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REPORT

on the Commission communication on improving scientific and technical advice for Community fisheries management
(C(2003) 625 – C5-0241/2003 – 2003/2099(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Carlos Lage

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 1 April 2003, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication on improving scientific and technical advice for Community fisheries management (C(2003) 625).

At the sitting of 5 June 2003 the President of Parliament announced that he had referred the communication to the Committee on Fisheries as the committee responsible; the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy was asked for its opinion on 10 July 2003 (C5-0241/2003).

The Committee on Fisheries had appointed Carlos Lage rapporteur at its meeting of 23 April 2003.

It considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 10 June, 8 July, 8 September, 24 November 2003 and 20 January 2004.

At the last meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 16 votes to 0, with 1 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Struan Stevenson (chairman), Rosa Miguélez Ramos (vice-chairwoman), Carlos Lage (rapporteur), Elspeth Attwooll, Niels Busk, Salvador Jové Peres, Heinz Kindermann, Giorgio Lisi, Ioannis Marinos, John Joseph McCartin (for Brigitte Langenhagen), Patricia McKenna, Neil Parish, Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Joaquim Piscarreta, Dominique F.C. Souchet, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre (For Hugues Martin) and Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna.

The opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy is attached.

The report was tabled on 29 January 2004.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the Commission communication on improving scientific and technical advice for Community fisheries management
(C(2003) 625 – C5-0241/2003 – 2003/2099(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the Commission communication (C(2003) 625 – C5-0241/2003),

– having regard to Article 163 of the EC Treaty,

– having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (A5-0023/2004),

A. whereas both questions of biological risk and sustainability and questions of the socio-economic impact of stock management or recovery measures are now the most important considerations in fisheries management,

B. whereas the best way to minimize the need for urgent scientific advice is to follow a precautionary approach to fisheries management, avoiding the severe depletions of fish stocks that cause so much environmental damage and socio-economic hardship to coastal communities,

C. whereas one of the trickiest problems currently facing us in the field of marine biology and fisheries biology concerns the reliability of information, which may to a greater or lesser degree affect estimates and assessments, and in general terms the interpretation of data relating to fish stock development, and hence the ensuing diagnosis, whereas the reliability of information is all the more crucial given the dramatic socio-economic impact on fishermen,

D. whereas the common fisheries policy is one of the Community policies most dependent on scientific research, and the credibility of the measures taken depends on high-quality scientific advice,

E. whereas the Community's needs for fisheries scientific advice are not satisfactorily met at present, and whereas this situation is not helped by the Commission's apparent unwillingness to have regard for all the scientific advice available,

F. whereas it is necessary to improve the quality of scientific advice available to the Member States, to the Community and to the fishing industry,

G. whereas it is necessary to move towards the preparation of integrated advice that will provide a foundation for ecosystem-based management,

H. whereas fisheries research is costly and it is necessary to optimise resources,

I. whereas the management of resources must respect biological needs and fishermen must withdraw part of the stock of the species concerned without endangering the species itself,

J. whereas the uncertain nature of scientific advice sometimes weakens its acceptance and may lead to inappropriate decisions,

1. Believes that it is important to strengthen the relationship between science and industry by improving consultation between scientists and the fishing industry, integrating them in a joint body at European, national and regional level;

2. Points out that the Regional Advisory Councils have an important role to play in this regard and therefore calls for scientists to be members of the Regional Advisory Councils;

3. Welcomes the intention to incorporate knowledge from the fishing industry and feels that the Regional Advisory Councils would be one appropriate venue for this.

