Arrangements for importing fishery and aquaculture products into the EU with a view to the future reform of the CFP

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own-initiative report drafted by Alain CADEC (EPP, FR) on the arrangements for importing fishery and aquaculture products into the EU with a view to the future reform of the CFP.

The report deplores the fact that the Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy devotes only a few lines to the issue of imports, and clearly underestimates the importance of addressing this issue properly for the credibility and success of the reform.

Members note that EU **fishery and aquaculture production falls well short of the needs of the processing industry** and growing consumer demand, and will continue to do so. They acknowledge, therefore, the need to promote responsible consumption, based upon quality and sustainability rather than quantity, the need to reinforce fisheries management to promote stock recovery and the fact that **imports will continue to play an important role in supplying the EU market**.

The report emphasises, however, the overriding **need to ensure that the EU retains environmentally sustainable and economically viable fishery and aquaculture sectors**, including small-scale operations, provide jobs at all stages of production, and supply safe, good-quality food.

Trade and customs policy: Members consider that the EU, as the world's largest importer of fishery products, shares political responsibility with other major fish importing countries for **ensuring that the WTO trade rules respect the highest possible global standards of fisheries management and conservation**. They call on the Commission to ensure that fair, transparent and sustainable trade in fish is strengthened in the EU's bilateral and multilateral trade agreements

Unable to accept the idea – promoted through the commercial policy currently being pursued – Members take the view that **tariff protection is reasonable** and should continue to be an important and legitimate instrument enabling the authorities to regulate imports.

The report urges the EU representatives negotiating bilateral and regional agreements to **require more systematically a real quid pro quo in exchange for trade concessions to non-EU countries** on imports of fishery and aquaculture products, resolutely defending any offensive interests of the EU in this sector. It emphasises that the EU needs to retain control over the trade preferences that it grants to certain partners by insisting on the application of strict rules of origin based on the concept of "wholly obtained" products.

Environmental, social, health and quality aspects: the committee believes that it should be one of the key aims of EU policy on fishery and aquaculture imports to ensure that imported products meet the **same requirements that apply to EU production in every respect**.

Members are concerned that the massive influx of fishery and aquaculture products onto the Community market in an environment of unfair competition could influence the eating habits of Europeans, who, at a time of general economic crisis, could yield to the easy temptation to buy cheaper and lower-quality food products. They consider, moreover, that EU efforts to conserve fish stocks and make fishing sustainable, pursued through the CFP, are incompatible with importing fishery and aquaculture products from

countries which are stepping up their fishing efforts without concern for sustainability and are only interested in short-term profitability.

The report encourages the rigorous and effective application of rules to **combat illegal, unreported and unregulated** (IUU) fishing, while acknowledging the need of many developing countries for help with implementing the rules properly and combating illegal fishing.

The committee takes the view that the Union must also enforce those undertakings in order to ensure that all products exported to the European Union, without exception, are from **countries that have ratified the main international agreements in the field of maritime law**. It demands that all the trade preferences granted by the EU in respect of fishery and aquaculture products be made strictly conditional upon the fulfilment of stringent environmental and social requirements.

Members emphasise the importance of rigorously applying all aspects of EU law in relation to health standards and inspections (including food safety, traceability and prevention), which are crucial aspects for consumer protection, to fishery and aquaculture imports, including feedstuffs and feed materials. In this context, the Commission is urged to enhance its **programme of third country inspections** by fine-tuning Food and Veterinary Office missions.

Revision of the COM: the report draws attention to the various resolutions, adopted during the 6th parliamentary term, asking the Commission, as a matter of urgency, to carry out a far-reaching revision of the COM in fishery products to enable it to contribute better to guaranteeing earnings in the sector, ensuring market stability, improving the marketing of fishery products and increasing the added value generated.

Consumer information: Members emphasise the urgent need to introduce **stringent and transparent criteria for certifying and labelling** in respect of the quality and traceability of European fishery and aquaculture products and to promote the introduction, as soon as possible, of specific EU ecolabelling for such products in order to put an end to the uncontrolled proliferation of private certification systems.

The ecocertification and ecolabelling of fishery and aquaculture products should be a process that is transparent and easily understandable by the consumer, and should be available to the whole sector without exception.

Aquaculture: highlighting the fact that aquaculture products account for a growing proportion of fishery and aquaculture imports into the EU, Members see a determined policy of supporting and developing sustainable aquaculture, with a reduced environmental impact, in the EU as one of the key aspects of a strategy to reduce dependence on fishery and aquaculture imports, stimulate economic activity in the EU and offer a more plentiful and varied supply in response to the rapidly rising demand.