

European Fisheries Fund (EFF)

2004/0169(CNS) - 27/07/2006 - Final act

PURPOSE: the establishment of the European Fisheries Fund.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Regulation 1198/2006/EC on the European Fisheries Fund.

CONTENT: this Regulation establishes the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and defines the framework for Community support for the sustainable development of the fisheries sector and inland fishing. It has a total budget of EUR 3.8 billion and will last from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013. The EFF replaces the current "Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance" (FIFG). Its objectives and priorities are based on the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy with a particular emphasis on the sustainable development of the EU's fishing sector. Since 1993 the sustainable development component of the CFP has been integrated into the rules governing the Structural Funds. The measures provided for in the Regulation apply to the entire territory of the Community.

EFF financial assistance will seek to support the following objectives:

- The CFP and the sustainable development of the EU's fishing sector.
- A sustainable balance between fish resources and the capacity of the fishing fleet.
- The promotion of sustainable inland fishing.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of the fishing fleet.
- Protecting, as well as enhancing, the environment of fish.
- Improving the quality of life in those areas where fishing takes place.
- Promoting equality between men and women in the fishing sector.

A number of principles have been established including that of complementarity, consistency and compliance – in other words the EFF shall provide assistance which complements national, regional and local action. Further, the objectives of the EFF are to be pursued through close Member State/Commission co-operation such as the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the operational programmes.

In addition to establishing these principles, the Regulation requires the Member States to draw up firstly, National Strategic Plans and secondly, an Operational Programme, both of which will form the framework for implementing the EFF. The National Strategic Plan sets out the Member States' individual priorities and objectives and will include the estimated public financial resources required plus deadlines for implementation. The operational programme on the other hand, also to be drawn up by each Member States, will contain a synthesis of the policy areas eligible for support, a description and justification of the priority axes chosen; the setting of specific targets for each priority axis and a summary description of the principal measures envisaged for implementing the priority axes.

The operational programmes, will be based on five priority axes:

1) Measures for the adoption of the Community fishing fleet: under this heading the EFF will offer financial support to owners of fishing vessels and fishermen who have been affected by the reform of the CFP and, in particular, adjustments in the level of permitted fishing. Owners will receive aid for either the permanent cessation of fishing or the temporary cessation of fishing activities. The EFF can contribute to financing the permanent cessation of fishing activities – provided that it forms part of a fishing effort adjustment plan and includes actions such as the scrapping of fishing vessels or else reusing vessels to create artificial reefs. Alternatively, the EFF may be used to invest in on-board technology and the modernisation of fishing vessels.

2) Aquaculture , inland fishing, processing and marketing of fishery and aquaculture products: support under this heading will be targeted at: investing in aquaculture; public health measures and animal health measures. For example, the EFF may support investments in the construction and modernisation of installations with a view to improving working conditions, hygiene, animal health and environmental improvements. The EFF may also offer compensation to mollusc farmers for the temporary suspension of harvesting farmed molluscs due to the presence of toxin producing plankton.

3) Measures of common interest: within the scope of this priority axis the EFF will offer assistance to “broad” measures or those not normally undertaken by private enterprises such as the protection and development of aquatic fauna and flora. On a practical level actions could include removing lost fishing gear from the sea bed or the rehabilitation of inland waters, including spawning grounds and migration routes for migratory species.

4) The sustainable development of fisheries areas: the EFF is seeking to support the implementation of CFP sustainable development priorities and as such is offering assistance to environmental measures including support for coastal environments. As a matter of priority, assistance under the fourth axis, will target areas with a low population density, fishing regions which are in decline and small fishing communities. A fisheries area selected for assistance will be limited in size and, as a rule, shall be smaller than NUTS level 3. Measures eligible for financial assistance will include strengthening the competitiveness of the fishing area concerned and economic diversification.

5) Technical Assistance: funding under this heading will be devoted to evaluations, studies and meetings etc needed to implement the EFF. It will be allocated 0.8% of the budget.

Whilst the EFF retains many FIFG features, a number of new elements have been introduced into the EFF in a bid to simplify and improve upon the previous financial instrument and to take account of the changing needs of the fishing industry. The EFF has been designed so that, in future, Member States can benefit from simplified implementation rules and take advantage of the greater flexibility afforded by the revised eligibility criteria.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 4 September 2006.