Fisheries: action plan to integrate environmental protection

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The committee adopted the report by Dominique SOUCHET (Ind, F) on the Commission's proposed action plan. Echoing many of the points raised in its previous reports, the committee emphasised that fishermen shared the goal of protection of the marine environment and were themselves among the victims of any impairment of that environment. It therefore rejected a negative perception of the fishing industry and called on the Commission to involve fishermen and fisheries organisations in research efforts aimed at protecting the marine environment, improving the system of stock evaluation and devising responsible methods of fishing. The report pointed out that any technical measures needed to take account of the specific characteristics of each fishing zone and each fish species and should not therefore be uniform or decided on centrally. The recovery of vulnerable stocks should be dealt with through flexible management instruments, such as TACs and quotas, thereby enabling fishing effort to be adjusted to match the state of resources, in preference to drastic and irreversible measures such as the scrapping of vessels. The committee also called for the maintenance of public aid for the modernisation of fleets with the aim of improving working conditions and safety. The report approved the Commission's guiding principle, namely, the implementation of an ecosystem-based approach, provided that man's action through fishing was demonstrably a full part of that approach. It also welcomed the priority given to improving fishing methods with a view to reducing discards, by-catches and the impact on habitats. The committee reiterated Parliament's previously-expressed concerns about the environmental impact of industrial fishing and renewed its call for the Commission to carry out a thorough study into this issue. It also expressed concern at the new risk to the environment which could arise from the proliferation in the sea of genetically-modified fish originating from aquaculture and called for the development of common environmental standards in this sector. Lastly, MEPs wanted to see environmental policy concerns given greater prominence in fisheries agreements between the EU and third countries.