The implications of Chinese fishing operations on EU fisheries and the way forward

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted the own-initiative report by Pierre KARLESKIND (Renew, FR) on the implications of Chinese fishing operations on EU fisheries and the way forward.

Ensuring maximum transparency

Members deplored the Chinese authorities' lack of transparency concerning the number of vessels making up its distant-water fleet. They are concerned and bewildered that, in the absence of reliable official figures, the various estimates of the size of China's distant-water fleet range from 2 900 to 16 966 vessels. They noted that the total Chinese fishing fleet contains up to 564 000 vessels, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The FAO insisted on transparency, recognising that improvements are needed to more accurately assign China's distant-water fishery catches by area and disaggregate catches by species.

The Commission is called on to:

- encourage and guide the Chinese Government in implementing standards governing distant-water fishing with a view to moving towards sustainable fishing techniques;

- develop monitoring, tracking and geolocation instruments for vessels on the high seas by supporting the implementation of international initiatives designed to coordinate data systems and provide complete, precise data and transparent information on the location, origin and activity of fishing vessels;

- take measures to **stop the use of flags of convenience** and improve its system for identifying vessels engaged in IUU fishing, so that a boat's country of origin can be identified even if its flag state is unclear and so that boats on which human rights violations have been detected are also included;

- launch a **catch identification system** based on the recommendations in the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes;

- initiate, with its international partners, a strategy for **monitoring bilateral agreements** entered into by China with a view to preventing distortion of competition whether in supply chains or trade.

Defending the EU against unfair trade practices

Member States are asked to strictly enforce EU law on the catch report and traceability system. It is believed that the digitalisation of IUU catch certificates via the CATCH system will reduce opportunities for fraudulent imports and alleviate the administrative burden on Member States. Therefore, the report called on Member States and the Commission to provide information on how many products that are caught by Chinese vessels subsequently enter the EU market. There is also a need to harmonise and step-up customs and port controls, as well as on commercial platforms, of all imported fishery products in order to restrict the movement of products deriving from illegal fishing on the single market. Enhanced **certification of origin** for imported fishery products is needed so that fisheries are subject to European legislation rather than flag state legislation, in order to ensure that products entering the single market come from sustainable sources and their origin and compliance have been checked and that it contributes to preserving public health and preventing the distortion of competition.

Moreover, the report expressed concern about the news regarding the presence of a number of Chinese vessels fishing unchecked in the high seas adjacent to the exclusive economic zones of some Latin American countries, including Ecuador and Argentina. Members encouraged China and the countries with which it has signed fisheries agreements to strengthen their capacity to monitor, detect, prevent and respond to IUU fishing incidents.

Protecting fisheries resources and human rights

Noting that the intensity of the Chinese fishing fleet's activities is on the way to depleting fisheries resources, the report underlined that the status of all targeted fisheries resources globally should be **scientifically assessed** with a view to determining the level of exploitation. In addition, Members advocated the establishment of **management plans**, including regional ones, in countries with which the EU has signed sustainable fisheries partnership agreements. They stressed that introducing better governance of fisheries in developing countries should be a priority in order to combat IUU fishing and build suitable infrastructure, train a workforce qualified in port controls and organise an effective defence system to cope with interference at sea.

Members are deeply concerned about the information regarding **inhumane working conditions** on board some Chinese fishing vessels. In this regard, China is urged to ratify, as soon as possible, the International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention (No 188).

The EU is also called on to step up its cooperation with the United Kingdom, the US, Japan and other key players in fisheries and ocean policy, using its diplomatic and trade instruments to encourage China to make progress on the necessary reforms of its fisheries governance framework.

Noting the increase in Chinese exports to the EU, Members requested that the Commission ensure a rapid, uniform and global implementation of the **CATCH IT system**, when it becomes mandatory.

Ensuring dialogue between China and the EU continues

The report encourages collaboration with China at global level, under the banner of the FAO, RFMOs and the WTO, with a view to devising global policies and regulations to combat IUU fishing. Members noted that the human and financial resources allocated to DG MARE and the EFCA to deal with China and cooperation with third countries are insufficient to cover the true needs. A better balance is needed to ensure that dialogue continues.

Lastly, the Commission is urged to ensure that its fisheries policy on China is consistent with all of its other policies, especially its trade, social and development cooperation policies. An interdepartmental working group on IUU fishing should be set up under the supervision of a Commission vice-president.