Rights-based management tools in fisheries

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The European Parliament adopted, by 538 votes to 42, a resolution on rights-based management tools in fisheries in response to the Commission's Communication on this subject. The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Elspeth **ATTWOOLL** (ALDE, UK) on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries.

Parliament welcomes the fact that the Commission has initiated a debate on rights-based management systems in fisheries as an essential step before the necessary amendment to the existing management policy, and that it issued a call for tender for an exhaustive study on the different management systems. It recognises, however, even in advance of such a study, that it is evident that there is a wide variety of such systems in place and that most, if not all, employ some form of RBM. Experiments with management through fishing rights in Member States which have applied such systems have had very positive consequences in many respects, for example in terms of capacity reduction. The resolution highlights the degree of complexity involved and the difficulties this poses for movement toward a single system, whether achieved through harmonising the practices of Member States or by its administration at Community level.

Nevertheless, Parliament takes the view that, as shown by the fact that RBM in fisheries has been introduced in many of the countries and regions which have the most significant fishing interests in the world, these difficulties are not insurmountable. Given that the system could prove highly positive for the management of certain Community fleets, consideration should at least be given to the possibilities for including it in the CFP.

MEPs consider it necessary to ascertain the effects that changes, particularly the introduction of Community-wide individual transferable quotas or other types of rights-based access, might have in relation to:

-relative stability and its role in maintaining the viability of fisheries-dependent communities;

-the degree of concentration of ownership of such rights and the resulting socioeconomic consequences;

-advantages that could accrue to large companies at the expense of small-scale operators or community-based fisheries;

-the fear that additional costs may be involved, providing disincentives towards investment in vessels, gear, safety and working conditions;

-the likelihood of quotas being managed by people at a level above those actively engaged in fishing;

-the problems inherent in achieving an initial allocation and in conferring a windfall benefit on those to whom the allocation is made;

-the risk of an excessive concentration of rights.

Members emphasise that these concerns must be addressed prior to any move toward a single system, for example the possibility to set, as precedents indicate, a limit on the accumulation of fishing rights.

The Commission is called upon to ensure that all studies on rights-based management systems in fisheries which it initiates have the aim of:

-providing a full picture and analysis of the systems of management currently in operation within the Member States;

-looking at the basic understandings involved in RBM in terms of: (a) to whom the rights may be allocated, to whom they may be transferred and whether they are tradable, together with any limitations in these respects, and (b) the extent of the rights;

-assessing, using the evidence acquired from the existing systems of management, the effectiveness of each such understanding in achieving the objectives of the CFP in terms of: (a) improving the livelihood of those engaged in the fishing industry; (b) having a sustainable marine ecology in which fish stocks are conserved; (c) maintaining the viability of fisheries-dependent communities; (d) the extent to which the system has, since its inception, concentrated ownership of the right to fish and led to loss of employment; (e) the economic efficiency of the fisheries sector;

-examining these issues separately for different types of fisheries both within and outside Community waters.

Parliament feels that the prescribed period for debate is too short. It calls for it to be extended to ensure that the various possibilities available are properly explored and studied, along with their consequences. The Commission is urged to allow a longer period for debate on these issues.