

Common Fisheries Policy CFP: establishment of Regional Advisory Councils

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The committee adopted the report by Seán Ó NEACHTAIN (UEN, IRL) amending the proposal under the consultation procedure. MEPs argued that the Commission's proposal was far too timid, especially as regards financing, and therefore tabled amendments designed to give RACs real viability. Whereas the proposal provided for a maximum of EUR 100,000 for each of the 6 new RACs in the first year, phasing out all financing after 3 years, MEPs supported a maximum of EUR 500,000, thereby giving RACs the capacity to conduct their own research. They also argued that RACs - as non-profit organisations - would require permanent financial support. The committee also called for a clearer status for RACs, each of which should be a "legally incorporated non-commercial body" registered in a Member-State. Other amendments gave RACs powers to send observers to any meetings, at national or EU level, where stocks in their geographical area are being discussed. MEPs also underlined that the Commission should be present at all RAC meetings. Pointing out that RACs were primarily designed to represent fishing interests, the committee said that "at least" two-thirds of the seats in the general assembly and executive committee of each RAC should go to the fisheries sector. It also believed that RACs were the ideal venue for fishermen and scientists to overcome their traditional differences over the state of stocks and therefore argued that the RACs should always adopt recommendations by consensus (the Commission proposal allows minorities in RACs to issue dissenting opinions). Lastly, given that the Commission would review the functioning of RACs after three years, the committee believed that if experience proved the effectiveness of the new bodies, they should in the future be given a "significant management role" in the CFP.