Coastal zones: integrated management

1995/2284(COS) - 04/03/1996

The Council held a public debate on this subject on the basis of a Commission communication submitted in 1995. The debate coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, to which most Member States of the European Union are Contracting Parties. At the close of its debate the Council adopted the following conclusions: "THE COUNCIL, Conscious of the major importance of wetlands in the Community, notably on account of the part they play in maintaining biodiversity and as a basis for specific economic activities; Noting the disappearance of a large number of such wetlands in the Community owing to the developments that have taken place there and their non-sustainable exploitation; Noting the continuing degradation of such areas caused by the activities pursued within them or by external pollution spread by the hydrographic network or other carriers of pollution; Realizing that: - the protection of wetlands corresponds to the objectives of the fifth Community Environmental Action Programme and to the Community's international commitments, particularly under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and also to Member States' commitments under the Ramsar Convention; - the Community has progressed in the protection of wetlands through legislation relating to environmental protection (Birds Directive and Habitats Directive, water quality, treatment of waste, etc.) and a series of programmes (ENVIREG, MEDSPA, LIFE, agri-environmental measures, etc.). It has given particular support to the implementation of the MedWet programme; Noting that all these provisions and commitments have not led to the achievement of all of their objectives for wetlands, owing in particular to insufficient integration between the different policies, especially on funding through existing Community financial instruments, and between the corresponding development strategies; Acknowledging that it is a matter of priority to halt the disappearance and degradation of wetlands, to ensure better management and to improve and restore such areas; Takes note of the analysis, the conclusions and the recommendations which the Commission has put forward in its communication on wise use and conservation of wetlands and approves its general approach; Emphasizes the need for better coordination between Community policies and for better coordination between existing Community financial instruments; Maintains that activities in the wetlands must be pursued in strict compliance with the principles of integration and of regional development based on integrated territorial development, and affirms that projects likely to affect such areas significantly should be the subject of an environmental impact assessment in accordance with the provisions of the Impact Assessment Directive, as amended, or an assessment in terms of their effects in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive, as appropriate. In this context the guidelines for the sensible use of wetlands as agreed by the Parties to the Ramsar Convention [Kushiro, 1993] should also be taken into account; Undertakes to ensure that, when sites are proposed, the NATURA 2000 network is consistent with the need to preserve wetland habitats in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directives; Considers it necessary to formulate an integrated policy on management of hydrological resources in terms of both quantity and quality within the wetlands and outside them, and draws attention to the possible importance here of the communication on Community water policy which the Commission will be submitting; Recalls the support it gave to the communication on coastal areas in its conclusions of 18 December 1995, and takes the view that, as in the case of coastal areas, insufficient consultation between all levels of responsibility is one of the main causes of the current situation of wetlands; Emphasizes the need to take wetlands into account when drawing up the Community's strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity which the Council called for in its conclusions of 18 December 1995 concerning the Convention on Biological Diversity; Welcomes the necessary research, education and training efforts being made to ensure the protection of wetlands; Stresses the need for the state of wetlands to be observed and monitored and for information and experience in this field to be exchanged, and the role played by the European Environment Agency in this matter, taking account of existing work and mechanisms in this field, particularly under the Ramsar Convention; Advocates coordination and cooperation with third countries to encourage the wise use of wetlands under existing instruments; Expresses the wish that the Community's concerns regarding the wise use and conservation of wetlands should be taken into account at the next conference of the parties to the Ramsar Convention,

which must be an opportunity for exchanges of information and experience in this field; Calls on the Commission, in the context of its work on the wise use and conservation of wetlands, to take into account the relevant results of the International Conference on Mediterranean Wetlands in Venice in June 1996."