Fishing industry: improving the economic situation

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Pedro GUERREIRO (GUE/NGL, PT) in response to the Commission communication on improving the economic situation in the fishing industry. The report regretted the "lack of ambition" shown in the Commission's paper and deplored a policy which, "taking advantage of the socio-economic deterioration in the industry owing to the steep rise in fuel prices, seeks to promote the scrapping of vessels and the permanent cessation of activities".

The committee criticised the fact that the measures proposed did not have a genuine socio-economic dimension and did not take account of "the consequences of their implementation for vessel crews". As far as intermediate measures were concerned, MEPs regretted that, as regards rescue and restructuring aid, the Commission was continuing to block the possibility of granting compensatory payments and operating aid. They therefore stressed the need to adopt "immediate concrete measures" to reduce the high instability of fuel prices for the industry, including the creation of a guarantee fund with Community participation to safeguard the stability of fuel prices and the granting of a transitional compensatory payment for fishing enterprises affected.

With regard to medium and long-term measures, the committee also criticised the lack of vision in the new European Fisheries Fund's approach to aid for engine replacement and said that some of the proposed measures would make certain fishing practices virtually unviable and could affect safety as well as possibly encouraging increased fraud in the form of under-declaring of engine power. The report stressed the need for the EFF to continue to grant aid for the renewal and modernisation of the fishing fleet - and in particular for the replacement of engines - especially for small-scale inshore and artisanal fishing, and for the replacement of vessels over 20 years old, which are no longer operating safely.

The Commission was also urged to recognise the specific nature of small-scale inshore fishing and artisanal fishing in the CFP, to analyse the extent to which the current instruments are suitable for responding to the sector’s needs, and to submit a proposal for a Community support programme for small-scale inshore fishing and artisanal fishing, which would help to coordinate actions and channel funding from other existing instruments to deal with the specific problems facing this segment of the industry.

Among other points dealt with in the report, the committee called for measures to strengthen the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, such as better control mechanisms on the part of the Member States and improved controls at EU borders to prevent the entry into the EU of fish that had been caught illegally. MEPs called on the Commission to review the current common fisheries policy provisions in this area and said that there was a particularly pressing need for regulations to prevent a significant percentage of catches from being discarded.

The committee reiterated Parliament's request to the Commission that it should take a more wide-ranging view of measures to protect the marine environment and rebuild depleted fish stocks, in particular by considering and studying other factors which have a considerable impact on the marine environment and the state of fishery resources, such as coastal and offshore pollution, industrial and agricultural effluents, deep-sea dredging and maritime transport, to complement current management methods. The report called for a Community initiative in this area. Lastly, MEPs stressed that it was essential to achieve a balance between the socio-economic situation and environmental sustainability, and they underlined the need to

implement a mechanism for subsidising or compensating fishermen who are affected by the economic and social effects of stock recovery plans or other measures to provide increased protection for ecosystems, especially in less favoured regions.