

Balancing fishing capacity and fishing opportunities

European Parliament resolution of 5 September 2007 on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities (2007/2108(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Annual Report from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities (COM(2006)0872),
 - having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 of 20 December 2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy¹,
 - having regard to Commission Regulation (EC) No 1438/2003 of 12 August 2003 laying down implementing rules on the Community Fleet Policy as defined in chapter III of Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002²,
 - having regard to the proposal for a Council Regulation concerning the establishment of a Community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2007)0196),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament entitled 'A policy to reduce unwanted by-catches and eliminate discards in European fisheries' (COM(2007)0136),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission on rights-based management tools in fisheries (COM(2007)0073),
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on improving fishing capacity and effort indicators under the common fisheries policy (COM(2007)0039),
 - having regard to the Final Declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A6-0297/2007),
- A. whereas the protection and conservation of marine resources and their exploitation in accordance with the principles of sustainable development must be one of the central

¹ OJ L 358, 31.12.2002, p. 59.

² OJ L 204, 13.8.2003, p. 21.

planks of the common fisheries policy,

- B. whereas the sustainability of fishery resources is essential for guaranteeing fishing activity and the viability of the fishing industry in the long term,
- C. whereas since the beginning of the 1980s the overcapacity of the Community fleet by comparison with the available resources has been one of the factors causing constant concern for the viability of fisheries,
- D. whereas the Final Declaration of the World Summit on Sustainable Development envisages an ecosystem-based analysis for the exploitation of fisheries, proposing that destructive fishing practices be eliminated and calling for the precautionary principle to be used in the exploitation of resources,
- E. whereas the goal was set at the above summit to achieve, by 2015, the recovery of fish stocks for species in danger of collapse, the aim being that, by that date, all fishery resources will be subject to a level of exploitation in keeping with the maximum sustainable yield,
- F. whereas in recent years the European Union has approved various recovery and management plans for overexploited stocks (hake, cod, sole, eel and prawns) and it is foreseeable that these plans will have to be extended to other species of commercial value in the future,
- G. whereas, despite the progress made since the first guidance plan for the fleet was introduced in 1983, with the aim of reducing fleet capacity and power in line with available resources, the specific features of national fleets and fishing industries have not been taken into account and this goal has not been achieved by some Member States, certain of which have even increased their fishing effort,
- H. whereas it is necessary to promote environmentally friendly fishing methods, in line with scientific fisheries research, through improved fishing gear, greater selectivity and a ban on fishing gear that destroys marine ecosystems,
- I. whereas, even after several years, the data sent by the Member States are still not homogeneous, which makes a comparative assessment of the fleet difficult or indeed virtually impossible,
- J. whereas many Member States have sent data on the fleet register with a significant delay, and some States have failed to send data within the deadlines set by Community legislation,
- K. whereas sound management of resources in line with the precautionary principle and the principle of sustainable development requires the strengthening of existing control mechanisms so that the flag State and the coastal State where vessels are operating can access information in real time on the vessel's location and the fishing operations being carried out whenever they wish,
- L. whereas dialogue and the industry's participation in all measures laid down to achieve a balance between the fleet and the state of resources are essential conditions if these measures are to prove effective,

- M. whereas fishermen and their representative associations should be involved in determining measures to protect the marine environment and to rebuild fish stocks,
- N. whereas Regional Advisory Councils are effective bodies for cooperation and dialogue between the various interests involved in the fisheries sector (the environment, nature conservation, people working in various parts of the industry, including production and processing, and aquaculture) provided that there is a close link between the geographical scope and the problems they are analysing,
- O. whereas the fishing industry in the European Union's island and outermost regions faces specific problems, characterised by marine habitats the nature of which merits special protection arrangements, and the existence of a small-scale coastal fleet operating in difficult conditions stemming from the morphology of the continental shelf and the fact that resources are located in areas of open sea that require special conditions to ensure the safety of vessels and of fishing operations,
1. Congratulates the Commission on the annual report on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fish stocks since, in spite of the difficulties arising from the diverging information supplied by the Member States, it provides an overview of the development of the national fleets that makes it possible to analyse their development;
 2. Reiterates the need for a more wide-ranging approach to measures to protect the marine environment and to rebuild fish stocks, in particular by considering and studying certain factors which have a significant impact on the marine environment and the state of fish stocks, such as coastal and offshore pollution, industrial and agricultural effluents, bottom dredging and maritime transport, to complement current management methods; considers a Community initiative in this area to be a priority;
 3. Notes that there has been a gradual reduction in the overall capacity and power of the fleet (approximately 2% per year) but there has been no reduction in the level of exploitation of stocks, since the technical improvements made to vessels cancel out or exceed the possibilities as regards yield and fishing effort that these modest reductions represent;
 4. Considers it unacceptable that Member States should fail to comply with their obligations to gather and forward data in relation to matching their fishing capacity to the state of stocks and calls on the Commission to consider this non-compliance as serious misconduct and penalise it accordingly, as is the case for fishermen's obligations as regards catch data;
 5. Stresses that matching national fleets to existing resources must take account of the reduction in fishing effort already brought about – in particular the degree of compliance with Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes;
 6. Recalls the need for all national fleet adjustment and stock recovery measures to be taken with the involvement of fishermen and to be based on scientific fisheries research;
 7. Urges the Commission to submit proposals for guidelines that will ensure that the Member States present harmonised information making it possible to carry out comparative analyses of developments in the various national fleets and provide each of

the Member States with disaggregated information on the level of catches by vessels operating in its coastal areas;

8. Points out that, in view of the current situation and the continuing existence of overcapacity, it might be desirable to reconsider the usefulness of the current schemes for bringing the Community fleet into line with fishing opportunities, leaving room in the Community policy on fisheries conservation and management for other more efficient systems which may themselves lead to capacity reductions even greater than those laid down by Community legislation;
9. Calls on the Commission to adopt the relevant initiatives for the possible transition from a fleet management system based on restricting vessel tonnage and power, to a scheme under which fishing effort can be controlled through management by geographical fishing areas and the use of appropriate technical measures for the sustainable management of resources;
10. Calls on the Commission to submit proposals to improve the safety of small-scale coastal and artisanal fishing vessels in the European Union, aimed at increasing the size and power of engines and renovating vessels so as to improve the hygiene and safety conditions on board, without thereby implying an increase in fishing effort;
11. Calls on the Commission to submit a proposal for the setting up of a specific Regional Advisory Council for the outermost regions of the European Union;
12. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and to the Commission.