Implementation of control measures for establishing the conformity of fisheries products with access criteria to the EU market

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Linnéa ENGSTRÖM (Greens/EFA, SE) on the implementation of control measures for establishing the conformity of fisheries products with access criteria to the EU market.

The EU is the world's largest market for fisheries and aquaculture products, absorbing 24 % of total global imports in 2016, and is dependent on imports for over 60 % of its consumption of such products.

Parliament emphasised that one of the key aims of EU policy on fishery and aquaculture imports must be to ensure that imported products meet the same requirements that apply to EU production in every respect, and that EU efforts to make fishing sustainable were incompatible with importing products from countries that fish with no concern for sustainability. However, the outermost regions of the EU, in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, neighbour third countries whose fishing, production and marketing conditions do not always meet European standards, resulting in unfair trade vis-à-vis local production.

Members stressed that in order to ensure equitable treatment of imported and European fishery and aquaculture products, which should be a key aim of EU fisheries policy, the EU should require all imported products to comply with EU conservation and management standards, as well as the hygiene requirements imposed by EU legislation. This would help to create fairer competition and raise standards for the exploitation of marine resources in third countries. They considered that the application of the Control Regulation ensuring compliance with the rules of the common fisheries policy should be enhanced in all Member States, so that it is applied in a homogeneous and harmonised manner at all stages of the supply chain, including retail and restaurant services, and to both EU and imported products.

Sanitary standards: Members expressed concern that the system imposed by the Union and employed by the competent third-country authorities for the verification of sanitary criteria for fishery products exported to the EU does not provide sufficient guarantees that these criteria are always respected.

The Commission is called on to provide more **training, technical assistance** and facilities for institutional capacity building to help developing countries comply with EU rules.

Control regime: Members commended the Commission for the way in which it has enforced the IUU Regulation with respect to third countries, demonstrating that the EU can have a tremendous influence on global fisheries in its role as a responsible market State. They urged the Commission to continue to pressure other market States to implement measures to prevent IUU-caught fish from entering their markets. They called on the Member States and transit and destination countries to step up their coordination in order to ensure that catch certificates issued for fish imports are examined more carefully. It is vital to adopt a **harmonised and coordinated European computerised system** that can facilitate fish import controls in the Member States.

The report called for the powers of the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) to be extended to cover checks on vessels covered by fisheries agreements, including on the basis of cooperation with the competent authorities of the signatory state, and for the EFCA to be given the resources it needs to do so.

Revised control regime: while regretting the Commission's decision to launch a major revision of the entire control regime without proper public consultations on either the implementation of the IUU Regulation, Members insisted that the revision must include, *inter alia*:

- EU-wide standards and norms concerning **inspections at sea**, in port and all along the custody chain;
- full **traceability** of fish as it moves along the custody chain, from the vessel to the final point of sale;
- complete data on catches by all operators, including vessels under 10 metres and recreational fishers;
- common levels of **sanctions** in all Member States;
- system accessible to the Commission and all Member States for the exchange of all information concerning infractions observed and legal and judicial follow-up.

The Commission should submit its proposal to amend the Control Regulation as soon as possible.