

Optimisation of the value chain in the EU fishing sector

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Clara Eugenia AGUILERA GARCÍA (S&D, ES) on the optimisation of the value chain in the EU fishing sector.

The EU fishing sector is facing ever-more difficult and complex challenges. The status of resources and the increase in outgoings, particularly variations in the price of fuel, may have a decisive impact on fishermen's incomes. Small-scale, artisanal and coastal fishing account for 83% of the fishing vessels active in the EU and 47% of total employment in the EU fisheries sector.

Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the common fisheries policy states that Member States should endeavour to give preferential access for small-scale, artisanal or coastal fishermen. However, given that this provision is not complied with, the report encouraged Member States to do so.

The **value chain** of fisheries products is complex, going from producers through various middlemen to the retailer or restaurant. The report highlighted that fish brokers and fish processors play an important role in the value chain and that, on average, the margin in the value chain is that only 10% go to the producers, and the remaining 90% are for the intermediaries.

Shortening of the value chain, notably through the establishment of producer organisations which are key players through their production and marketing plans, is an initial vehicle to improving the income of the small-scale fishers, but also of getting a better product (probably at a better price) to the consumer.

Against this background, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to:

- set up groups of experts whose task will be to analyse and propose **corrective measures** in relation to the use of the various European Maritime and Fisheries Fund appropriations in order to identify the causes of non-implementation and the possible loss of funds;
- facilitate the creation of producer organisations and boost their activities further empowering them to access the necessary financial support;
- help and encourage producer organisations to include the value chain in production and marketing plans, with the aim of adapting supply to demand, securing a fair income for fishermen and ensuring that European consumers find products that meet their needs;
- empower small-scale fisheries by encouraging local consumption through direct and more specialised marketing, zero-kilometre channels of trade, including improved cooperation between the public sector and the fisheries sector through the supply of public establishments such as schools and hospitals with local fish products;
- include the **gender** approach in fisheries policies so that the significant role played by women in the EU fishing sector becomes more visible and so as to enhance their position;
- help the movement of EU small-scale fishers' organisations with the development of a **dedicated logo** which guarantees: a fresh fish product, excellent quality, controlled health standards, compliance with km 0 requirements (favouring local products over products transported from far away), close to consumers, in-line with traditions, etc.;
- put in place a system for the **labelling** of fish, both fresh and processed, clearly indicating the country of origin;

- strictly monitor the **compliance** of products imported into the Union with current EU safety, hygiene and quality requirements, as well as with the regulation on IUU fishing;
- promote **training** programmes for people working in the fishing sector in order to modernise and improve the sector.

Members called, in particular, for systems to be set up with a view to **improving first-sale prices**, so as to benefit fishermen by increasing the reward for their work, and promoting fair and proper distribution of added value along the sector's value chain by reducing operating margins, raising the prices paid to producers, and limiting the prices paid by end consumers.

Reiterating that when there are serious imbalances within the chain, it is proposed that Member States should have the power to intervene, for instance by **setting maximum operating margins** for each agent in the chain.

On better **funding**, Members called on the Commission to look into the possibility of creating, as soon as possible, a **financial instrument specifically to provide support for fisheries**, on the basis of POSEI for the agricultural sector in the outermost regions.

The Commission is called on to:

- promote the use of the information provided by the EU Market Observatory for fisheries and aquaculture products (EUMOFA) so that all operators in the chain have transparent, reliable and up-to-date information for efficient business decision-making;
- revise the COM for fishery products with a view to increasing its contribution to the sector's income, market stability, and better marketing of fishery products and an increase in their added value;
- include fisheries products in its forthcoming proposal for regulations to combat **unfair trade practices**, which are a general problem in the food products sector;
- propose a **clear definition and sketch the foundations for a future European programme** to support small-scale fishing that will help to improve the environmental and socio-economic sustainability of the fishing sector in the EU.