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Committee on Fisheries

2007/2019(BUD)

3.10.2007

OPINION

of the Committee on Fisheries

for the Committee on Budgets

on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2008
(C6-0287/2007 - 2007/2019(BUD))

Section III- Commission

Draftsman: Emanuel Jardim Fernandes

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Draftsman's remarks

The overall appropriations allocated to fisheries in the 2008 PDB represent a very modest increase by comparison with the previous financial year, which must be considered a negative development bearing in mind that previous budgets already represented the minimum necessary to carry out the steps required of public administrations in order to implement a coherent Community fisheries policy with the requisite resources to make it effective.

This lack of coherence between ambitious objectives and insufficient human and financial resources can be revealed by a detailed analysis of the content of the budget items which have suffered the highest percentage reductions in the Commission's PDB:

Sustainable fishing cannot be achieved without an effective system for controlling fleet activity and fishery products entering the Community market.

Fisheries control activities are first and foremost a Member State competence. It has long been recognised that the resources and staff dedicated to this activity in the EU fall far short of what is required for proper control.

The Commission's PDB cuts the item intended to co-finance control measures carried out by the Member States by 11.7%, on the grounds that this item was not fully used under the previous budget.

Even though this reduction is in line with sound budgetary practice in that the resources provided for the Member States were not used up, it may in future serve as something of an alibi to cover up poor management by those countries which do not set aside sufficient resources to strengthen fisheries control, competence for which they guard jealously whilst at the same time paying little attention to the satisfactory performance of their tasks, which is their legal obligation.

The same remarks can be made regarding the funds earmarked for the collection of data by the Member States. These funds have been underused, revealing either poor budgetary management or a lack of willingness to cooperate in ensuring the effectiveness of fisheries policy.

It is evident that, without reliable information on the state of stocks, landings, fleet capacity and power etc., it is impossible to adopt appropriate measures to arrive at management or recovery plans for fisheries which all too often are at risk of collapse.

Parliament's recent debates on the Commission's annual report on adapting Member States' fleets to available resources highlighted Member States' negligence and failure to cooperate in complying with their obligations to provide data. Problems included repeated and habitual delays, a lack of standardisation and even the failure to send any reports at all, despite their legal obligation to do so.

We therefore believe that the items in the Community budget that are intended for gathering data but have not yet been used should be upheld in order to highlight Member States' failure

to carry out these tasks, which are essential if a common Community policy is to function responsibly and coherently.

Even though, strictly speaking, it does not figure among the fisheries headings, we must also mention the funds allocated in the budget for research activities in our sector.

Research into the marine environment, the state of fisheries and the social and economic situation of regions and communities that depend on fisheries is a priority for the CFP, providing the basis for the entire structure.

The fourth and fifth framework programmes included specific programmes on fisheries and aquaculture (FAIR) for the applied marine research sector, with funding of EUR 130 and 150 million respectively. This amount was cut drastically to EUR 60 million in the sixth framework programme. At a time when it appears likely that multiannual management or recovery plans will be introduced for a large number of commercial species, it is vital to ascertain what implications the various scenarios for reducing catches and setting biomass levels may have on the local and regional economy, employment and regional planning so as to avoid hampering the integrated development of coastal areas that are highly dependent on fishing. High-quality scientific information cannot but help to ensure that the decisions taken by the Community institutions, which are sometimes painful for coastal communities, are properly understood.

The transfer of funds earmarked for research under the seventh research framework programme and their centralised management by DG Research rather than DG Fisheries provide grounds for concern, since as we pointed out at the time, there is a serious risk that the funds earmarked for our sector will decline because it does not represent a priority within the context of Community research as a whole.

Finally, we welcome the new item dedicated to Community maritime policy, which will make it possible to finance projects linked to the launching of an overall Community action for the sustainable management of Community seas and oceans pending clarification of the legal basis.

Maritime policy is one of the Union's strategic objectives for the period 2005-2009. The aim is that the various initiatives in the fields of maritime transport, tourism, fisheries, the environment, the conservation of natural resources and research and development should converge and produce a multiplier effect with a view to the development of a European Union maritime policy.

The debate launched with the Commission Green Paper has sparked countless contributions from economic operators and civil society and will provide the basis for Commission proposals designed to meet these challenges in the coming years.

