Community action in relation to whaling

2008/2101(INI) - 19/12/2007 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to establish an effective international regulatory framework for the comprehensive protection of whales.

CONTENT: extensive exploitation of whales and environmental degradation have severely depleted the populations of many whales. The international work to conserve and manage whale stocks carried out by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) is weakened as a result of the endless discussions between 'pro-whaling' and 'anti-whaling' States. The European Union has not yet been able to use its political weight in the IWC context mainly because of the lack of a coordinated and agreed Community position.

With this communication, the Commission intends to underline the need for the EU to act as a united major player in international whaling policy.

The International Whaling Commission (IWC), set up by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling signed in Washington D.C., on 2 December 1946, is the international organisation competent for the conservation and management of whale stocks. The European Community has observer status. The IWC adopted a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1982, which is in force since 1985. In adopting this measure the IWC took into account the uncertainties in the scientific information on whale stocks and the difficulty in obtaining the required data.

The need to develop new management objectives and procedures was recognised at the outset of IWC discussions on future management of commercial whaling, following the entry into force of the moratorium. Accordingly, work was undertaken to develop a Revised Management Procedure (RMP). The RMP would establish catch limits based on scientific data on whale populations. Although the procedure was adopted in 1994, it has not been applied yet pending further work on the Revised Management Scheme (RMS). The RMS would seek to ensure that the regulations of the IWC are complied with. It would include a wide range of control measures in this context.

The lack of effective application of the ban due to reservations and objections and the lack of appropriate regulation of scientific whaling, which is carried out outside any adequate international management regulatory framework, undermine the purpose of the moratorium on commercial whaling. Any long-term solution for a better regulation of whaling should in principle address comprehensively all whaling activities currently carried out under the different legal headings of the Convention, be they commercial whaling, scientific whaling, whaling conducted under an objection (Norway) or a reservation (Iceland), as well as aboriginal subsistence whaling. Issues such as a stringent compliance regime, monitoring and reporting, etc. would also need to be addressed.

The overarching long-term objective of the Community should be to ensure an effective international regulatory framework for the comprehensive protection of whales. In this respect, the Community should support strengthening cooperation in and enhancing the effectiveness of the IWC. It should assess, relying, *inter alia*, on the invaluable expertise in the Member States, the work carried out so far on the draft RMP and RMS, as well as past proposals to bridge the gaps among Parties to the Convention with a view to play a positive role to unblock the deadlock in the IWC.

Only acting together and developing a Community position the EU Member States would stand a chance to ensure the development and enforcement of an adequate and strict international regulatory framework for the protection of whales. To this end, the Commission is proposing an appropriate decision to the Council.