New impetus for the strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Guido MILANA (S&D, IT) on a new impetus for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture in which it recalls that, at present, there is no specific, harmonised EU legislative framework for the aquaculture sector.

Legislative and administrative considerations:the sector is covered by a variety of EU legislative texts in different areas (environment, public health, etc.) and national legislation which may vary considerably from one Member State to another. Therefore, in order to avoid causing discrimination and market distortions, Members call on the Commission to bring forward swiftly a proposal for a regulation consolidating in a single text all the EU legislation governing the aquaculture sector and thus introducing the necessary legislative clarity. The Commission is also called upon to:

- set out in that regulation specificEuropean certification criteria and general basic rules for the various product categories, with which every aquaculture establishment in the Community must comply,together with provisions for maximum harmonisation of environmental impact criteria at Community level in order to avoid any distortion of competition between Member States;
- work towards, with the help of the Member States, a 'maritime development plan' and the integrated management of coastal areas, as provided for under the EU's new maritime policy;
- undertake to reduce existing bureaucratic obstacles to obtaining the requisite permits and concessions to start a sustainable aquaculture activity, possibly by setting up '**one-stop shops'** that centralise the administrative formalities incumbent on operators in a single location;
- equip the aquaculture sector with a real **economic crisis instrument** and to devise support systems to deal with biological natural disasters (like toxic algal blooms), man-made disasters (like the Erika or the Prestige) or extreme weather events (cyclones, floods, etc.);
- support the experimental farming of native species, technologies for the production of healthy fish and efforts to combat diseases occurring in aquaculture,;
- consider creating specialist organisations for the promotion of aquaculture products and to extend the rules on the common market organisations to the sustainable aquaculture sector and to support and provide incentives for promotional campaigns at EU level and on external markets.

Members point out that with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the EuropeanParliament has ceased to be a consultative body in the fisheries sector and has become a co-legislator in the aquaculture sector. They consider that any legislative reform of the aquaculture sector should fit in, in a smooth and complementary manner, with the current process of reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Rural and coastal regions: Members express the view that a strong sustainable aquaculture sector could act as a catalyst for the development of many remote, coastal and rural areas in the Member States and contribute to the development of local production. They consider that the success of the European sustainable aquaculture sector will be largely dependent on the establishment, nationally and locally, of a more business-friendly environment, and calls on the Member States, therefore, to speed up theirwork towards this without delay and to promote exchanges of experience and best practices at EU level. The Commission is also called upon to guarantee appropriate vocational training in the field of aquaculture, boost the competitiveness of the sector and encourage the possibleretraining of members of the professional fishing industry in alternative methods of managing aquatic environments**,** thus also helping to create secure jobs for young people in rural and coastal areas and in the outermost regions.

Sustainable aquaculture systems: noting that all forms of aquaculture must be sustainable and socially just and, consequently, no harm must be done to ecosystems through an increase in the concentrations of natural substances, Members consider that aquaculture systems which deplete capture fisheries or pollute coastal waters are to be considered unsustainable and that European aquaculture should give priority to herbivorous species and carnivorous species which can thrive on reduced consumption of fishmeals and oils. They stress that, in order to expand the aquaculture industry in Europe, the sector relies on continuous development to decrease the feed factor of wild-caught protein to product. They point out that the stocks of wild fish suitable for feed production are limited and in many cases overfished and therefore aquaculture development should focus more on herbivorous species and piscivorous species which can further significantly decrease the feed factor.

Transparency and quality: Members consider it urgent and essential to lay down and strengthen the rigorous, transparent quality and traceability criteria for EU aquaculture products, to improve fish feedstuffs, and to introduce and strengthen labelling criteria for high-quality aquaculture products and organic aquaculture production. They consider that the priority aim of environmental quality certification for aquaculture products should be to promote the environment-friendly use of living aquatic resources in the context of a sustainable development that takes due account of environmental, economic and social factors, with due respect for the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and future FAO guidelines. The Commission is called upon to:

- introduce a **European eco-labelling programme for fishery and aquaculture products** that follows the Community guidelines on eco-labelling;
- organise and promote, in close cooperation with the Member States, institutional information campaigns to promote aquaculture products, including organic aquaculture products;
- extend the scope of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of **animals during transport** so as to limit the transport of fish over long distances, thus promoting locally based hatchery operations and encouraging slaughter close to the fish farm;
- ensure that the sourcing of raw materials used for fish feed follows an environmentally acceptable practice and does not have negative impacts on the ecosystems from which these ingredients are harvested;
- ensure that **pre-slaughter procedures** classed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as harmful to the wellbeing of the fish are avoided; methods of slaughter, such as asphyxiation in ice slurry, in which, according to the EFSA, fish retain consciousness for a long time before death, should be prohibited;
- issue specific technical guidelines on the certification of sustainable fish feed.

Financing: Members view that financial assistance compensating for damage caused by legally protected animals as an essential precondition for the development of a sustainable, modern and efficient aquaculture sector. The report stresses the need for a **firmer commitment from the EU** on investments in sustainable aquaculture, in the form of **additionalfinancing under the Community Fisheries Fund**. The report points out, however, that future financing of aquaculture related activities should only be possible with the effective implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive, to ensure that projects funded do not lead to degradation of the environment or of wild-fish or shellfish stocks. Members reiterate the need to include traditional shellfishing activities along with the rest of the aquaculture sector in the Common Fisheries Policy to ensure economic, social and environmental sustainability and to guarantee them non-discriminatory access to European funding.

In addition, Members emphasise the need to ensure **increased financial contributions for scientific research**, innovation and technology transfers in the field of sustainable, organic, offshore and freshwater aquaculture. Members hope that the future European Fisheries Fund will provide for **specific budget lines** for sustainable aquaculture development and support for investment in that sector. They stress that these budget lines should not be financed through an overall cut in spending in other sectors, in particular fisheries.

External relations:in this field, the Commission is called upon to:

- strive to ensure that Community legislation is applied rigorously throughout the whole chain of aquaculture products, including feedstuffs and raw materials for feedstuffs, imported from third countries;
- strive to ensure that the principle of mutual recognition and free movement of goods is applied to curative and preventivepharmaceuticals used in aquaculture, to promote reciprocal advanced know-how agreements with third countries and to promote the introduction of best practices by other countries and international bodies;
- sponsor, as part of the EU's policy on cooperation with developing countries, support and training measures designed to helppromote sustainable aquaculture and steer the awareness of aquaculturists in those countries towards a policy on quality and higher production standards, particularly as regards the environment, hygiene and social standards in the industry;
- submit a report on environmental and social standards in the aquaculture industry outside the EU and to explore ways of improving the provision of information to consumers;
- launch impact assessment studies concerning the possible effects that Community trade agreements may have on the aquaculture sector.