of new fisheries protection zones (FPZs) before having assessed, together with the Member States, their workability and the implications should third countries take a similar step;
13. Regards the programme proposed by the Commission as ambitious in overall terms, in that it seeks to achieve objectives which are largely contingent on actions by third countries in a very short space of time, despite the fact that new, reliable scientific data is not yet available;
14. Supports the Commission in its efforts to improve research and the compilation of scientific data; emphasises the need to coordinate research, not least by means of closer links with the GFCM, and to establish a 'model' for the Mediterranean which can be used

¹ P5-TA-PROV(2003)0021.

to extrapolate reliable data (whilst remaining true to the specific characteristics of the region) which are directly applicable to management policies; calls, in particular, on the Commission to await the completion of the study being drawn up at STOA's request concerning the effects of fishing with bottom trawls, and to take that study into account;

15. Considers that the extreme fragmentation of the market could be overcome if the centralisation of landing points were to be promoted - the practicalities of which would have to be compatible with the specific nature of the Mediterranean; supports, furthermore, the establishment of local data-collection networks in order to facilitate research in this area;
16. Regrets the fact that greater consideration and support is not being given at Community level to an integrated approach to the management of coastal areas and calls on the Commission to study specific proposals concerning such an approach; calls for steps to be taken to promote studies into the impact on biodiversity and habitats of intense fishing activity in populated coastal areas with a view to apportioning responsibility and launching integrated management plans for coastal areas;
17. Calls on the Member States to step up checks and to introduce much harsher penalties with genuine deterrent effect for the purpose of combating illegal fishing, to equip themselves with the means of carrying out such monitoring work and to consider the possibility of fitting VMS systems to certain categories of commercial and recreational fishing vessels; calls on the Commission to liaise more closely with non-Mediterranean flag States whose vessels fish in the Mediterranean with a view to limiting the adverse effects;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Mediterranean fisheries represent an important and vital sector of the Community fishing industry. The Mediterranean fleet makes up roughly 22% of the total Community fleet expressed in tonnage and 34% expressed in engine power. In numbers, it represents about 46% of Community fishing vessels. On average, fishing vessels in the Mediterranean are smaller than in the rest of the Community. Roughly 80% of the Mediterranean fleet, i.e. more than 32 950 fishing vessels, are smaller than 12 metres in length, giving the Mediterranean fleet the characteristics of a small-scale artisanal fishery, even though a large proportion of the catches is taken by larger, non-artisanal vessels. The volume of landings in the Mediterranean makes up only a modest 12% of the Community total, but the economic value of those landings is much higher, chiefly because catches in the Mediterranean, even of small-sized fish, are intended for human consumption and thus fetch a higher price. In 1997, in the four Mediterranean Member States, the fisheries sector provided more than 106 000 jobs, including part-time fishermen, or 42% of total EU jobs in the catching sector.

The Commission communication laying down an action plan for the Mediterranean represents an initial response to the concerns regarding that region which have been building up ever since the Common Fisheries Policy came into being. It seeks to remedy the discrepancy between the socio-economic importance of Mediterranean fisheries and the attention paid to it in the context of the Common Fisheries Policy.

This change in approach on the part of the Commission, which has finally shifted the focus on to the specificity of the Mediterranean, has cleared the way for the implementation of a genuine policy of sustainable management.

There is still much to be done, however: although it sets out a comprehensive approach to the problem of Mediterranean fisheries, the European Commission defers many choices, some of them crucial, to a later date when the issues have been considered in greater detail.

Your rapporteur's main concern is that the management measures taken to implement the sound approach set out in the communication will distort, if not completely disregard, the key principle underpinning any Mediterranean fisheries policy, namely that the measures must reflect the specificity of the region. Clearly this does not imply that fisheries management should go by the board; however, it does point to a need for detailed knowledge of the specific characteristics of the Mediterranean and for a Community policy tailored to those characteristics.

In that connection, your rapporteur would like to emphasise a number of interrelated aspects:

The need for a systematic approach and to respect the subsidiarity principle:

Any plan for the management of Mediterranean fisheries resources entails practical dialogue with all Mediterranean countries and with fishermen's associations – on this point, the Commission's intentions are clear. The problem concerns the transition from words to action: the implementation of such a policy is unthinkable without effective means to achieve that integrated management. The European Commission's proposals are interesting, but there is a danger that this vital objective will be 'overtaken' by the premature implementation of

technical measures which would serve to negate the multilateral approach. In that connection, negotiations should be initiated immediately with non-EU Mediterranean countries, negotiations which might be concluded at the Mediterranean Interministerial Conference scheduled for November 2003.

The fundamental role of research:

Any sound policy must be based on quality and a comprehensive understanding of the factors involved. In that respect, the specificity of the Mediterranean has always represented a problem.

More than in the quantity of research, the problem lies in the discrepancy between research (i.e. the type of research, the methods employed, the piecemeal approach, etc.) and the specific knowledge required for an effective management policy. For this reason, your rapporteur emphasises the need for scientific research to be coordinated and relevant to the action plan.

Structural implications:

A straight application of structural policy to the Mediterranean might easily disregard the specific characteristics of the regions, and your rapporteur regards the section of the communication which deals with this aspect of the action plan as unsatisfactory.

A shortcoming of this kind may act as a disincentive to private investment in the fisheries sector, given that there can be no clear prospects for development without practical economic support from the European Union or the Member States, potentially giving rise to very serious socio-economic problems.

Management measures:

Your rapporteur emphasises the need to assess and encourage local and sectoral solutions to the problem of managing the fishing effort and fears that the Commission's ambitious programme will negate fishermen's determined efforts by applying mechanisms from the CFP which prove counterproductive (see the proposals to introduce minimum landing sizes and TACs). The Mediterranean requires a specific model, two fundamental aspects of which are experiments in self-management and improved research.

The environment:

The Commission communication emphasises the environmental impact of fishing activities, specifically listing some types of fishing which are particularly damaging to the environment. Although your rapporteur fully shares the European Commission's concerns regarding the need to protect the environment as part of an approach based on the sustainable exploitation of resources, he regards the argument set out in the Communication as inadequate.

The fisheries sector is generally more sinned against than sinning when it comes to damage to the environment, damage which is chiefly caused by urban and industrial pollution. In a region where genuinely coastal fishing predominates, the key to sustainable coexistence

remains the integrated management of coastal areas, an aspect to which the Commission fails to give sufficient emphasis. Moreover, many of the fishing activities listed in the Communication as being particularly damaging are in fact already prohibited in coastal areas: the issue is thus more one of effective monitoring of the existing measures, rather than a need for fresh measures.

Further consideration should therefore be given to the issues raised here with a view to finding appropriate and effective solutions.