Common Fisheries Policy CFP: reform action programme and roadmap

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The committee adopted the report initially drawn up by Camilo NOGUEIRA ROMÁN (Greens/EFA, E), who asked for his name to be withdrawn from the final report after it was heavily amended in committee. The committee therefore decided to table the report under the name of its chairman, Struan STEVENSON (EPP-ED, UK). The report as finally adopted, expressing qualified support for the Commission's "roadmap" for reforming the Common Fisheries Policy, was considerably less critical of the Commission than the rapporteur's original text. However, the committee criticised the Commission for its delay in presenting its proposals, urging it to avoid a "legal void" which could seriously jeopardise stocks if the reform package was not approved by the end of 2002. It also asked the Commission to give priority to economic and social measures intended to soften the impact of reform, and argued that fisheries should be regarded as an economic and social sector which must be preserved. On resource conservation and fisheries management, the committee called for greater investment in scientific research and development and for the application of the precautionary principle to the CFP, stressing that it must be applied to all fishery sectors including industrial fisheries. Management of fish stocks should be differentiated on the basis of the situation of each species. Although the committee agreed that the viability of the CFP depended on reducing both capacity and effort, it wanted the Commission to take account of previous efforts made by Member States when coming up with proposals for scrapping. On access to waters and resources, the Commission was urged to protect the already endangered stocks of the North Sea and ensure that any consideration of open access to the North Sea was ruled out, in the absence of scientific evidence regarding non-quota species, risks of by-catches of quota species and other potential harm to the marine environment. MEPs also called for the 6-12-mile coastal zones to be installed as a permanent feature of the CFP. On monitoring and implementation, MEPs welcomed plans to harmonise monitoring of the CFP and called for the introduction of standard minimum penalties in the EU for infringements. They warned, however, that the Commission's resources and staff needed to be increased. They also felt that the establishment of Regional Advisory Committees would boost the effectiveness of monitoring at local level. On international fisheries, the committee agreed that the Community's activities must ensure sustainable and responsible fisheries and must function according to the same standards as in EU waters. The Commission and Council should adopt minimum standards for the conclusion of international agreements, based on the FAO Code of Conduct for Reponsible Fishing. There should also be closer coordination between the EU's development cooperation policy and the external aspects of the CFP. The committee was opposed to the imposition of unilateral limits on Community fishing in international Mediterranean waters, pointing out that this would achieve very little if third countries did not also apply those limits. Turning to aquaculture, the committee expressed concern at the potentially damaging environmental consequences and called for a clear and coherent strategy for the sustainable development of this sector. The Commission was urged to develop an integrated approach to the processing industry in the context of CFP reform, including strengthening support mechanisms to offset the impact of further liberalisation of fishery product prices, especially on the canning industry.