EU/Greenland/Denmark Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement and Implementation Protocol

2021/0037M(NLE) - 15/07/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Fisheries adopted the report by Pierre KARLESKIND (Renew, FR) containing a non-legislative motion for a resolution on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union on the one hand, and the Government of Greenland and the Government of Denmark, on the other hand and the Implementation Protocol thereto.

As a reminder, the new agreement and protocol enable 12 EU vessels to make use of fishing opportunities in Greenland's waters for eight species (cod, pelagic redfish, demersal redfish, Greenland halibut, northern prawn, grenadier, capelin and Atlantic mackerel) for a period of four years, renewable for two years, in return for annual financial compensation from the EU of EUR 16 521 754, of which EUR 2 931 000 has been earmarked for support for and the development of Greenland's fisheries sector.

Previous agreement and protocol

The report underlined that both the Greenlandic and EU fisheries sectors benefit from this agreement both from a socio-economic point of view in terms of direct and indirect employment and gross value added generated by the operations of the EU fleet in Greenlandic waters. However, Members expressed concern at the lack of scientific data needed to draw up accurate estimates of stock levels.

New agreement and protocol

Members pointed out that fishing opportunities for the EU fleet have been cut by an average of 5% compared to the previous protocol. They also noted that the duration of the agreement is four years and that it can be renewed for two more years, which may represent a lack of visibility for European vessels. In addition, the EU's financial compensation is higher than under the previous protocol, while the contribution to sectoral support remains the same and the reference prices for shipowners' fishing authorisations have risen.

Members regretted that EU operators had lost almost four months before the provisional application of the agreement, which was only signed on 22 April 2021 due to the elections in Greenland and the need to form a government. They also stressed the complex nature of the negotiations and their context, marked by the parallel negotiation of the agreement with the United Kingdom, which delayed the conclusion of an agreement. Furthermore, they recalled that Greenland's starting position in these negotiations was a 30% reduction in fishing opportunities for the EU fleet.

In general, the report stressed that the Brexit has destabilised the whole relationship of the North Atlantic countries and that the resulting consequences for the North Sea and North East Atlantic fisheries should not be used to manipulate the distribution of quotas in the Northern Agreements. Members also stressed the importance of relations with Greenland in the context of an EU strategy on the Arctic and in the fight to prevent unregulated fishing on the high seas in the Central Arctic.

Recommendations and requests to the European Commission

The main recommendations to the Commission are as follows:

- ensure that the implementation of the agreement and the protocol thereto help to mitigate global warming and to permit adaptation to its growing effects, to preserve and restore biodiversity and to achieve the sustainability goals set in the European Green Deal, and is aligned with the objectives of the CFP;

- ensure the application of the precautionary approach to the currently exploited and targeted stocks such as cod, redfish and Greenland halibut;

- improve arrangements for data collection and analysis and for updating oversight of use of the EU's financial contribution to sectoral support, with a view to ensuring that stocks fished by the EU are managed sustainably and that the quotas allocated to EU vessels are in fact for surplus stocks;

- ensure improvements in the available data on the fleet size and fishing effort of Greenland's subsistence and small-scale fishing fleets;

- ensure that the protocol is renewed for a further two years in four years' time;

- carry over to the allocation for 2022 all or part of the quotas left unused owing to the delay in the provisional application of the agreement, in line with the best scientific advice;

- ensure that special attention is paid to lost fishing nets, to the collection marine litter, to marine ecosystems and vulnerable species, to the identification of habitats and to bird by-catches, particularly in the context of support for the sector;

- engage in a long-term process of reflection to reduce the instability created by the UK's departure from the EU, particularly in the fisheries sector;

- take full account of the SFPA when the EU establishes its geostrategic position on the Arctic Ocean.

Lastly, the report stressed the need for the Commission to keep the European Parliament informed at all stages of the implementation of the SFPA and its protocol.