Marine knowledge 2020: seabed mapping for promoting sustainable fisheries

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution 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.

Existing data on the marine environment is currently held by numerous different bodies in a dispersed and fragmented way. Parliament suggested that it was fundamental to **ensure availability of and ease of access to the vast reserve of data existing** on the marine environment in Europe and make it available and accessible to potential users in order to maximise resources and promote development, innovation and job creation in the marine and maritime sectors.

In its resolution, Parliament 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 resolution 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. They concern in particular:

- 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.

Members 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 Parliament.

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.

The resolution 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,** especially information obtained from VMS reports, fishing logbooks, and logbooks kept by on-board observers.

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: Parliament 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 resolution considered it imperative to establish **common protocols/models**, harmonised and tested in sampling strategies. It also 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**.