4. Points out that there are inaccuracies in catch data and scientific advice, and that there are differing interpretations about scientific advice received as well as the causes of problems concerning stocks; further points out that these problems are compounded by the Commission's apparent unwillingness to have regard for all the scientific advice available;

5. Takes the view that, where there are contradictions between different scientific reports, they should be put to a higher scientific body which would resolve the contradictions;

6. Notes that management decisions must be taken on the basis of reliable and current scientific advice;

7. Points out that EU measures based on scientific advice can have severe socio-economic impacts on fishing communities and that it is therefore vital to improve the quality both of scientific advice and of socio-economic impact assessments;

8. Calls in particular, bearing in mind their socio-economic impact, for recovery plans to be subjected to a thorough scientific assessment as soon as possible, with special attention being paid to their effectiveness;

9. Points out that scientific advice on the question of aquaculture needs to be improved and systematised, and suggests the use of an advisory committee with specific responsibility for aquaculture;

10. Urges that greater resources be devoted to researching aquaculture, including production and economic data and environmental impact;

11. Believes it is important to strengthen fisheries science in partnership with third countries in order to ensure that resources are developed sustainably, while taking account of economic and social considerations in third countries;

12. Considers that the EU must improve scientific research and understanding in non-EU waters, so as to improve the quality of management advice in all fishing grounds in which

the EU fleets are active; believes that this should be accomplished by augmenting the scientific capabilities of regional fisheries organisations and the third countries with which the EU has signed fisheries agreements;

13. Believes that further budgetary resources should be allocated to meet the need for scientists and managers in fisheries;

14. Believes that the need for improved fisheries scientific advice can be met by a combination of actions, including the strengthening of ICES, with new scientists directly employed to meet EU needs, as well as by the recruitment of further staff in the Commission both on a permanent official basis and also by the greater use of temporary experts;

15. Considers that, in order to meet the need for better scientific advice in the field of fisheries, it is necessary to arrange for scientists to travel on fishing vessels so as to conduct research at the locations where fishing is carried on, and considers that this would reduce differences of opinion between scientists and fishermen, which would lead to greater support for measures taken on the basis of scientific advice;

16. Considers that new fisheries, either for previously unexploited species or in new areas, must be the subject of more thorough studies to improve fisheries management by monitoring catches and establishing an appropriate fishing effort;

17. Agrees that scientific and technical advice must be clear, unambiguous and transparent; that it must clearly explain any inherent assumptions such as those regarding management objectives, as well as the scientific uncertainties involved; and that, if alternative options are provided for the basis of management decisions, the ecological risks inherent in each option be provided;

18. Encourages the development and use of multispecies models that incorporate non-commercial species;

19. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Commission Proposal

As the Commission state in the introduction to their proposal, "questions of biological risk and sustainability are now the most important considerations in fisheries management". Answering these questions requires accurate and timely scientific advice.

The Commission's proposal: describes the Community's need for scientific advice in the fisheries sector; sets out the current mechanisms for providing advice; identifies the areas in which the current system needs to be strengthened; and suggests possible solutions over the short to medium, and the long term.

At the moment the Community's needs for fisheries science are met by the staff of national fisheries laboratories collaborating under the auspices of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), or by national laboratories alone e.g. in the Mediterranean which is not within the ICES area. The fundamental problem is that there are insufficient fisheries scientists available to meet the Community's needs for advice. The average time taken by ICES to respond to requests for additional advice made in 2000 and 2001 was 15 months.

The Commission proposes some procedural and organisational changes to the existing system in the short term, e.g. identifying those species for which annual stock assessments are not needed in order to better focus resources. In the long-term the Commission feels the only viable solution is to increase the number of fisheries scientists. The Commission proposes two strategies for achieving this objective: increasing the role of ICES with a team of its own fisheries scientists (i.e. instead of staff contributing from national laboratories) to meet the Community's needs for advice; or a "Community solution". Several models for this are proposed including an Agency, an office of the Commission or a technical unit of the Joint Research Centre.

Rapporteurs Comments

The rapporteur supports the Commission's objective of improving the quality of scientific advice in fisheries, and broadly welcomes this proposal. If the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to meet the challenge of conserving threatened fish stocks it must be based on sound science.

