For a comprehensive EU fishery strategy in the Pacific region

2012/2235(INI) - 24/09/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own-initiative report by Carmen FRAGA ESTÉVEZ (EPP, ES) on a comprehensive EU fishery strategy in the Pacific Region.

Members recalled that around half the tuna caught in the world are taken in the waters of the Western and Central Pacific, of which 80 % are in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of island states and only 20 % in international waters.

The report stated that despite slightly improved fisheries supervision, vigilance and monitoring in the Pacific, the sustainability of the region's resources is being threatened by a major rise in the number of purse-seiners (mainly from Asia and the island states), the increase in the fishing effort, and illegal fishing. The committee considered the **EU's approach in the field of fisheries in the Pacific should be to actively support the current regional efforts to address overcapacity and improve fisheries management**.

They proposed, to this effect, a targeted strategy which should:

- ensure coherence among all the Community policies affecting the Pacific region;
- within the framework of future, post-Cotonou relations with the Pacific ACP countries, have a **regional focus** that bolsters the position and role of the EU in the Western and Central Pacific region;
- ensure that the 11th EDF takes this strategy into account and also reflects the possibility of increasing the percentage of sector-specific assistance for addressing fishing communities' needs (including enhancing their contribution to local food security) and developing fishery infrastructure;
- call for greater coordination and complementarity with other actors in the region in relation to development assistance.

Members stressed the need for distant water fleetsto contribute, in cooperation with Pacific countries, to **reducing fishing pressure on tropical tuna stocks**, including by substantially reducing mortality levels for **juvenile big-eye tuna**, a stock of great economic importance to the region and one which is currently overfished.

In the short term, the fisheries strategy should:

- take account of the importance of this region from a fisheries standpoint and its value to the Union's fleet and the EU market and fish processing industry;
- provide legal certainty for the vessels operating there.

Members noted that the EU's strategy for accessing resources in the EEZs of the countries in the region by way of fisheries cooperation agreements has not worked properly except in the case of Kiribati, and considered that a **new framework for close and advantageous relations between the various parties involved** is needed in order to revitalise and consolidate those agreements. For Members, they considered that part of the problem is that the EU has held unsuccessful negotiations on agreements with the countries of the Western Pacific, which is where the EEZs of the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia are located, rather than directing its efforts towards the Central Pacific, where the Community' s purse-seiner fleet has traditionally centred its operations.

They welcomed the fact that the Commission has completed prior assessments with the Cook Islands and Tuvalu with a view to launching negotiations on fisheries partnership agreements. They considered this **new negotiating approach** to be more in line with the **regional focus** repeatedly called for by Parliament.

Overall, Members noted that the EU's approach to the Pacific should **assist developing states**, and small island developing states in particular, in their efforts to secure a greater share of the benefits from the sustainable exploitation of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks and should also help strengthen regional efforts to sustainably conserve and manage fisheries for such stocks. They called for measures to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) and for the Commission to include an explicit reference to the IUU Regulation (EC) No 1005/2008 in the provisions of the EPA negotiated with the Pacific countries.

In the medium to long term, Members called on the Commission to provide for the establishing of a longer-term strategy for access for the EU fleet to the EEZs of the countries of the region, based on a **regional framework agreement between the EU and the countries of the Western and Central Pacific** , negotiated with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and centring on the following aspects:

- outline the arrangements for access for the EU fleet;
- establish a system of transparent governance which would in particular ensure the combating of IUU fishing;
- based on the vessel day scheme (VDS), provided that measures are adopted to ensure its transparency, improve its effectiveness;
- explore ways of channelling EDF development assistance for the region through the FFA, since the Pacific ACP countries do not have the human and technical resources to adequately utilise that funding.

At the same time, Members stressed that the final stage in this process should be exclusively regional in its focus, i.e. it should take the form of a multilateral fisheries cooperation agreement with the EPA signatory countries that grants the Community fleet access to the EEZs of those countries.

Lastly, they underlined the need for Parliament to be adequately involved in the preparation and negotiating process and the long-term monitoring and assessment of the functioning of bilateral agreements according to the provisions of the TFEU and be immediately and fully informed, on an equal footing with the Council, at all stages of the procedure related to FPAs.

Members recalled their conviction that Parliament should be represented by observers at the Joint Committee meetings envisaged in the fisheries agreements.