Launching a debate on a Community approach towards eco-labelling schemes for fisheries products

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Carmen FRAGA ESTÉVEZ (EPP-ED, ES) in response to the Commission communication launching a debate on a Community approach towards eco-labelling schemes for fisheries products. MEPs regretted the Commission's delay in coming forward with its communication, which had allowed privately initiated eco-labels to proliferate without any form of control. This was giving rise to "issues of credibility and confusion for producers and consumers". The report also deplored the communication's "lack of ambition" and felt that it did not properly address the issues. It stressed that "whatever labels are used in the marketplace must be independently monitored in order to be absolutely reliable and credible for the consumer". A further debate was needed, with the participation of all parties concerned, including representatives of the non-industrial fishing sector.

MEPs said that establishing a single EU eco-label was bureaucratically cumbersome. They called on the Commission to draw up a communication within six months, detailing the minimum requirements and guidelines with which a Community eco-labelling scheme for fisheries products must comply. There was a need to take account of international criteria, in particular those set out by the FAO, to ensure that any EU eco-labelling scheme was consistent with the FAO Code of Conduct and the resolutions adopted by other international organisations such as the UN and the WTO, and that it did not pose obstacles to trade, particularly as regards developing countries. The committee added that the scheme should be promoted by the Commission, which should be responsible for establishing rules governing its operation and guaranteeing the independence of specialist accreditation and certification bodies, key components in the procedure, as well as the credibility of the claims made by the label.