

EU/Cook Islands Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement and implementation Protocol

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the recommendation by João FERREIRA (GUE/NGL, PT) on the draft Council decision on the conclusion on behalf of the European Union of a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Government of the Cook Islands and the Implementation Protocol thereto.

The committee recommended the European Parliament to give its consent to the conclusion of the Agreement.

Members recalled that the Cook Islands have traditionally allowed vessels from other countries to have access to their exclusive economic zone (EEZ). These Islands, which border Kiribati, Tokelau, French Polynesia, American Samoa, Niue, and high sea areas, extend over 1.98 million km². This adds to the economic potential of the fisheries sector, but also entails problems as regards monitoring and control, since illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing is difficult to tackle over so vast an area in which resources are scattered so widely.

At present there are no EU vessels fishing in Cook Islands waters. Concluding a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement is a **strategic choice for the EU and the Cook Islands** that will provide fishing opportunities for vessels flying the flags of Member States, theoretically on the basis of the best scientific advice available, subject to compliance with the conservation and management measures laid down by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) within the limits of the available surplus.

Therefore, Members recommended that the European Parliament approve the conclusion of the Protocol, given its importance both to the Cook Islands and to the EU fleets operating in their waters. They also stressed that the Agreement and its future prospects need to be assessed and studied in more detail and that **Parliament must, at every stage, be kept fully informed** without delay about procedures related to the Protocol or its renewal.