Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities

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The Committee on Fisheries adopted by a large majority an own-initiative report drawn up by Paolo **CASACA** (PES, Portugal) on Member States' efforts during 2005 to achieve a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities. It began by congratulating the Commission on its annual report, which, in spite of the difficulties arising from the diverging information supplied by the Member States, provides an overview of the development of the national fleets that makes it possible to analyse their development. The Committee reiterated the need for a more wide-ranging approach. This included the consideration of certain factors which have a significant impact on the marine environment and the state of fish stocks, such as coastal and offshore pollution, industrial and agricultural effluents, bottom dredging and maritime transport, to complement current management methods. The report considered a Community initiative in this area to be a priority.

Whilst there has been a gradual reduction in the overall capacity and power of the fleet (approximately 2% per year), there has been no reduction in the level of exploitation of stocks, since the technical improvements made to vessels cancel out or exceed the possibilities as regards yield and fishing effort that these modest reductions represent. Members felt it unacceptable that Member States failed to comply with their obligations to forward data in relation to matching their fishing capacity to the state of stocks. They called on the Commission to consider this non-compliance as serious misconduct and penalise it accordingly, as is the case for fishermen's obligations as regards catch data. It was stressed that matching national fleets to existing resources must take account of the reduction in fishing effort already brought about - in particular the degree of compliance with Multi-Annual Guidance Programmes.

The Commission was also urged to do the following:

- submit proposals for guidelines for Member States to present harmonised information making it possible to carry out comparative analyses of developments in the various national fleets and provide each of the Member States with disaggregated information on the level of catches by vessels operating in its coastal areas;

- adopt the relevant initiatives for the possible transition from a fleet management system based on restricting vessel tonnage and power, to a scheme under which fishing effort can be controlled through management by geographical fishing areas and the use of appropriate technical measures for the sustainable management of resources;

- submit proposals to improve the safety of small-scale coastal and artisanal fishing vessels in the EU, aimed at increasing the size and power of engines and renovating vessels so as to improve the hygiene and safety conditions on board, without thereby implying an increase in fishing effort;

- submit a proposal for the setting up of a specific Regional Advisory Council for the outermost regions.