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on more environmentally-friendly fishing methods
(2004/2199(INI))

Committee on Fisheries

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on more environmentally-friendly fishing methods (2004/2199(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy,
 - having regard to the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on promoting more environmentally-friendly fishing methods: the role of technical conservation measures (COM(2004)0438),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A6-0000/2005),
- A. Whereas it is important to promote fishing methods that respect the environment,
1. Welcomes the Commission's Communication on the promotion of more environmentally-friendly fishing methods;
 2. Believes this to be an important step in achieving ecologically sustainable management of fisheries in order to reduce the impact of fishing on marine environment, while recognising that a certain level of impact by fishing is unavoidable within reasonable limits;
 3. Believes that while ecological considerations are of major concern, future fisheries management policies must not be used to further penalise economically and socially vital fishing operations;
 4. Points out that it is essential to achieve a balance between socio-economic exigencies and environmental sustainability, while underlining the need to activate a mechanism for subsidising or compensating fishermen who are affected by the negative effects of environmentally-friendly fishing, particularly those active in less developed areas;
 5. Calls for the adoption of technical methods to improve selectivity and, therefore, the possibility to catch fish at the right size, in order to maintain high productivity;
 6. Points out that only by allowing fish to spawn and develop for a minimum specific period can the satisfactory reproduction of fish be made possible;
 7. Emphasises the need to limit any significantly negative impact of fishing on marine habitats through the establishment of marine reserves, real time area closures and other appropriate and balanced management measures;
 8. Highlights the necessity of reducing discards, which produce detrimental biological effects as well as a negative economic impact through the adoption of proper technical measures, closed seasons, prohibited zones and mesh size regulations;

9. Invites the Commission to bring forward, without further delay, proposals for pilot projects aimed at reducing discards;
10. Calls on the Commission to place emphasis on the development of environmentally-friendly fishing as part of the overall package of management measures;
11. Calls on the Commission to avoid conflicting objectives and superfluous regulations and to avail itself of this opportunity to simplify the overall regulatory system,
12. Calls on the Commission to consider the application of environmentally-friendly fishing technical measures as alternatives to existing effort limitations in relation to stock recovery plans;
13. Believes that in this context it is indispensable to develop and implement the satellite technology for detecting the presence of unauthorised fishing vessels in closed zones in order to guarantee an effective protection of fishes and their habitat;
14. Points out the need to support the actions undertaken in the framework of the reformed CFP in order to further the goals of this Communication, particularly:
 - a) the adoption of a decentralised approach which takes account of the specificity of particular fish species;
 - b) the development in tandem with Regional Advisory Councils of a decision-making process for the application of technical measures in which specific requirements and locally appropriate measures can be developed, implemented and monitored;
 - c) the development of scientific and technical research shared at Community level;
 - d) the integration of environmentally-friendly fishing rules in long-term management;
15. Underlines the importance of the Communication, which should play a greater role in sea governance in order to build a long-term positive future both for those whose livelihoods depend on fishing and for the marine environment;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Communication aims to promote the use of environmentally-friendly fishing methods in order to achieve one of the main objectives of the Common fisheries policy: an exploitation of living marine resources that provides sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions.

Communication objectives

The Commission Communication aims to achieve:

a) reduction of fishing pressure.

Fish stocks are in a poor state. The rising share of naturally regenerating marine fish caught results in the progressive decline of adult spawning stocks. Some species are on the brink of collapse, and, for other stocks, this pressure is likely to be unsustainable in the long term. The reformed CFP considers the development of multi-annual management plans as a sound approach to ensure that fishing effort is in line with sustainable fish resources.

b) optimisation of catch of target species and minimisation of unwanted catch.

Too low selectivity of fishing causes large catches of juvenile fish which are thrown overboard dead as unwanted by-catch. Approximately 23% of the annual catches in tonnes is discarded each year.

A number of technical measures can contribute to reduce discards including the use of:

- square-mashed panels or other devices to allow non-target species to escape;
- establishment of protected zones and closed seasons to facilitate the reproduction of fish stocks

The Commission in 2002 faced this challenge by launching an action plan to reduce discards of fish, which has been the basis of the Council's request to start pilot projects which have to include several measures such as trials of fishing gear, voluntary departure from fishing grounds, real time closures, discard bans, by-catch quotas, quota flexibility and better use of low value fish, including both those cases which can be faced in a mid-term period and others which need a long term approach.

