Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors

2021/2188(INI) - 05/04/2022 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own-initiative report by Isabel CARVALHAIS (S&D, PT) on 'Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors'.

Members welcomed the Commission's new strategy for a sustainable blue economy in the EU, but deplored the **lack of specific objectives for the different sectors, in particular fisheries and aquaculture** as important sectors of the blue economy.

Comprehensive approach to the EU Blue Economy

The report stressed the need to promote an **integrated approach** to the different sectors of the blue economy, while emphasising that support for the blue economy is an essential component of revitalising the economy as a whole and improving the social and economic situation in several sectors, such as transport and tourism, which have been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members consider that the blue economy should be given appropriate financial support to enable large-scale investment in research, technology and infrastructure at EU and Member State level. They therefore called on the Commission and industry to assess the potential benefits of creating a **European partnership for maritime transport**, including with the private sector, at EU and international level.

The report urged the Commission and Member States to develop new projects and instruments to ensure that all actors in the blue economy base their activities on the responsible and sustainable use of natural resources, decarbonisation and the circular economy. It insisted that the sustainable blue economy should develop within ecological limits, be based on scientific advice and promote a healthy marine environment.

The Commission is invited to propose **legislative and non-legislative initiatives**, based on appropriate assessments of their impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and to ensure that the blue economy becomes the basic pillar for the achievement of the overall objectives of the Green Deal for Europe and the related EU strategies.

In particular, the report stressed the need to:

- improve the implementation and better coordination of the different financial instruments available, including the structural and investment funds, to better promote the blue economy strategy;

- involve **coastal and island communities**, in particular those linked to fisheries, at all stages of the development of the blue economy;

- adopt a holistic approach to all sectors of the blue economy, taking into account their interactions;

- combat **illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing** and conclude bilateral partnerships with third countries, including Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements and the fight against IUU fishing;

- establish a level **playing field with products imported from third countries** and ensure that all fisheries and aquaculture products consumed in the EU come from sustainable food systems and meet the objectives of the Green Deal;

- strengthen the **rights and working conditions** of third country nationals working on EU vessels;

- closely link Sustainable Fisheries **Partnership Agreements** (SFPAs) with EU development aid to improve their added value for coastal communities, and promote small-scale fisheries in Africa;

- propose ambitious mandates for RFMOs to protect fisheries resources in developing countries and in international waters;

- complete the priority projects included in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Baltic Seas and promote the development of the TEN-T motorways of the sea.

Resilience, competitiveness and employment

Recognising that the EU's recovery efforts must be focused on sustainability, competitiveness and growth objectives, the report stressed the need for **sustainable financing instruments** to drive this transition, in particular through increased public and private investment. It called on the

Commission and the Member States to support the sustainable development of the **small-scale fisheries and aquaculture** value chains from fisher to the consumer. It also stressed the need to recognise the socio-economic value of recreational fisheries and their contribution to a blue economy.

According to the report, **offshore wind farms** should only be built if it can be guaranteed that there will be no negative environmental and ecological impacts, or economic, socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences on fishers and aquaculture producers.

Members advocated the creation of an **appropriate financial framework** to stimulate the development of the blue economy and job creation, which integrates and coordinates the various financial instruments available – the structural and investment funds (EMFAF, ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund), Horizon Europe 2021-2027 and others.

According to Members, **greater job security, occupational safety, healthy oceans** providing better earnings and social security in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are essential to attracting women and younger generations, thereby ensuring its rejuvenation and continued survival.

The Commission is also called upon to develop **new forms of sustainable maritime** and coastal tourism, to promote new forms of tourism activities, to provide additional income streams and to increase year-round employment to enhance the value of maritime and coastal areas, while protecting the environment and the blue cultural heritage and preserving marine and coastal habitats.

Blue transition

Members called for the development of instruments to enable sustainable exploitation of maritime resources and diversification of the maritime economy, including support for new products associated with and derived from fisheries activities, which can enhance the cultural and natural heritage, notably through quality tourism.

The report emphasised the importance of fisheries and aquaculture for the **supply of protein**, which is essential for food security, as well as the socio-economic development of local communities and job creation worldwide. It called for sustainable aquaculture models that can contribute to the conservation of ecosystems that provide protection against the effects of climate change.

Cooperation, knowledge and innovation

Members called for greater cooperation between universities, research and innovation centres, public authorities and industry to promote the use of equipment, methods, techniques and practices based on the best available scientific knowledge, capable of improving efficiency and safety at work, economic growth and competitiveness, and environmental sustainability. They called on the Commission to **improve the exchange of information** and cooperation between countries, stressing the importance of collaborative, inclusive and cross-sectoral maritime spatial planning.