



17.9.2020

DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on Fisheries

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
(2020/xxxx(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Gabriel Mato

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Fisheries calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas EU fishing, aquaculture and processing sectors subscribe to the highest standards of environmental and social sustainability throughout the entire value chain, including labour rights and animal health and welfare, and provide high-quality seafood products, thus playing a fundamental role in food security and nutritional wellbeing to an ever increasing population; whereas by restricting fishing, a number of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are jeopardised;
- B. whereas EU fishers and fish farmers play an essential role across the Union and must continue providing social and economic support to many coastal and inland communities;
- C. whereas fishers, guardians of the sea, are present on a daily basis, alert the authorities whenever they see any environmental degradation and are taking steps to conserve the marine environment;
- D. whereas the EU Biodiversity Strategy does not take into account at all that there have been considerable improvements in EU fish populations; whereas in the north-east Atlantic there has been a 50 % increase in the number of fish at sea in only 10 years and overfishing in the EU is at an all-time low, whereas almost 100 % of the landings from EU-regulated stocks come from stocks fished at the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) levels;

Protected areas and targets

- 1. Recalls that effectively managed fished populations are more productive than non-fished ones; stresses, therefore, the fact that, in certain cases, closing fishing areas might not be compatible with social welfare and economic prosperity – essential components of sustainability – and with the SDGs on food security and poverty alleviation;
- 2. Stresses that marine protected areas (MPAs) are a tool, not an objective per se; underlines the fact that setting a protection objective through the means of a conservation figure (i.e. a percentage) is irrelevant, since the most important thing is to ensure that the established protection zones truly cover an area with an ecological value that needs to be protected;
- 3. Points out that setting abstract, arbitrary, rigid, unrealistic and non-achievable numerical targets undermines good legislation and the credibility of lawmakers;
- 4. Considers that strengthening and efficiently implementing existing closed areas would be much more efficient and meaningful;
- 5. Stresses the importance of including in the EU Biodiversity Strategy ‘other effective

area-based conservation measures' provided for by the Convention on Biological Diversity¹; considers that these 'other measures' sometimes offer a higher level of protection than those provided for by an MPA;

No-take zones

6. Points out that establishing protection zones does not have to be incompatible with the practice of activities, including extractive ones, as long as they do not compromise the values of those protected areas and provided that they are established under scientific advice and that there is adequate management and control;

Spatial planning

7. Stresses the importance of proper and inclusive spatial planning, which takes sufficiently into account the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture, pointing to the need for allocating space to existing and new fishing grounds and aquaculture farms;

Action plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems

8. Recalls that the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides for a robust regulatory framework with sophisticated tools, which has set down the dates of publication of specific reports: the Commission is to report to Parliament and to the Council on the functioning of the CFP by 31 December 2022;
9. Recalls that, according to the new Technical Measures Regulation², the Commission must submit a report to Parliament and the Council by 31 December 2020, and that only in cases where there is evidence that the objectives and targets have not been met, the Commission may propose measures;
10. Calls on therefore the Commission to wait for the abovementioned reports before proposing an action plan;

Discriminatory treatment

11. Expresses its deep regret over the obvious discriminatory treatment of fisheries compared to that of agriculture; welcomes the fact the proposed strategy outlines that 'the progress towards the targets will be under constant review, and adjustment if needed, to mitigate against undue impact on biodiversity, food security and farmers' competitiveness'; notes, however, that this sentence, which is a necessary safety net, is clearly discriminatory since it fails to mention fishers and aquaculture producers;

Fisheries: the source of all evil?

12. Strongly denounces the excessive focus on fishing and its connection with the failure to achieve the good ecological status in marine ecosystems and the lack of

¹ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf>

² OJ L 198, 25.7.2019, p. 105.

consideration given to other sources of pressure and degradation, such as oil, gas, dredging or shipping;

Fishing gears

13. Strongly denounces the fact that the strategy accuses bottom trawling, as ‘the most damaging activity to the seabed’, without any in-depth analysis to back it up;
14. Stresses that gears and techniques should not be demonised; recalls that bottom trawling can also enhance biodiversity in certain sandy seabeds and that it is one of the most common and most regulated fishing gears in Europe; stresses that it is the only viable way to catch many key species that we eat and that almost all of them are fished at MSY levels and that many of them are Marine Stewardship Council certified;

Specific recommendations for aquaculture

15. Highlights the need to simplify administrative procedures on aquaculture activities, especially when in Natura 2000 areas, and asks the Commission to update its guidance on ‘Aquaculture and Natura 2000 areas’;
16. Considers that ecosystem services provided by aquaculture, of which the maintenance of biodiversity is an important one, must be taken into consideration and supported;
17. Welcomes proposals to reduce and limit the use of pesticides and other chemicals to protect biodiversity; strongly believes, however, that such measures should be pre-assessed diligently and should include cumulative impact assessments;
18. Embraces the ambitions set out in the Water Framework Directive³ and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive⁴; highlights that aquaculture can play a role in restoring degraded marine and freshwater ecosystems;

Funding

19. Stresses the importance of adequate funding through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund in order to achieve the EU’s goals on biodiversity;

Conclusions

20. Welcomes the high level of ambition when setting targets; strongly recommends, however, that such targets should not be legally binding, and that they should be set on a case-by-case basis, adapted to local specificities and to the level required to protect nature; recommends that such targets should also take into account socio-economic considerations and the need to ensure a long-term resilience of the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, be proportionate with the objective pursued and have a solid scientific basis;

³ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p.1.

⁴ OJ L 164 25.6.2008, p. 19.

21. Stresses the importance of the constructive, effective and equal consultation of fishers and aquaculture producers in any decision related to biodiversity;
22. Stresses the need to conduct comprehensive impact assessments that take into account the impact on small-scale fishers and small and medium-sized enterprises in particular and) that consider the accomplishments achieved to date and the availability of alternative products, economic impacts alongside effects on food security and food safety, with a view to guaranteeing the preservation of biodiversity together with the competitiveness of the seafood value chain;
23. Emphasises the importance of ensuring an adequate and fair income to fishers and farmers, as well as a level playing field with imported food;
24. Advocates for the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to be achieved in the most effective and least burdensome way for economic operators;
25. Notes the Commission's remark that in order 'to have healthy and resilient societies we need to give nature the space it needs'; stresses, however, that if we are to have healthy and resilient societies not only do we need to give nature the space it needs, but also fishermen and aquaculture producers the space they need;
26. Recommends that MPAs should be designated as areas in which only fisheries and aquaculture activities can occur;
27. Calls for policy coherence among EU environmental, fisheries, trade and other EU policies to uphold the integrity of the single market and the competitiveness of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.