The fishing industry will play an important role as regards preparation and monitoring the pilot project including through the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs).

c) reduction of the fishing impact on the habitat.

Some habitats such as cold-water coral reefs or stone reefs, highly productive and rich in very diverse flora and fauna, are particularly sensitive to the activity of fishing gears which can alter their physical structure. Sensitive habitat needs a particular protection. In conformity with this objective the Commission adopted a Regulation to protect deep-water coral reefs off

North-West Scotland.

The Commission also intends to carry on adopting similar measures in other well-identified cases. In order to be credible and acceptable, these initiatives must be based on comprehensive scientific research at all times.

d) balance between environmental and economic sustainability.

Obviously the adoption of environmentally-friendly measures has an economic impact which should be evaluated both in terms of short-term losses and in terms of long-term benefits.

Effect of the reformed CFP

The reformed CFP, integrating the principles of ecological sustainability, promotes a more environmentally-friendly fishing through a number of actions which includes:

1) a more decentralised approach which takes account of the specificity of particular fishes.

It is necessary to distinguish between measures which are applicable to the whole area of distribution of the stocks concerned by effort limitations and other measures which have to take into account the different features of the fish because several technical measures can be useful for one species but counterproductive for another.

2) a greater involvement of the fishing sector in formulating and implementing technical measures.

The regulatory process needs a direct participation of the fishing industry to clear up the meaning of the existing rules and to devise new ones. This process will be put into action through the Regional Advisory Councils (RAC's) which will represent a forum of discussion and an instrument to intensify the involvement of the fishing industry in the development of environmentally-friendly fishing measures on a regional basis. The Commission will draw up a proposal regarding a procedure which promotes the strengthening of the RAC's role in developing environmentally-friendly fishing: the measures endorsed on the basis of consensus within the RAC's may be implemented by the Commission.

3) development of scientific and technical research shared at Community level.

Over the past 10 years EU has implemented several research projects based on cooperation with the national administrations, marine research institutes and fishing industry. In that context, the 7th Framework Programme for Community Research is operating to produce a detailed analysis regarding the impact of different fishing gears and the consequences of the discards on marine environment as well as the opportunity to create Marine protected areas.

In addition, the Community will have to promote trans-national cooperation in identifying technical measures aiming to improve environmentally-friendly fishing methods, and increasing financial support to test new fishing methods.

4) **integration of environmentally friendly fishing rules in long-term management plans.**

They have to be considered as part of a wide management system instead of developing them within the context of an isolated ad hoc approach.

5) **incentives for the fishermen to promote the implementation of environmentally friendly fishing measures.**

It would be highly desirable and useful to offer fishermen an alternative to discarding illegally part of their catch because of the present regulation which prohibits landing the under-sized fish or the fish taken in excess of quotas. More financial support will have to be offered to fishermen to stand the short-term losses which follow the implementation of environmentally-friendly fishing methods.

General Considerations

The international Community should aim at building a sustainable future for the marine environment assuming a more active role in sea governance. It is indispensable to introduce a wide range of measures to reduce to acceptable and reasonable levels the impact of fisheries activities and to reach, at last, a balance between economic and social exigencies and environmental requirements.

In this context the European Union should achieve formal political support for environmentally friendly fishing initiatives bringing forward a plan to give effect to the introduction of new methods in the near future to reduce the impact of fishing on the marine environment which is affected, in some cases, by over-exploitation and waste of resources. These new orientations are integrated within the Commission proposal for the creation of the European Fisheries Fund, and in several different actions such as the present Communication.

Pressure on fish stocks

Environmental organisations and fishing industry organisations are in agreement in recognising two immediate solutions to avoid over fishing:

- 1) to capture fish at the right sizes so that the overall productivity of the fishery be kept high;
- 2) to maximize reproduction by allowing the required number of mature fish to spawn in order to maintain stocks at a healthy level;

Improving selectivity alone is no longer a viable solution if it is not accompanied by a reduction of fishing capacity that would allow the population to rebuild and enough fish of the newly targeted size are available to the fleets.

