

Implementing sustainability in EU fisheries through maximum sustainable yield

2006/2224(INI) - 06/09/2007 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Carmen **FRAGA ESTEVEZ** (EPP-ED, ES) on the implementation of sustainable fishing in the EU on the basis of maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The report began by stating that the greater part of the Community's fisheries resources having significant commercial value are being overfished or are almost in that situation. Parliament felt that the Community system of conservation and management based on total allowable catch (TAC) and quotas has not led to the rational exploitation of stocks - on the contrary, the rigidity of the system and its dependence on political rather than biological guidelines have proved obstacles to rational management, making controls difficult and encouraging discards. The report welcomed both the Commission's recognition that the existing fisheries management policy has failed and its objective of creating a new management model making it possible to ensure stock recovery, adapt the fishing effort to fisheries' real circumstances, and improve the reliability and stability of the fishing fleet. Parliament stressed the need for all future measures altering the current Community system of conservation and management to be taken with the full involvement of fishermen and to be based on scientific fisheries research.

It was important to increase the appropriations earmarked for scientific fisheries research in the Seventh Framework Programme for research so that that programme could contribute to the development of theoretical fisheries' management models, their application, improved analysis of the state of stocks, natural effects and other inter-species relationships, and improved fishing gear. Parliament noted the Commission's intention to achieve these objectives by making MSY the yardstick for fisheries management, but warned that, for a large majority of scientists, the **traditional MSY model had been superseded** by new cutting-edge approaches which consider the ecosystem in its entirety and incorporate, inter alia, aspects relating to the environment and species interrelation, and economic and social factors. New methods have been developed, based on computer simulations of fisheries, which emulate the MSY approach while not taking it as an explicit target, and take due account of uncertainties, environmental factors, and possible interactions between species, which could, in principle, be extended to take into account specified social and economic factors.

Parliament cautioned that it would be difficult to apply the MSY model to multispecies fisheries (i.e. the majority of those in the EU), since this could lead to overfishing or underfishing depending on the species chosen. It was, therefore, obliged to deplore the deficient analysis and inadequate solutions offered by the Commission's communication, as well as the absence of an in-depth evaluation of what applying an MSY model would actually mean, in terms of its shortcomings, the particularities of its application, and the potential risks of any errors in the model. It also regretted the lack of any analysis of the evolution of the MSY concept and the potential advantages of the different approaches. Accordingly, the time was not ripe to propose the introduction of an MSY system, and a deeper analysis was needed of the problems, with a view to deciding, with all political courage, the most suitable measures for introducing the changes that are most needed to the present CFP.

Parliament was concerned that, in the context of the ambitious objective of changing the approach of the CFP conservation and management system, advantage was not being taken of the opportunity to provide a clear definition of the system of access to resources, and that the TAC/quota system and the fishing effort system continued to overlap. The Commission must seize this opportunity to devise a system of access to resources that puts the accent on sustainability, discourages discards, simplifies the technical measures, eliminates discrimination and excessive competition for stocks, introduces the necessary flexibility, and

boosts the sector's competitiveness. Any change to the management system must necessarily include financially acceptable compensation mechanisms, and this will require an assessment of the social and economic impact of the final proposal. The Commission must develop these measures at the same time as the new management system and, if possible, to integrate the two.

Parliament called in sum, for the phasing-in of a system which would, ultimately, result in a fisheries policy that was ever more in line with the biological capacity of stocks in recovery so as to ensure that the sustainability of the Community's fisheries became more of a given than a cause for concern and was perceived as such wherever Community fisheries' products are to be found in the world, which would provide the fleet with the necessary stability and allow for sound and ever more long-term planning. This would, ultimately, result in a stable system of access to resources in which TACs and quotas need only be modified in specific circumstances and using semi-automatic mechanisms, instead of being altered every year on grounds that are not purely scientific.