Fisheries products in the Union: responsability, partnership, competitiveness

1997/2304(COS) - 25/05/1998

Responsibility, partnership and competitiveness: these three principles, set out in the Commission's paper on the future for the market in fisheries products, are to serve as its guidelines in the review of the common organisation of the fisheries market (COM). In adopting the report by John McCARTIN (EPP, Irl), the Committee hopes to play a part in the broad debate on this issue which has been set in motion by the Commission's paper. The report was adopted under the consultation procedure. The motion for a resolution, which was adopted unopposed with one abstention, calls for the COM to be refocused by investigating different options such as a gradual reduction in market intervention (which would allow more scope for market forces and hence achieve a better match between supply and demand), changes in the role of producer organisations, stricter measures against the sale of illegally landed fish and financial compensation for voluntary reductions in fishing. The main aim is to eliminate the contradictions between the various strands of the market policy and the common fisheries policy. In practical terms, this means gradually promoting carry-over premiums in the place of withdrawal aid. Withdrawal and destruction (discards at sea) should not be supported but penalised. The Commission is also asked to consider whether the introduction of financial compensation for a voluntary reduction of fishing activity might be a good way of compensating shipowners and fishermen who would no longer be able to benefit from the withdrawal system. The committee also emphasises the need to strengthen controls, for example by allowing fisheries products to be landed only at ports designated as having the capacity to carry out the necessary checks. In contrast to the proposals contained in the Commission's paper, the report argues that Community producers should continue to receive protection. Tariff reductions are thus undesirable and in any case the principle of reciprocity should be observed. The committee also calls for reference prices and safeguard clauses to be maintained. Protection must certainly be retained against all forms of unfair competition resulting from ultra-low wages, fishing methods that are incompatible with resource conservation and fisheries products of suspect quality obtained under dubious conditions of hygiene. Given the Community's deficit in fisheries products, the report argues that a system should be introduced differentiating the treatment of products of joint ventures with Community capital from that of third-country imports proper. In addition, measures should be taken to deal with the problem of vessels flying flags of convenience, whose practices distort competition on the market. Lastly, the resolution calls for the legislative proposal to provide for an internal information system for improved market monitoring as well as technical health controls to enable the quality of Community products to be certified.