On the detail of the proposal, the rapporteur makes the following specific comments:

Strengthening the relationship between fisheries science and the industry

The relationship between fisheries scientists and the fishing industry is vital. The advice of fisheries scientists must be seen to be credible, not just by their peers, but by the fishermen themselves, if it is to be accepted. Therefore the participation of the industry in the formulation of scientific advice should be encouraged wherever possible, including participation in the collection of data, submission of information and in suggesting areas where research and or advice is needed. All the activities suggested by the Commission in this regard, namely: consultation between scientists and the fishing industry at national and

regional level, and particularly in Regional Advisory Councils; external review of fisheries assessments; and collaboration in the formulation of multiannual management plans and the rules for TAC and quota regimes should be developed.

Tackling inaccuracies in catch data
Misreporting of catches can cause serious inaccuracies in scientific advice, and the rapporteur calls on the Member States, and particularly the enforcement agencies, to ensure that this problem is tackled. New rules on control and enforcement have been adopted in the Framework Regulation of the CFP[1]. The rapporteur urges the Commission to monitor the effectiveness of the application of these new rules in preventing the misreporting of catches, and take further measures, if necessary, to address this problem.

Advice on the socio-economic impacts of fisheries management measures
The recovery plans being proposed for many threatened fish stocks in Community waters will have serious socio-economic consequences for fishing communities. Assessing these impacts is perhaps the area where the current advisory system is most lacking. It is regrettable that the current round of stock recovery plans have not been accompanied by assessments of the socio-economic consequences of implementing them. It is acknowledged that part of the reason for this is that insufficient data are available. Member States will be asked to provide socio-economic information by 2004, but this will not be compulsory before 2006. However, by this date, the most severe socio-economic impacts of the stock recovery plans will already have been felt. The Commission should propose that this date be brought forward so that the socio-economic consequences can be considered in the debate on future recovery plans. Working with experts in the Member States, the Commission should also strengthen the economic capacity of the Scientific Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF). In particular, the time national experts give to this committee should be adequately remunerated by the Community.

Aquaculture
Aquaculture is a sector of growing importance in the Community. Though the Community does not have the same duties of regulation and control as it has for capture fisheries, it does have responsibilities relating to the environment, human and animal health, economics and animal welfare. Up until now the Community's needs for advice in respect of these issues has been met through the use of external experts on an *ad hoc* basis, or by consulting existing committees (in the health and animal welfare spheres for instance). The rapporteur feels that it would be appropriate for the Commission to establish an advisory committee with specific responsibility for aquaculture, to meet the Community's needs for scientific and technical advice in this area.

Strengthening fisheries science in partnership with third countries
Although the responsibility for identifying excess resources which could become the scope of fishing access agreements with the Community formally rests with third countries, as the Commission acknowledges there is often a lack of scientific knowledge, or a reluctance to take science into account for political reasons on the part of third countries. In these instances, the Community should work in partnership with the authorities of those third countries to

[1] OJ L 358, 31.12.2002, p.59-80.

develop the necessary scientific capacity. The priority should be to ensure that resources are exploited sustainably. In the absence of other formal structures to provide advice, and in lieu of their development, this is one area in where the rapporteur feels that the recruitment of additional scientific staff by the Commission is particularly justified.

Commission membership of ICES
As one of the major users of it's advice, it is appropriate for the Commission to be a full Member of ICES as it is in the case of Regional Fisheries Organisations. Member States should continue to be separate members of ICES.

Solutions to the problem of a lack of resources in fisheries science
A way of providing advice quickly to meet the demands of managers is needed. The demand for this type of advice is growing, and is likely to increase in the coming years. The rapporteur welcomes the initiatives proposed by the Commission to tackle this problem over the short to medium term.

