Resolution on the crisis in the fisheries sector caused by rising fuel prices

2008/2596(RSP) - 19/06/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 18 June 2008, the European Parliament adopted, by 454 votes to 84 against and 24 abstentions, a resolution on the crisis in the fisheries sector caused by rising fuel oil prices. The resolution had been tabled for consideration in plenary by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, and UEN groups. It recalls that the current crisis facing the Community fishing industry is due to the constant rise in the price of fuel, which has risen by more than 300% in the last five years and by more than 40% since January 2008. Prices of fisheries products are similar to those of twenty years ago, and in the case of some species, a considerable reduction of up to 25% has occurred since the beginning of the year owing to mass imports from illegal fishing. In the fisheries sector, unlike other sectors of the economy, the price of fuel cannot affect the price of first sale of products, since in the current situation fishermen cannot set prices. Parliament acknowledged that the rise in fuel prices is having direct and indirect repercussions on the incomes of crews, owing to the link between wages and income from the first sale of catches.

It expresses its solidarity with the EU fishermen and calls on the Commission and the Council to envisage measures in order to resolve the present crisis in the fisheries sector. Member States are asked to speed up procedures to enable the payment of aid under Commission Regulation (EC) No 875/2007 on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the EC Treaty to *de minimis* aid in the fisheries sector. The Commission is called upon to revise this Regulation so as to increase the aid to EUR 100 000 per vessel instead of per undertaking, so that the level of aid is brought closer to that in other economic sectors. Parliament draws Member States' attention to the Community Guidelines for the examination of State aid to fisheries and aquaculture, which allow tax relief and reductions in social costs for Community vessels that operate outside Community waters, and asks for these measures to be applied to those vessels that request it.

Together with the rising price of oil, one of the most recurrent claims of the EU fishing fleet with regard to the fall in the price of its products relates to massive imports of fishing products at low prices from illegal fishing. Parliament insists that:

-the Council act responsibly by adopting the future directive against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;

-controls on fisheries products from third countries be intensified and improved so as to guarantee that the same standards are applied to imported products as to Community products;

-information on the origin of fisheries products be improved and, above all, that the compulsory use of an informative label be guaranteed in all cases.

Parliament reiterates its call to the Commission to submit a proposal for the revision of the common organisation of the market in fishery and aquaculture products, taking account of the proposals of the European Parliament, with a view to allowing fishermen to have more responsibility in the setting of prices. It also asks for the fishing fleet adjustment plans to be brought into force in all the Member States and for the financial means necessary for a voluntary restructuring of the fleets to be provided. To this end, Parliament:

-calls on the Commission to establish priority criteria for the segments of the fleet that have been most affected by this crisis;

-considers it essential that national Operational Programmes under the European Fisheries Fund be reviewed to allow for more targeted spending;

-calls for assistance with a one-off change in fishing gear to produce less fuel-intensive fishing methods;

-encourages the purchase of equipment to improve fuel efficiency.

Members also want the Commission to submit proposals for a seven-year compensation scheme for CO_2 reduction in the fisheries sector, based on the current price of EUR 25 per tonne of CO_2. They ask the Commission to support the creation of a specific fisheries-oriented research and development fund, within the existing Seventh Research and Development Framework Programme, to help finance projects aimed at investigating alternative energy sources and improving energy efficiency in the fisheries sector.

Parliament considers that conversion and diversification of fishing gear can contribute to a reduction in the fisheries sector's energy dependence. It calls on the Commission and Member States to consult widely with the fishing sector and other interested parties to solicit their ideas on the best ways to achieve such an objective, recognising that the situation and therefore the solutions will not necessarily be the same in all fisheries or regions. The Commission should formulate specific proposals to alleviate the situation in the areas most dependent on fisheries.

Lastly, Parliament calls for the establishment of a tripartite dialogue at European level between all the players (public administrations, trade unions and fishermen) to deal with the structural problems of the sector, which are not merely a reflection of the oil price crisis, giving priority to fishermen's working conditions.