Tuna: fleet and industry. Evolution and future in the European Union and in the world

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Daniel VARELA SUANZES-CARPEGNA (EPP-ED, E) on the situation and future prospects of the tuna fleet and industry in the EU and worldwide. The report began by pointing out that tuna was currently the world's most commercially valuable fish species and was therefore of great importance to the future of the EU fishing industry. The canning industry directly employed 40 000 people in the EU and the market for tuna products was enjoying buoyant growth. Moreover, the EU had the world's largest tuna fleet by capacity, with average catches of 350 000 tonnes a year. However, the committee warned that more needed to be done in favour of the sector, whose commercial viability was being undermined by EU policy. The report argued that tuna products from third countries should be required to meet the same food quality and health standards applied to Community produce, Otherwise, the market would continue to be distorted by unfair competition. MEPs said that the inspection regime should be intensified and pointed to the need to create laboratories to test imported products and uphold standards. They also called for a review of Community customs legislation affecting the European tuna industry, in the wake of tariff quotas awarded to south-east Asian countries seen as damaging to EU interests. The committee noted that several tuna stocks were under pressure, at least in part owing to an excess of fishing capacity, and were particularly vulnerable to fishing from illegal vessels or to those flying flags of convenience. It said that a coordinated approach was needed among all countries concerned to prevent over-fishing, and therefore urged the EU to take the initiative in RFOs to adapt fleet capacity to available resources. In particular, RFOs should establish a list of individual vessels "which comply with the relevant rules", which would be allowed to fish. All others should be excluded from the list and even subjected to commercial penalties. Such actions would require cooperation among the various RFOs. In the light of these concerns, the report called on the Commission to draw up an action plan and "structural support framework" for the sector. It also argued that the importance of the regulatory role of RFOs meant that a new unit should be created within the Fisheries DG to deal with tuna and other highly migratory species, with "sufficient staff and economic resources".