

Reduction in the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels

1997/0105(SYN) - 23/04/1998

The committee voted overwhelmingly to adopt a report on a Commission proposal for a Council Directive aimed at reducing the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels. The rapporteur is Ms Heidi HAUTALA (Greens, Fin) and, inter alia, the proposal amends Directive 93/12/EEC. The committee rejected the advice of its rapporteur to accept the Commission view that the appropriate legal base for the proposal is the first paragraph (Council procedure, environment) of Article 130s. It opted instead for Article 100a (internal market), which, if accepted by the Council, will bring the measure into the codecision procedure. An amendment adopted by the committee pointed out that studies had shown that benefits from reducing sulphur emissions by reductions in the sulphur content of fuels would be considerably greater than the estimated costs to industry. Another amendment suggested the use of tax incentives to encourage emission reductions. The Commission proposal covered two types of fuel: heavy fuel oil of the kind used in refinery, power stations and industry and gas oil. The committee agreed with the rapporteur that it should also cover bunker oil and marine diesel oil (used by ships and boats) but rejected her suggestion to include aviation kerosene as well. The committee brought forward the deadline for the introduction of the proposed limit (a maximum sulphur content of 1% by weight) on heavy fuel oil: this provision is to come into force as from 1 January 1999, instead of 1 January 2000 as proposed by the Commission. It halved the maximum permitted sulphur content of gas oil (as from 1 January 1999) from the 0.2% by weight proposed by the Commission to 0.1%. And it set its own limit for bunker oil and marine diesel oil: 1.5% by weight as from 1 January 2000. However, the directive also provides for a number of derogations. The committee was anxious that the proposed directive should not prevent Member States from introducing more stringent environmental protection measures than those it laid down. It also cited the need for further research.