Fishery sector problems in the NAFO zone

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The Committee adopted the report by Mr ARIAS CAÑETE. Discussion centred on the Union's relations with Canada, which often difficult, have been particularly strained since the "Halibut War" in 1995, during which the Canadian authorities illegally seized the Spanish freezer vessel "ESTAI" in international waters. At this time, some tensions arose within the Union when, despite almost universal condemnation of the Canadian action, fishermen in certain Member States displayed their sympathy for the overall Canadian position and their frustrations with EU fisheries policy in general, by flying the Canadian flag on their vessels. To a degree, the amendments presented reflected these tensions. However, the majority of members accepted the view of the rapporteur, that it was necessary to continue to take a firm line with Canada. The report points out in particular, that many aspects of Canadian law continue to be discriminatory and that Canada's behaviour within NAFO appears to be be motivated, not by a genuine concern for conservation, but rather, by a desire to reduce fishing opportunities for the European fleets in order to reserve the stocks for itself. Mr ARIAS repeats the call already made in several EP resolutions for Canada to ratify the bilateral agreement negotiated in 1992 and to allow access for Community vessels to Canadian ports. He calls on the Commission to protect European fishing rights in the area (which in the case of Spain, go back to the 16th century) and to propose a modification of the voting system within NAFO, which disadvantages the Union by providing for only one vote per contracting party. He further argues that the Commission should seek the support of other countries, such as Norway, in order to draw up a joint strategy within NAFO, so as to ensure consistent management of overlapping fish stocks and stocks of major migratory species. Moreover, improved scientific research and use of satellite technology would strengthen the Community position. Finally, the report also indicates the Committee's concern that problems in other domains, such as those related to marine mammals, should not adversely affect relations in the fisheries sector and should be addressed in the appropriate fora and not in NAFO.