Status of fish stocks and socio-economic situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean

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The European Parliament adopted by 558 votes to 43, with 35 abstentions, a resolution on the status of fish stocks and the socio-economic situation of the fishing sector in the Mediterranean.

In its communication entitled 'Consultation on the fishing opportunities for 2017 under the Common Fisheries Policy', the Commission maintained that overfishing remains prevalent in the Mediterranean and that urgent measures are needed to reverse this situation.

In addition to overfishing, the Mediterranean sea is facing numerous challenges, the majority of which can be attributed to a densely populated coastline but also to maritime transport and the overexploitation of resources, including oil and gas harvesting.

Addressing overfishing and protecting the Mediterranean: Members stressed the importance of **comprehensively enforcing, in the short term, the targets and measures laid down in the common fisheries policy (CFP)**, and of a timely drafting and effective implementation of the multiannual management plans in line with an approach centred on regionalisation and a multiplicity of species. They also stressed the need for a **response that is collective** and based on multi-tier international, European, national and regional cooperation, while underlining the strategic role of the Mediterranean Advisory Council in this context.

The resolution called for the following actions and measures:

- ensure that more incentives and preferential access to coastal fishing areas are given to **small-scale** (artisanal and traditional) **fleets** if they fish selectively and in a manner that has a limited impact;
- encourage **recreational fishing** that generates a high economic revenue for the local communities, through activities like tourism;
- **define coastal, small-scale coastal and traditional fishing** in line with socio-economic characteristics;
- apply a **precautionary approach** to the conservation, management and exploitation of living marine resources which takes into account socio-economic considerations in order to achieve sustainable fisheries, while protecting and preserving the marine environment;
- improve efforts in the field of **marine knowledge**, with particular regard to commercially exploited species, and that this knowledge should be used as the basis for planning their sustainable exploitation;
- **combat illegal, unreported or unregulated (IUU) fishing** in the Mediterranean Basin and secure the support of non-EU Mediterranean countries;
- **step up monitoring activity** both on land, throughout the entire distribution chain (markets and catering trade), and at sea, especially in areas in which fishing is temporarily suspended or prohibited;
- provide incentives for fleets to use **more selective fishing equipment** and techniques that have a reduced impact on the marine environment;
- tackle the depletion of stocks in the Mediterranean through fisheries management and conservation measures for commercial and recreational fisheries, including, mainly, through **area and time-based restrictions and daily or weekly fishing limits, as well as quotas**, where appropriate;
- ensure that marine-protected areas cover at least **10 %** of the Mediterranean Sea by 2020;

- protect cooperation in the management of **sensitive areas** that represent important spawning grounds for the most economically important species;
- take measures to address the problem of **marine litter** and plastics in the sea;
- provide for **appropriate planning in space** ('no fishing' areas on a rotational basis, total or partial closures depending on fishing systems) and time (**biological recovery periods**), in addition to the promotion of technical measures aimed at maximum gear selectivity;
- adopt, in the Mediterranean, a **minimum permitted size for all** commercial and recreational targeted species, depending on sexual maturity and based on the best scientific knowledge available;
- **greater involvement of the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC)** and regional fisheries organisations in the decision-making process in line with the regionalisation mentioned in the common fisheries policy.

Cooperation with third countries: Parliament called for a series of measures in respect of third countries, such as: (i) promoting measures actions through the GFCM to improve the status of stocks shared with third countries; (ii) promoting compliance and a level playing field in fisheries control with third countries and regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs); (iii) assisting non-EU Mediterranean countries to achieve the objective of sustainable fishing.

Working conditions: stressing that 250 000 people are directly employed on boats, Members stated that it is crucial to improve the working conditions of fishermen, starting with decent remuneration and fair competition, while special attention should be paid to the industry's high accident rate and high risk of occupational diseases. They suggested that Member States establish income support instruments as well as a **stable income compensation fund** to cover non-fishing periods.

Raising awareness among consumers: Parliament recommended the mandatory provision of proper consumer information detailing the exact origin of products and the method and date of catch and raising awareness among consumers and educate them to consume fish responsibly.