Diversification of fishing activities

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By adopting the report of Mr Souchet (I-EDN,F), the Committe agreed with the proposition to put off the compensation of fishermen affected by the Council's ban on drift nets until the European Court has ruled on the appeal against the ban lodged by producer organisations.It would be inadmissible for Community funding to be used to assist fishermen who use drift nets to diversify their activities if this ban were judged to be out of order by the Court", says Mr Souchet. The ban on fishing with drift nets, intended to protect dolphins and other marine life, would hit French, UK and Irish fishermen particularly hard and would take effect from 1 January 2002 under a Council Regulation adopted on 8 June 1998.If the drift-net ban is not ruled illegal by the Court, fishermen and shipowners in the Atlantic and Mediterranean will need financial aid in order to convert vessels to other types of fishing or leave the fisheries sector altogether. A proposed Council Decision provides for payments of up to ECU 50 000 for those ceasing all economic activity and ECU 20 000 for those converting to other types of fishing but the Fisheries Committee also wants compensation for local authorities and producer organisations which have invested in port facilities and markets. Other amendments tabled in Mr Souchet's report call for the diversification measures to be applied fairly to fishermen in different Member States, ensuring that all those who suffer genuine loss are compensated and that the aid is not abused. Mr Souchet says fishermen should not be allowed to continue using drift nets by sailing under non-EU flags and the ECU 50 000 grant should only go to fishermen over 50 who stop work. He also wants to ensure that enough money is available for the diversification measures by allowing Member States to exceed Structural Fund limits where necessary.