

Aquaculture in the European Union: present and future

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The committee unanimously adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Hugues MARTIN (EPP-ED, F) in response to the Commission communication on aquaculture published in September 2002 as part of its CFP reform package. Pointing out that aquaculture helped to maintain and develop employment, the report called on the Commission to promote aquaculture in coastal areas affected by significant restructuring and in general in coastal and rural areas where there are no alternative sources of employment. The committee acknowledged that the sector suffered from a negative public image and that certain types of intensive aquaculture posed problems from the point of view of animal health and welfare, particularly from over-crowding. However, it felt that the answer lay in stepping up research into all areas of aquaculture (including disease prevention and the development of environment-friendly substances for and methods of treatment), encouraging the adoption of new farming techniques and coming up with proposals to safeguard fish welfare by reviewing stocking densities and prohibiting inhumane slaughter methods. The report also emphasised that the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG) regulation must be amended to enable the aquaculture sector to become eligible for subsidies aimed at improving ecological performance and at financing "start-ups" by young people. Other recommendations contained in the report included a call for a concerted communications programme, to be drawn up by the Commission, the Member States and the industry itself, aimed at improving the sector's image. In particular, the quality of its products should be promoted through the use of designations of origin. MEPs also welcomed the Commission's proposal to update and simplify existing legislation on food safety, public health and animal health. However, they said that new technical and environmental standards should take into account "the economic importance of all businesses, including the smallest". In the wake of various oil tanker disasters (Erika and Prestige), the committee called for the creation of a new instrument designed to help the sector deal both with this type of man-made situation and biological natural disasters (such as toxic algal blooms). It also wanted to see the Commission intervene in the market for sea bream and bass, where prices had been affected by loss-making sales on the part of some firms. Lastly, the committee was opposed to any attempts to introduce genetically-modified fish into the EU until such time as this "can be demonstrated to present no dangers for consumers or the environment", and called on the Commission to undertake a feasibility study on the creation of a data bank and the conservation of genetic stocks of wild fish.