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DRAFT REPORT

on the status of fish stocks and the socio-economic situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean
(2016/2079(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the status of fish stocks and the socio-economic situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean (2016/2079(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy¹,
 - having regard to Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)²,
 - having regard to the Mid-term strategy (2017–2020) of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0000/2016),
- A. whereas the Mediterranean, with its 17 000 maritime species, is one of the areas with the greatest biodiversity in the world;
- B. whereas, in its communication ‘Consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2017 under the Common Fisheries Policy’ (COM(2016)0396), the Commission maintains that overfishing remains prevalent in the Mediterranean and that urgent measures are needed to reverse this situation; whereas in the same text the Commission expresses concern that many of the assessed stocks are being fished considerably above the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) target estimates;
- C. whereas the Mediterranean has to take up the major challenge of achieving MSY for most stocks by 2020; whereas in the Mediterranean basin the overall level of overfishing is broadly between 2 and 3 times the FMSY; whereas, despite the considerable efforts made both within and outside the EU to develop an effective legal framework and ensure implementation and compliance in the fisheries sector, over 93% of the assessed species in the Mediterranean are still regarded as being overfished;
- D. whereas at the high-level meeting on the status of stocks in the Mediterranean (February 2016, Catania), an agreement was reached on the urgent need to reverse these negative trends, taking note of the major challenge of achieving MSY for all species by 2020;
1. Stresses the importance of enforcing, in the short term and comprehensively, the targets and measures laid down in the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and of a timely, urgent

¹ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22.

² OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19.

and effective implementation of the multiannual management plans provided for in the CFP, taking an ecosystem-based approach; stresses, in particular, the need to achieve the Good Environmental Status (GES) goal established by Framework Directive 2008/56/EC on the strategy for the marine environment;

2. Considers it urgent to provide a response that is collective, based on multi-tier cooperation – international, European, national and regional; considers that all stakeholders, including fishermen, scientists and NGOs, should be involved in an inclusive, bottom-up process;
3. Notes that the CFP recognises that access to fishing opportunities should be distributed primarily among small-scale non-industrial fishermen, or those in small coastal areas, and should include incentives (Article 7(1)(d) of the CFP regulation) in order to promote more selective fishing techniques which have a lower impact on the marine ecosystem and fishery resources; notes that, for this reason, efforts should be made in this direction, to ensure that incentives and preferential access to coastal fishing areas are given to the small-scale (artisanal) fleet as opposed to those fisheries segments that are not selective and have a greater impact;
4. Stresses that, according to the FAO, a precautionary approach to the conservation, management and exploitation of living marine resources should be applied, in order to protect and preserve the marine environment as a whole and to highlight that the lack of scientific information must not be an excuse to postpone conservation and management measures, or to make them fail;
5. Takes the view that it is not feasible to protect and safeguard Mediterranean fisheries and environmental resources through effective fisheries management policies unless they are backed up by strong, wide-ranging and urgent policies and measures to counter the anthropogenic factors that affect and have an adverse impact on those resources: climate change (warming, acidification, rainfall), pollution (chemical, organic, macro- and microscopic), gas and oil exploration and extraction, shipping traffic, invasive species and destruction or alteration of natural habitats, especially coastal;
6. Stresses firmly that in the Mediterranean basin there is still an extensive problem of illegal, unreported or unregulated (IUU) fishing, even in EU countries; considers that no intervention to safeguard resources, including and above all for small-scale fisheries economies, can be effective unless IUU fishing is combated firmly and decisively;
7. Considers it a matter of priority to step up monitoring activity on land, along the distribution chain (markets), and at sea, especially in areas in which fishing is prohibited (temporarily or permanently);
8. Considers it feasible to introduce non-transferable quotas, especially for species subject to single-species fisheries; is of the view that, to avoid social inequalities, fishing opportunities should be allocated using objective and transparent criteria, including environmental, social and economic criteria, and should also be fairly distributed within the various fisheries segments, including traditional and small-scale fishing; is of the view, in addition, that incentives should be provided for fleets to use more selective fishing equipment and techniques that have a reduced impact on the marine environment, in keeping with Article 17 of the CFP regulation;

9. Notes that the system of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean covers an inadequate area, with major coverage disparities between the various basins; considers it crucial to increase the percentage of marine protected areas and to identify areas to be covered by protection measures, in addition to implementing an effective monitoring and control system to check they are effective;
10. Considers it vital for policies to take a varied and nuanced approach, within management plans, and with different criteria based on the biological characteristics of the species and technical characteristics of the fishing methods; considers, moreover, that appropriate planning in space (rotating 'no fishing' areas, total or partial closure depending on fishing systems) and time (biological recovery periods) should be the vital component of any multiannual plan, in addition to the promotion of technical measures aimed at maximum gear selectivity;
11. Notes that in the Mediterranean, a minimum permitted size should be adopted for all commercial species, depending on sexual maturity and based on the best scientific knowledge;

Measures in respect of third countries

12. Calls on the Commission to promote measures through the GFCM to improve the status of stocks shared with third countries;
13. Calls on the Commission to assist non-EU Mediterranean countries in modernising their fisheries sectors and to achieve sustainable fisheries, also through a policy of fisheries agreements that are more balanced, fair and sustainable;

