Marine knowledge 2020: seabed mapping for promoting sustainable fisheries

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Maria do Céu PATRÃO NEVES (EPP, PT) on marine knowledge 2020:"Seabed mapping for promoting sustainable fisheries" as a follow-up to the Commission green Paper of 29 August 2012.

Members welcomed the Marine Knowledge 2020 initiative which opened an exchange of ideas on this topic and undertook a public consultation to sound out opinions regarding the opportunities and challenges provided by access to information on marine monitoring in Europe.

They considered it necessary to **release, in line with the established rules, the potential of the huge amount of data on the marine environment** which has been collected and stored by numerous public and private bodies at European level, and to make it available and accessible to potential users.

The report is accordingly focused on the **importance and usefulness of pooling, mapping, and disseminating fisheries data** within the wider ‘Marine Knowledge 2020’ initiative, with particular reference to the following key points:

Information sources and types of data: the report highlighted the existence of a wide range of public and private bodies which store data on fishing activity in the EU, which should be integrated into the publicly available multiresolution digital seabed map:

- Member States collect and forward data that constitute an excellent source of information on fishing activity, and that this huge reserve of information is compiled by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and assessed by experts from the working groups of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF);
- some **producer organisations**, especially in the industrial fishing sector, store data on fishing activity which should complement the information currently available;
- the huge volume of data generated by fishing fleets equipped with vessel monitoring systems (VMS), would be of great use in mapping fishing activity.

The report emphasised the usefulness of making available charts of the spatial distribution of fishing fleets, fishing effort and catch composition and volume. Moreover, the separate mapping of data according to type of fishing activity, such as small-scale fishing, traditional fishing or industrial fishing, would provide a more realistic picture of the diversity of fisheries according to Members.

Promoting the obtainability and availability of data: Members recalled that data collection and fishery resource management are financed by the EU and the Member States and that the data collected must therefore be available for consultation by potential users and the general public. Access to fisheries data that are obtained using private financing and do not contain commercially sensitive information should be subject to authorisation by the organisations holding the data.

- When data are held by public authorities in Member States, the Commission should draw up a comprehensive set of standard guidelines for circulation, schedule collection, processing, and communication within a given time-frame, and should provide the encouragement needed for information to be made available for consultation by potential stakeholders.

- When fisheries data are obtained in research projects financed by the EU or Member States or subject to cofinancing, there should be a requirement to communicate the data according to a predetermined timetable once the projects have been completed.
- When data have been obtained from research projects the researchers concerned must be given reasonable time to publish their studies.

The report advocated the creation of mechanisms to provide easy access to relevant data on fishing, under conditions to be established and with different levels of access, and ensuring adequate levels of **confidentiality of information and commercial interests**. Independently, Members maintained that, irrespective of whether data are held by public or private bodies or have been obtained using public or private financing, the body responsible for collecting, processing, and communicating the information should invariably be mentioned.

Compilation and pooling data effectively: Members noted that if data are to be robust and reliable, their quality has to be standardised, verified, and checked, whether they come from Member States' databases or from fisheries research projects.

With a view to guaranteeing **comparability and interoperability** of fisheries data, the report:

- considered it imperative to establish **common protocols/models**, harmonised and tested in sampling strategies, and to lay down data collection and processing procedures and the format in which information is to be communicated - the DCF model could be used for that purpose;
- recommended that Member States designate a **national authority** to be responsible for data collection, compilation, processing, quality control, pooling, and transmission with a view to integration into a common fisheries information access platform.

Benefits from the processing and interpretation of data: Members pointed out that if the maximum benefit is to be derived from this initiative, the governance and operating model has to allow for the necessary collection, processing, interpretation, and communication of fisheries data and secure the participation and genuine involvement of Member States, the scientific world, and local communities.

They maintained, as regards governance and operation, that the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) should be given **permanent status**.