Fisheries resources: recovery of the sole stocks in the Western Channel and the Bay of Biscay

2003/0327(CNS) - 23/12/2003 - Document attached to the procedure

The over fishing of sole in the Western Channel and in the Bay of Biscay has inevitably left existing stocks critically low. To such an extent that the scientific community is warning of a total collapse of stock if urgent action is not taken. In recent years the EU has taken various measures to try and protect its stock of cod. Now, the Commission is seeking to introduce similar measures to protect its sole stock in the Western Channel and the Bay of Biscay. It is hoped that dramatic measures will ensure safe biological levels within five to ten years. The proposed instruments for combating the decline in sole stock are similar to those used under the cod recovery plan, namely reduced fishing possibilities, limits on fishing effort and specific control measures. However, one important distinction is that, unlike the cod recovery plan, the targets set in the latest plans are expressed not in terms of the level of adult fish in the stock (biomass) but rather in terms of fishing mortality rates - or in other words the proportion of fish removed by fishing. The Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries or STEFC will decide when sole has reached a safe biological limit to allow for a resumption of fishing in the Western Channel and Bay of Biscay. The EU is offering aid to those Member States and those fishing communities most in need of it. Recovery plans will be financed from the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG).