

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0057/04
pursuant to Rule 108 of the Rules of Procedure
by Philippe Morillon, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries
to the Commission

Subject: Fisheries economy and fuel

The price of 'fisheries' fuel has risen dramatically over the last eight years, increasing by more than 82 % between 1996 and 2004 (from EUR 0.17/litre to EUR 0.31/litre). The price of fuel has a considerable impact on operating costs. For example, in the case of a trawler of between 16 and 20 m in length, the proportion of gross operating surplus that can be lost may vary between 2.5 % and 42.1 %, based on operating accounts for 2003. It should be noted that, during this period, the price of diesel has peaked on several occasions (in 2000, 2002 and 2004). The impact of this is felt all the more keenly, given that several factors have coincided to produce a crisis situation, in particular the following three: the fuel situation, falling prices and decreases in income. This was the situation in the summer of 2004.

The previous crisis, in 1993-94, which was even more serious because of the long-term collapse in prices linked to the high level of indebtedness borne by shipowners, set off a domino effect: vessels were laid up (including the newest vessels); vessels were scrapped and fishing undertakings restructured; fisheries activities collapsed in several ports; fisheries-related jobs were lost, with knock-on effects on the economies of neighbouring small regions; there were fewer staff at maritime schools and fewer young sailors; the profession of fisherman was brought into disrepute; and management and financial structures within the fisheries sector were undermined.

The Community approach, which concentrates almost exclusively on sustainable management of fisheries resources as a means of preserving the interests of future generations, is nowhere to be heard in crisis situations. The lack of confidence in European institutions shown by the fisheries world is notable and is reaffirmed with each election (and it obviously deteriorates still further when times are hard). This is a truly paradoxical situation because, without the CFP, entire fishing regions would have disappeared from the map.

Is the Commission committed to taking action in support of seriously affected areas? Does the Commission intend to submit proposals providing for economic intervention at times of crisis, drawing on the European Fisheries Fund or by other means, and thereby genuinely preserving the future of regions that have no real alternative?

Tabled: 11.10.2004

Forwarded: 13.10.2004

Deadline for reply: 20.10.2004