Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities

2007/2108(INI) - 05/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Paolo **CASACA** (PES, PT) on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities, and it called 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.

Parliament congratulated the Commission on its annual report, which, in spite of the difficulties arising from the diverging information supplied by the Member States, provided an overview of the development of the national fleets that makes it possible to analyse their development. It urged the Commission to submit **proposals for guidelines that would ensure that Member States presented 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.

Parliament pointed out that in recent years, the EU has approved various recovery and management plans for overexploited stocks (hake, cod, sole, eel and prawns) and these plans might have to be extended to other species of commercial value in the future. However, 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. A more wide-ranging approach was required. This included the consideration of 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. The report considered a Community initiative in this area to be a priority.

Whilst there has been a gradual reduction in the overall capacity and power of the fleet (approximately 2% per year), 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. Members felt it unacceptable that Member States failed to comply with their obligations to forward data in relation to matching their fishing capacity to the state of stocks. They called 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. It was stressed 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.

Parliament felt 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 might themselves lead to capacity reductions even greater than those laid down by Community legislation. Accordingly, it called 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.

The Commission was also asked to submit proposals to improve the **safety of small-scale coastal and artisanal fishing vessels** in the EU, 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. Lastly, it was asked to submit a proposal for the setting up of a specific **Regional Advisory Council for the outermost regions.**

Parliament underlined that dialogue and the industry's participation in all measures laid down to achieve a balance between the fleet and the state of resources were essential conditions if these measures are to prove effective.