Socioeconomic aspects

14. Stresses that 250 000 people are directly employed on board boats and that the number of people dependent on the fishing industry increases exponentially if one includes families whose subsistence is derived from regional fishing and who are employed in secondary industries, such as processing, maintenance of boats and tourism; notes that 60% of work involved in fishing is located in developing countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean, which shows how important small-scale fishing is for the sustainable development of those regions and, in particular, for the most vulnerable coastal communities;
15. Considers that the Commission should issue guidelines on how best to use funding from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the European Neighbourhood Instrument;
16. Considers it vital to promote, emphasise and provide incentives for cooperation between small-scale fishermen within the same area or region, for the purpose of tackling jointly the planning and management of local fisheries resources with the aim of effective and practical regionalisation, in accordance with the aims of the CFP, given that the enormous fragmentation and differentiation of occupations, targets, technical characteristics and equipment used make it practically impossible to adopt a cross-cutting and unambiguous approach;

17. Observes that, despite the recent improvements, the number of stocks without a real assessment of their status remains high and that the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) deplores the fact that we have witnessed an actual reduction in the number of assessments, from 44 in 2012 to a mere 15 in 2014;
18. Considers that rational and sustainable fisheries management depends on scientific use of the relevant data, such as fishing capacity, fishing activities engaged in, the biological status of the stock exploited and the current socioeconomic situation of fishing itself;
19. Notes that only 40% of fish landed in the area covered by the GFCM comes from stocks for which a scientific assessment submitted to the Commission exists, and that the percentage falls when it comes to stocks covered by a management plan; draws attention to the need to improve the cover of scientific assessments of the status of stocks and to increase the percentage of landings derived from types of fishing regulated by multiannual management plans;
20. Stresses the need for integrated approaches which take into account simultaneously the heterogeneity of the marine environment, the complexity of species (both exploited and unexploited) in the sea, the various characteristics and the conduct of fishing activities;
21. Recognises that the data available for measuring the extent and impact of small-scale fishing activities are limited and can vary from country to country; observes that, because of this lack of data, non-industrial fishing tends to be underestimated, which marginalises it in decision-making;
22. Strongly supports the proposal by the GFCM to create a catalogue of fishing activities and to include information on fishing gear and operations, a description of fishing areas and an indication of target species and by-catches, for use in providing a complete description of fishing activities in the area and interactions with other sectors, such as recreational fishing;
23. Calls on the Commission to promote strong scientific cooperation and to work to improve the gathering of data on the principal stocks, reducing the time lag between the gathering and final assessment of data, and requesting assessments of new stocks from the STECF; strongly deplores the fact that, in the Mediterranean, most landings are of species on which little data is available ('data-deficient fisheries');
24. Stresses the strong and crucial need to share data and combat their inaccessibility and dispersion, by developing an all-embracing online archive, which should be publicly funded and should contain all the data on fish and fishing, so as to facilitate monitoring of quality and multiple, independent analyses and thus to adopt a constructive approach to stock assessments;
25. Notes that the impacts, as well as the quantities, extent and characteristics of IUU fishing (i.e. illegal fishing), are currently not assessed and are therefore underrepresented in information about the current status of fisheries and about trends over time, yet ought to be adequately taken into account in the development of scientific assessments for purposes of fisheries management;

Awareness

26. Stresses that effective results and full accomplishment can be attained by means of a high level of responsibility and awareness among operators in the industry, by developing the skills of all fishermen (both commercial and recreational) and educating them, and by involving them in decision-making, adding specific actions for the dissemination of good practices;
27. Considers it important also to raise awareness among consumers, who must be educated to consume fish responsibly, prioritising local species fished by sustainable methods, possibly coming from stocks which are not overexploited; considers it necessary, to this end, to establish a traceability system, but also and above all to inform consumers completely and reliably;
28. Stresses that, in the light of this new scenario and of all these new factors which interact in the Mediterranean and which have altered the approach to fishing in the area, Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006 must be revised for the Mediterranean, to bring it into line with the current situation;
29. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

With its 17 000 different marine species, the Mediterranean Sea is one of the areas of the world that has the greatest biodiversity, and yet its fish stocks have been overfished globally to a level that is fully double or triple the maximum sustainable yield level. There is a danger that we could turn the Mediterranean Sea into a desert.

Nor is it just overfishing that threatens the Mediterranean Sea. Excessively high nutrient and fertiliser levels, pollution, and changes to the coast and the habitat all pose serious threats, while maritime traffic and drilling for oil and gas are further risk factors. The Mediterranean Sea is, furthermore, very sensitive to climate change. It has to be protected.

Here are some key points from the report:

- long-term management of resources giving greater sustainability, thanks also to use of more selective fishing gear;
- cooperation with third countries operating in the Mediterranean Sea;
- biological recovery periods based on the biological characteristics of the various species;
- closure of some areas as nursery areas or for restocking of the overfished stock;
- preferential access to resources for small-scale (artisanal) fleets;
- stepping up of the monitoring of illegal fishing, together with special measures for those breaking the rules and fishing without a licence;
- possible introduction of quotas for some over-exploited species;
- compliance with minimum size and definition of size based on scientific criteria;
- stepping up of the monitoring of the supply chain right through to the fish market, including more exhaustive information for consumers;
- greater involvement of regional fisheries organisations in the decision-making process in line with the regionalisation mentioned in the common fisheries policy.

In general terms, the own-initiative report aims at achieving the following goals:

- long-term management of resources giving greater sustainability, thanks also to use of more selective fishing gear;
- cooperation with third countries operating in the Mediterranean Sea;
- biological recovery periods;
- closure of some areas as nursery areas or for restocking of the overfished stock;
- preferential access to resources for small-scale (artisanal) fleets;
- stepping up of the monitoring of illegal fishing, together with special measures for those breaking the rules and fishing without a licence;
- introduction of quotas for some over-exploited species;
- compliance with minimum size;
- stepping up of the monitoring of the supply chain right through to the fish market, including more exhaustive information for consumers;
- greater involvement of the GFCM and regional fisheries organisations in the decision-making process in line with the regionalisation mentioned in the common fisheries policy (CFP).