Over the long-term, the rapporteur does not believe the options proposed by the Commission are mutually exclusive. ICES is an organisation of proven effectiveness and credibility with a long record of excellence and expertise in fisheries science. It also meets the criteria of objectivity, impartiality and freedom from political influence which must be observed if advice is to be credible and is to be respected by the fishing industry. The rapporteur sees the solution to the problem of a lack of fisheries science resources necessary to meet new demands both in a strengthening of ICES, with new scientists directly employed to meet the Community's increased needs for advice, and in a "Community solution". The Commission should strengthen its own scientific resources, and since difficulties have been found in recruiting staff with sufficient expertise through the normal open competition system, the Commission should consider alternative means of recruiting fisheries scientists. Since the Commission should become a full member of ICES, there is no reason why scientific staff of the Commission could not work under the auspices of ICES, as national scientists do at present.

Your rapporteur feels that one part of a Community solution should be the establishment of regional centres of fisheries science, perhaps, but not necessarily linked to existing national laboratories. The centres should be established in tandem with Regional Advisory Councils, and part of their resources should be available to the Councils, as a further means of facilitating the collaboration and participation of the fishing industry in fisheries science.

6 November 2003

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, EXTERNAL TRADE, RESEARCH AND ENERGY

for the Committee on Fisheries

on Improving scientific and technical advice for Community fisheries management
(C(2003) 625 – C5-0245/2003 - 2003/2099(INI))

Draftsman: Caroline Lucas

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy appointed Caroline Lucas draftsman at its meeting of 10 July 2003.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 7 October and 4 November 2003.

At the last meeting it adopted the following suggestions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote Luis Berenguer Fuster (chairman), Yves Piétrasanta and Jaime Valdivielso de Cué (vice-chairmen), Caroline Lucas (draftsman), Konstantinos Alyssandrakis, Per-Arne Arvidsson (for Guido Bodrato), Sir Robert Atkins, Ward Beysen (for Marco Cappato), Gérard Caudron, Giles Bryan Chichester, Concepció Ferrer, Francesco Fiori (for Umberto Scapagnini), Norbert Glante, Michel Hansenne, Malcolm Harbour (for W.G. van Velzen), Hans Karlsson, Bashir Khanbhai, Rolf Linkohr, Erika Mann, Eryl Margaret McNally, Marjo Matikainen-Kallström, Ana Clara Maria Miranda de Lage, Elizabeth Montfort, Angelika Niebler, Reino Paasilinna, Paolo Pastorelli, Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl, Imelda Mary Read, Mechtild Rothe, Paul Rübig, Esko Olavi Seppänen, Claude Turmes and Olga Zrihen Zaari.

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy calls on the Committee on Fisheries, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

A. Whereas the best way to minimize the need for urgent scientific advice is to follow a precautionary approach to fisheries management, avoiding the severe depletions of fish stocks that cause so much environmental damage and socio-economic hardship to coastal communities,

1. Considers that new fisheries, either for previously unexploited species or in new areas, must be the subject of more thorough studies to improve fisheries management by monitoring catches and establishing an appropriate fishing effort;
2. Agrees that scientific and technical advice must be clear, unambiguous and transparent; that it must clearly explain any inherent assumptions such as those regarding management objectives, as well as the scientific uncertainties involved; and that, if alternative options are provided for the basis of management decisions, the ecological risks inherent in each option be provided;
3. Insists that the impact of fishing upon non-commercial species of all kinds (fish, sharks, turtles, birds, marine mammals) must be investigated, combined with research into alterations to fishing gears and practices to decrease such catches, with a view to developing management plans to reduce these impacts; notes that in certain cases, fisheries may need to be reduced or even closed in order to prevent incidental catches of severely depleted species;
4. Urges that greater resources be devoted to researching aquaculture, including production and economic data and environmental impact;
5. Considers that the EU must improve scientific research and understanding in non-EU waters, so as to improve the quality of management advice in all fishing grounds in which the EU fleets are active; believes that this should be accomplished by augmenting the scientific capabilities of regional fisheries organisations and the third countries with which the EU has signed fisheries agreements;
6. Encourages the development and use of multispecies models that incorporate non-commercial species;
7. Notes that management decisions must be taken on the basis of reliable and current scientific advice;
8. Welcomes the intention to incorporate knowledge from the fishing industry and feels that the Regional Advisory Councils would be one appropriate venue for this.