Fishing and the habitat

Environmentally-friendly fishing methods can reduce the impact of fishing on the habitat. In particular, bottom trawl fisheries in particular defined areas can generate detrimental effects

endangering the biodiversity of some vulnerable Deep-Sea Ecosystem. Coldwater Coral encrusted Seamounts support a rich flora and fauna extremely susceptible to "not responsible" fisheries activities.

The wide debate focused on the necessity to protect these areas involves the European Union directly because of the engagement of several member States to bottom trawl fishing.

The establishment of marine reserves to protect marine species and their habitats, could be key to reducing the impact of fishing on habitats and reversing global fisheries decline. Marine reserves can benefit adjacent fisheries from both the 'spill over' of adult and juvenile fish beyond the reserve boundaries and through the export of eggs and larvae. Inside the reserves, populations may increase in size and individuals live longer, grow larger and develop increased reproductive potential.

However, it must be underlined that the efficacy of marine reserves is not conclusively and scientifically established in all cases, and a range of measures including seasonal closures, gear type limitations and other measures must be included in all policy approaches towards maintaining marine habitats.

Furthermore it must be noted that a certain level of interaction between fishing activity and marine habitats is inevitable and that consequently there must be an appropriate balance between the need to maintain and restore marine habitats and the sustainable harvesting of renewable fishery resources.

Discards

According to a FAO study entitled "Options for utilisation of bycatch and discards from marine capture fisheries", the practice of discarding can be classified: by-catch discards (fish incidentally caught while targeting other species); fish discarded to respect the legal requirements; pre-market selection as regard quality.

It is generally recognised that the discarding of fish at the sea may have negative biological effects as well as economic impacts because in some cases discard mortality is associated with a fishery which discards fish of economic importance to another fishery; discard induced mortalities affecting immature individuals or non-legal sexes of the target species, capture of little, or any, commercial value with a loss associated with catching of unwanted catch.

Several measures should be adopted:

- effort reduction through area and time closures and other traditional control and command tools, but supplemented by economic and fiscal incentives, spatial planning, and voluntary agreements where appropriate;
- technical fixes, including:
 - pingers (small sound-emitting and dolphin-detering devices that are attached to fishing nets) and escape hatches (consisting of a widely spaced metal grid, which force the cetacean up and out of the net).
 - Increase in hook size
 - greater depth of casting fish gear

- use of particular hooks (as J hooks) to reduce accidental catches of some species, as turtles;
 - closed seasons or prohibited zones
 - use of observers
- mesh size regulations to reduce catches of undersized fish.

TACs cannot control fishing mortality because they control landings but not catches and disregard discards.

Without direct controls on fishing mortality, fish can be caught in excess of quota and discarded or landed illegally. They also make the scientific assessment of fishing mortality far more difficult to quantify.

Urgent consideration should be given to re-assessment of current management rules and tools regarding establishment of TACs and the greater use of Effort Controls to reduce discards and provide more effective and realistic means of reducing discards and managing stocks.

Existing regulations which allow the carriage on board vessels of static gear of mesh sizes smaller than legal size in certain fishing management areas but legal for use in adjacent areas should be revised; as such regulations make the effective control of such fisheries far more difficult legally.

Additionally it is useful to develop the satellite technology for detection of presence of unauthorised fishing vessels in protected zones. As regard the last point the Commission proposal concerning "data on fishing activities and means of remote detection" is currently being studied by the European Parliament (Rapporteur: Casaca).

Conclusions

The Rapporteur welcomes the Commission Communication as a step in the right direction, namely playing a stronger role in promoting the ecologically sustainable management of fisheries.

He would like to stress the following aspects:

- a) making any economic activity environmentally friendly is, of course, in the interest of fishermen because it would guarantee healthy fish stocks to them. It is therefore indispensable that the fishing industry is centrally involved, and becomes knowledgeable about the benefits related to the implementation of these measures.
- b) whilst recognising the need to adopt measures to preserve the environment, it is necessary to take into account the socio-economic consequences that these methods inevitably produce in the short term. He suggests activating a mechanism of subsidisation or compensation in order to support fishermen negatively affected in the short and medium term by environmentally-friendly fishing.
- c) additionally it is fundamental to involve the stakeholders in the decision-making process that determines their livelihoods through the established RACs.

In the light of the elements mentioned, the rapporteur considers the contents of the Communication to be a relevant and important contribution towards building a positive long term future for both those whose livelihoods depend on fishing and the protection of the natural environment.