Fishery resources: the Community's participation in Regional Fisheries Organisations RFOs

2000/2068(COS) - 08/12/1999 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : to present a Communication relating to Community participation in Regional Fisheries Organisations (RFOs). CONTENT : the intention expressed by the Community on a number of occasions of playing a more prominent role on the international stage and enhacing its capacity for concerted action in the area of external relations is particularly pressing in the fisheries sector. The disturbing condition of the majority of the world's fish stocks combined with the excessive exploitation capacity of the major world fleets calls for closer international cooperation in managing fishery resources. This cooperation should encompass both the management of stocks that can be fished in waters under the sovereignty of several coastal States and those found partially or wholly beyond those waters, firstly to ensure that measures adopted for the high seas are compatible with those for the EEZs and, secondly, to prevent the principle of the freedom of the high seas to which the Community attaches particular importance from developing into law of the jungle. It is essential then that the Community, ranked fourth among the world's fisheries powers, play a greater role in establishing and determining a regulatory framework to govern fishery resources which is in keeping with its international commitments in order to safeguard on a lasting basis the economic interests of its high-seas fleets and the effective implementation of a policy of responsible fishing. Furthermore, the regional fisheries organisations (RFOs) are the main vehicle for international cooperation. Arising from international agreements, they provide a forum within which representatives of the states meet to establish, using the best scientific data available, arrangements for managing fish stocks. They constitute, therefore, a particularly appropriate mechanism as they provide a legal framework in which account can be taken of the distinctive nature and characteristic features of their area by virtue of their regional character. Without prejudging the necessary consideration of the principles and concepts the Community will have to defend within the RFOs which will be developed further, this Communication will confine itself to dealing with aspects of the role of the Community will be required to perform within the RFOs and evaluating the sharing out of the tasks arising from that participation between the Community and the Member States. In addition, participating in the regional fisheries organisations will represent a heavy burden in terms of representation, participation, providing and transmitting of data and implementing the measures adopted, in particular as regards the monitoring of fishing activities. The intention expressed by the Community of playing a more prominent role on the international stage reaffirms, as far as fisheries and more especially the management of fish stocks on the high seas are concerned, the undertakings the Community gave when ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the other international legal instruments supplementing it. It will require: - the high-profile and necessary presence and activeparticipation of the Community in the regional fisheries organisations, in line with its exclusive competence for external fisheries; - the assignment by the Commission and the Member States of the human and material resources needed for effective participation in the work of the RFOs; - the introduction of arrangements for transposing the RFO recommendations which are both effective and transparent; - the establishment of close and properly understood cooperation between the Commission and the Member States based on the Commission concentrating again on its original mission, i.e. of representation to defend the interests of the Union and its fishermen, together with legislative asks; - the Member States to take on responsibility for monitoring, both financially and in terms of material and human resources, with NAFO being the only exceptional case which should not exist and must be terminated speedily. The Community is a contracting party to 10 regional fisheries organisations and an observer to 2 others. It has become a member of one-third of them over the last 4 years. In addition, it is particularly involved in defining and establishing the SEAFO and the arrangement for the southeast Atlantic. It has expressed an interest, lastly, in playing an active role in setting up an organisation to cover the central western Pacific and has applied for membership of the

ICATT. The reason for this increased participation is the wish to be actively involved in framing measures for the conservation and management of resources fished by Community shippowers in order to ensure, firstly, that due account is taken of the interests of Nations involved in distant-water fishing in the same way as those of coastal States, and secondly, that the principles and concepts put into effect in the different RFOs are consistent and respect the special features of each of them. It also enables the Community to ensure consistency and synergy with the policy it is pursuing as part of its bilateral fishery relations with non-member countries. It constitutes, in relation to the latter, an assurance of its commitment in relation to sustainable resource management. In line with the obligations arising under the New York Agreement, the Community gives financial encouragement, as part of the fishing agreements it has concluded with developing countries, to the latters' participation in the RFOs concerned.