Special report 12/2011 (2011 discharge): Have EU measures contributed to adapting the capacity of the fishing fleets to available fishing opportunities?

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the report by Marta ANDREASEN (EFD, UK)

On the Special report No 12/2011 (2011 discharge): “Have EU measures contributed to adapting the capacity of the fishing fleets to available fishing opportunities?”

Members note that the special reports of the Court of Auditors provide information on issues of concern related to the implementation of expenditure, and are thus a tool for Parliament in the exercise of its role as the discharge authority. They note its damning appraisal of the measures undertaken by both the Commission and Member States.

Members take note that**, in spite of the reduction of fishing, overcapacity has been a recurrent theme in previous reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)** and that the expensive measures taken to date to reduce fishing overcapacity by adapting the fishing fleet to fishing resources have been unsuccessful.

They recognises that, as from 1995, the trend for Union fish catches has been declining and that this decline is largely due to overfishing and forms part of a vicious circle involving fishing overcapacity and low economic performance of the fishing fleet.

In particular, they note that, since the last reform of the CFP in 2002, fish catches have declined by 1 million tonnes and jobs in the fishing sector have declined from 421 000 to 351 000.

Members therefore call for:

- **more relevant and robust measures to facilitate actions to balance fishing capacity with fishing opportunities**;
- a report to be drafted urgently containing the data on existing overcapacity in the Union, broken down by fishery and country;
- given both the technological advances and the capacity of today’s fishing fleets (which has increased with an average of 3% per year during the last decade), the updating of the fleet registers in the Member States, and the introduction of an obligation to report on their efforts to balance fishing capacity with fishing opportunities.

The committee also calls for:

- the adaptation of fleets to existing fishing opportunities;
- the application of measures and programmes to decommission fishing vessels that are designed to have a positive impact on the sustainability of the targeted fish stocks;
- the setting of effective fishing fleet capacity ceilings;
- a reform of the CFP is needed to that regionalises its implementation and the management of its programmes and measures.

Improved monitoring: Members also express concern at the problem of the scrapping of fishing vessels. The scrapping schemes have, in part, been badly implemented, with examples of tax payers' money being used for the scrapping of already inactive vessels or even being used indirectly for building new vessels. They stress the need for strict safeguards when using scrapping schemes, as a way of reducing overcapacity in order to avoid abuse. Members also want the Commission to call on the national authorities to enforce stricter checks before deciding on the funding of projects of investments on board.

Court recommendations: lastly, Members endorse the Court's recommendations made in the conclusions of the Special Report, which are also their own conclusions:

- actions should be developed to effectively reduce overcapacity of the fishing fleet and to better define and measure fishing capacity and fishing overcapacity;
- the aid scheme for modernising vessels should be reconsidered and the role of fishing right transfer schemes clarified;
- clear selection rules should be established for fishing vessel decommissioning schemes;
- Member States should implement the EFF on time and that any publicly funded investments on board should not have an increased fishing ability as a result;
- the fleet register should be correctly updated, and Member State reports should contain the required information and be of suitable quality.

Lastly, Members highlight the fact that the EFF and CFP are currently an ineffective use of our common resources; they therefore call for the re-structuring of the fisheries programmes to be done in such as way as to ensure that they are as efficient as possible.