# Multi-annual guidance programmes for the fishing fleets at the end of 1996 (regul. 3699/93 /EEC). Annual report

1997/2168(COS) - 03/02/1998

The conservation of fishery resources is crucial to the future of the EU fishing industry. In order to manage resources better, multiannual guidance programmes (MGPs) designed to reduce the overall amount of fish caught were introduced, starting in the early 1980s. Every year the Commission reports on the results of the MGPs and Parliament is required to deliver an opinion on the Commission's assessment, which is particularly significant this year as it is the final report on the third MGP (covering the period 1992-96). A new programme (the fourth MGP) will cover the period 1997-2001. The Committee adopted a report (under the consultation procedure) by Arlindo CUNHA (EPP, P) which puts forward various practical proposals designed to bring the capacity of fishing fleets into line with the available resources. The first suggestion concerns sanctions. According to the committee's report, only genuinely effective penalties such as virtually automatic quota reductions will make Member States comply with the objectives of the MGPs. Mr Cunha believes that present measures (such as the abolition of Structural Fund subsidies for the renewal and modernisation of fleets) do not have a sufficient deterrent effect because they do not impinge enough on the substantial profits made by vessel-owners from overfishing stocks of certain species of fish. In addition, the report calls for Member States to undertake to measure their fleet capacity in accordance with EU criteria and says that this procedure ought to be completed in the course of the current year. According to Mr CUNHA, some Member State administrations are reluctant to forward reliable data on their fleets to the Commission, with the result that the capacity reductions needed are constantly postponed to subsequent programmes. Moreover, the report argues that not only do the problems over standardising ways of measuring tonnage need to be overcome: there is also a need for standard EU criteria for calculating engine power. Mr Cunha draws a fairly gloomy picture of the overall achievements of the MGPs. Although the targets for catch reductions were much more modest than those recommended by experts, the results have been disappointing and, above all, have varied greatly from country to country. Broadly speaking, the reductions achieved in countries such as Denmark, Spain and Portugal have made up for the lack of real progress in other Member States. Distortions of this kind are dangerous as they are likely to cause the States which have met their obligations to ask what the point of their efforts - in both economic and social terms - has been, when other States are making little or no sacrifice.