

European Fisheries Fund (EFF)

2004/0169(CNS) - 14/07/2004 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to establish a European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and define the framework for Community support for the sustainable development of the fisheries sector and coastal fisheries zones.

PROPOSED ACT : Council Regulation.

CONTENT : the European fishing industry currently receives aid from the European Union (EU) under the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG). In common with the other so-called "structural funds", the current financial programme covers the period 2000 to 2006. The new European Fisheries Fund will succeed FIFG and provide aid to fisheries from 2007 to 2013.

To be effective, EU funding to fisheries has to be adapted to the evolving needs of the fishing and aquaculture industry in an enlarging Union. The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is undergoing a major reform, agreed by the Council of Fisheries Ministers in December 2002. The new Fund will help implement the major changes under this reform aimed at delivering sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture.

In addition, to optimise the impact of public aid, there must be coherence between the Fisheries Fund and the other EU Structural Funds. EFF reflects the new approach for EU Funds towards simplification, strategic planning and greater responsibility for the Member States in the choice and implementation of funding. EFF combines innovations and continuity in order to better meet the challenges facing the fishing and aquaculture industry and the areas concerned.

The European Fisheries Fund, like the FIFG, is to play a dual role in adding Community value. Firstly, as a financial instrument forming an integral part of the common fisheries policy, it is to accompany resource management measures and help adjust the structures of the production sector and the CFP monitoring tools. Secondly, it is to maintain a concern for cohesion vis-à-vis the populations and areas engaged in fishing activities.

As proposed here, the European Fisheries Fund will be able to play a greater role in the development and maintenance of the economic and social fabric of communities involved in fishing, for which the economic alternatives remain limited, while at the same time pursuing the objectives which the Treaty sets for the CFP.

The Fund will keep the same foundations and principles, as other Structural Funds, of multi-annual programming and monitoring, partnership, part-financing, subsidiarity and concentration on the least-favoured regions and those most under threat from the impact of fish stock recovery measures.

Each Member State will draw up a national strategic plan setting out its specific goals and priorities for Fund action, in the light of the Community strategic guidelines for the common fisheries policy. This strategic plan, which indicates the interventions and the financial contribution from the Fund and the other needed resources, will serve as a reference frame for drawing up the operational programmes.

The new EFF will target four priority areas. These reflect EFF's task of facilitating the implementation of measures adopted under the reform of the CFP to secure economic, environmental and social sustainability in fisheries.

The four EFF priorities have been identified as follows:

- Reduction of fishing pressure and better protection for the marine environment;
- Aquaculture, and processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products;
- Measures of collective benefit;
- Sustainable development of coastal fishing areas.

More specifically, the proposal highlights that assistance under the Fund shall aim to:

- support the common fisheries policy so as to ensure exploitation of living aquatic resources in a way which creates the necessary conditions for sustainability in economic, environmental and social terms;
- promote a sustainable balance between resources and the capacity of the Community fleet;
- strengthen the competitiveness of the operating structures and the development of economically viable enterprises in the fisheries sector;
- foster the protection of the environment and natural resources;
- encourage sustainable development and the improvement of the quality of life in marine, lake and coastal areas affected by fishing and aquaculture activities;
- promote equality between women and men in the development of the fisheries sector and coastal fishing areas.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS : the proposed overall budget for EFF for the seven year-programming period 2007 to 2013 amounts to EUR 4.963 billion. Three-quarters of this budget will be allocated to the regions lagging behind, most of which are located in the new Member States.