While these proposals are being drafted, it is desirable to prepare the ground. This means that the corresponding financial resources with which to launch preparatory initiatives need to be available as of now, and it is therefore highly appropriate that the corresponding budget item has been entered in the 2008 budget, thus ensuring that these initiatives will not be blocked in 2008.

Conclusions

1. The overall appropriations allocated to fisheries in the 2008 PDB represent continuity by comparison with the previous financial year, which must be considered a negative development bearing in mind that previous budgets already represented the minimum necessary to carry out the steps required of public administrations in order to implement a coherent Community fisheries policy with the requisite resources to make it effective.
2. The Commission's PDB cuts the item intended to co-finance control measures carried out by the Member States by 11.7%, on the grounds that this item was not fully used under the previous budget.

Even though this reduction is in line with sound budgetary practice in that the resources provided for the Member States were not used up, it may in future serve as something of an alibi to cover up poor management by those countries which do not set aside sufficient resources to strengthen fisheries control, competence for which they guard jealously whilst at the same time paying little attention to the satisfactory performance of their tasks, which is their legal obligation.

3. The budget item intended to finance the operation of the new Fisheries Control Agency, which is to start operating next year at its definitive seat, is a minimum which must be respected if it is indeed to start working at full effectiveness. We would therefore ask that the figure given in the Commission's PDB be reinstated.
4. Research into the marine environment, the state of fisheries and the social and economic situation of regions and communities that depend on fisheries is a priority for the CFP. Information and on-going regular research on the marine environment is the indispensable basis for protecting species, eco-systems and the rational exploitation of resources in line with the principles of balance between economic interests and respect for the natural environment.
5. The transfer of funds earmarked for research under the seventh research framework programme and their centralised management by DG Research rather than DG Fisheries provide grounds for concern, since there is a serious risk that the funds earmarked for our sector will decline because they do not represent a priority within the context of Community research as a whole. In future, the percentage share for fisheries research should be increased, or at least held at the same level as in the current budget.
6. In view of their specific characteristics, particular attention needs to be paid to the outermost regions in order to offset the disadvantages arising from their isolation and natural conditions.

The Council has recently approved a financial support mechanism for the period 2007-2013 amounting to EUR 15 million per year. Given the length of the period involved, this amount will evidently need to be indexed by 2% a year so that its real effectiveness is not lost, as is the case with other funds.

7. Bearing in mind the crisis affecting the fishing industry, the fisheries programme for the outermost regions needs to be adequately endowed. For this reason, an increase of EUR 2 million in commitment and payment appropriations is proposed, in line with Parliament's position of 26 April 2007¹ on a scheme to compensate for the additional costs incurred in the marketing of certain fishery products from the outermost regions.
8. Maritime policy is one of the Union's strategic objectives for the period 2005-2009. The aim is that the various initiatives in the fields of maritime transport, tourism, fisheries, the environment, the conservation of natural resources and research and development should converge and produce a multiplier effect with a view to the development of a European Union maritime policy.

The ground needs to be prepared for the development of this new integrated policy on the marine environment. This means that the corresponding financial resources with which to launch preparatory initiatives need to be available as of now, and it is therefore highly appropriate that the corresponding budget item has been entered in the 2008 budget, thus ensuring that these initiatives will not be blocked in 2008.

¹ P6_TA(2007)0158.

PROCEDURE

Title	Budget 2008: Section III, Commission
References	2007/2019(BUD)
Committee responsible	BUDG
Opinion by Date announced in plenary	PECH 24.9.2007
Enhanced cooperation – date announced in plenary	
Drafts(wo)man Date appointed	Emanuel Jardim Fernandes 14.3.2007
Previous drafts(wo)man	
Discussed in committee	27.8.2007
Date adopted	3.10.2007
Result of final vote	+: 18 -: 1 0: 0
Members present for the vote	Elspeth Attwooll, Iles Braghetto, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, David Casa, Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Ioannis Gklavakis, Alfred Gomolka, Pedro Guerreiro, Heinz Kindermann, Willy Meyer Pleite, Philippe Morillon, Seán Ó Neachtain, Willi Piecyk, Struan Stevenson, Catherine Stihler, Margie Sudre
Substitute(s) present for final vote	Thomas Wise
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	
Comments (available in one language only)	