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

2009/2107(INI) - 17/06/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 420 votes to 15, with 7 abstentions a resolution on the subject of a new impetus for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture in response to a Commission communication on the same subject.

Members welcome the Commission's initiative as an indication of greater attention being given to the sustainable aquaculture sector. They hope that this will lead to a legislative review that will be better geared to the needs and the challenges facing the sector, with a view to consolidating this at global level.

Parliament expresses 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, with significant benefits also for consumers in the form of high-quality, healthy and sustainably produced food products. As a result, the EU should give greater strategic importance to a sustainable aquaculture sector and its development at Union level by according it the necessary financial assistance without ignoring the fact that advanced technologies, of which aquaculture is one, often require significant investment from businesses, whatever their size.

Parliament considers that a sustainable and organic aquaculture sector should be in a position to provide consumers with high-quality food products ensuring healthy and balanced nutrition. An amendment adopted in plenary also underlines that aquaculture systems which deplete wild fish stocks 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.

Members 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. They also point out that, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament has ceased to be a consultative body in the fisheries sector and has become a co-legislator in the aquaculture sector as well.

Legislative, administrative and financial framework: Parliament calls 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 to promote coordination between the different Directorates-General that have responsibility in this field.

The Commission is invited to:

- set out in that regulation **specific European 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;
- 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;
- support the **experimental farming of native species**, technologies for the production of healthy fish and efforts to combat diseases occurring in aquaculture, in the interests of diversifying Community aquaculture production;

- take into account the trend towards the development of offshore aquaculture facilities as a potential solution to the problem of the availability of space on European coasts;
- guarantee **appropriate vocational training** in the field of aquaculture, boost the competitiveness of the sector and encourage the possible retraining of members of the professional fishing industry in alternative methods of managing aquatic environments;
- consider **creating specialist organisations for the promotion of aquaculture products**.

Member States are called upon to work towards a "**maritime development plan**" and the integrated management of coastal areas, as provided for under the EU's new maritime policy and in line with environmental impact assessments, which covers all the different product categories in the sector, such as shellfishing, sub-coastal aquaculture, offshore and freshwater aquaculture, and to undertake to **reduce existing bureaucratic obstacles** to obtaining the requisite permits and concessions to start a sustainable aquaculture activity.

Members hope that the **future European Fisheries Fund** in support of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy will provide for specific budget lines for sustainable aquaculture development and support for investment in that sector.

They stress too the need to ensure increased financial contributions for scientific research, innovation and technology transfers in the field of sustainable, organic, offshore and freshwater aquaculture.

Quality and consumer protection policy: Parliament takes the view that sustainable aquaculture development cannot take precedence over a stringent quality policy, environment-friendly production methods respectful of animal welfare rigorous health standards and a high level of consumer protection. They call on the Commission, therefore, to develop a specific **EU quality label for aquaculture products** , along with a specific organic aquaculture label, establishing strict rules in accordance with EU principles of high-quality organic production. The Commission is invited, among other things to:

- organise and promote, in close cooperation with the Member States, institutional **information campaigns** to promote aquaculture products, including organic aquaculture products;
- take the steps called for by Parliament with regard to the implementation of a staged **cormorant population management plan**, and to bring forward proposals for comprehensive legislation in this field;
- propose specific sustainable criteria in relation to the **well-being of farmed fish**;
- 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;
- **pre-slaughter procedures** classed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as harmful to the wellbeing of the fish are avoided;
- issue specific technical guidelines on the **certification of sustainable fish feed**.

External relations: recalling that EU products face strong competition from products from third countries (especially Turkey, Chile, Vietnam and China), where companies can produce at much lower cost, Members call on the Commission and the Member States 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**. They stress the need to ensure that aquatic food products that are manufactured in or imported into the EU comply with high environmental protection and consumer health and safety standards. In this context, they reiterate the importance of conducting **systematic checks at places giving access to the internal market and key import hubs**.

The Commission is called to:

- strive to ensure that the **principle of mutual recognition** and free movement of goods is applied to curative and preventive pharmaceuticals 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 help promote sustainable aquaculture and steer the awareness of aquaculturists in those countries towards a policy on quality and higher production standards;
- 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.