Multiannual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean

2019/0272(COD) - 28/11/2019 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: establish a multiannual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea in accordance with a recommendation of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas ("ICCAT").

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: the Union has been a contracting party to the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas since 14 November 1997. The Convention provides a framework for regional cooperation in the conservation and management of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and adjoining seas through the establishment of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

ICCAT has the authority to adopt decisions (recommendations) on the conservation and management of the fisheries under its jurisdiction, which are binding on the Contracting Parties.

At its 21st extraordinary meeting in 2018, ICCAT adopted Recommendation 18-02 establishing a multi-annual management plan for bluefin tuna in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. The management plan follows the advice of the ICCAT Standing Committee on Research and Statistics (SCRS) that ICCAT should establish a multi-annual management plan for the stock in 2018 as the current state of the stock no longer appears to require the emergency measures provided for in the bluefin tuna recovery plan (established by Recommendation 17-17 amending Recommendation 14-04).

ICCAT Recommendation 18 02 should be implemented in EU law in order to enable the Union to fulfil its international obligations and to provide operators with legal certainty as regards rules and obligations.

CONTENT: the proposed Regulation lays down general rules for the uniform and effective implementation by the Union of the multiannual management plan for bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) in the eastern Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, as adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

The objective of this Regulation is to maintain a biomass of bluefin tuna above levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield.

New rules for the management plan

ICCAT Recommendation 18-02, being transposed by this Regulation, provide for a Management plan, that is more flexible than the existing rules for the recovery, while some measures are more precise or restrictive, such as the control in farms. The main differences could be summarised as follows:

- this Regulation provides for 10 days longer open season for purse seiners than in the Regulation (EU) 2016/1627, unless Member States establish otherwise in their annual fishing plans;

- by-catch limit increases to 20% in this Regulation, in comparison to a 5% in Regulation (EU) 2016/1627;

- up to 20% more purse seiners (reference period 2018) are allowed to fish under this Regulation, in comparison with the Regulation (EU) 2016/1627 and a new sectorial quota for small-scale fisheries in Azores, Madeira and Canaries is recognised;

- with this Regulation there could potentially be a 7% more fish in farms;

- the control system for bluefin tuna is reinforced, concerning live fish monitoring at farms. This is done through random controls based on risk analysis and estimation of carry-over by using stereoscopical cameras.

The Management plan requires discarding and releasing bluefin tuna in certain circumstances. It obliges to discard quantities of bluefin tuna from fishing vessels, including recreational ones that exceed the allocated quota of the vessel, and/or the maximum level of permitted bycatches. Bluefin tuna caught on board vessels that are below the minimum conservation reference size will also have to be discarded, with the exception of a given limit of tolerance established by Member States in their annual fishing plans.

The Management plan takes into account the specificities of the different types of gear and fishing techniques. When implementing the Management plan, the Union and Member States should endeavour to promote coastal fishing activities and the use of fishing gear and techniques which are selective and have a reduced environmental impact, gear and techniques used in traditional and artisanal fisheries.

Implementation of the Regulation

In order to ensure uniform conditions for the implementation of this Regulation, implementing powers should be conferred on the Commission as regards detailed rules for the carry-over of live bluefin tuna, transfer operations and caging operations. The proposed Regulation establishes a detailed list of cases where delegated powers are requested in order to address frequent changes on the recommendations adopted by ICCAT.

As the bluefin tuna management plan pursues an interim management objective that should be revised by ICCAT from 2020, delegated powers are introduced to rapidly transpose the plan into EU law and to implement timely future changes to the bluefin tuna recovery plan, putting the EU fleet in a situation of even level playing field visa-vis third country fleets.