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REPORT

on the proposal for a Council regulation on closer dialogue with the fishing industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy
(COM(1999) 382 – C5-0145/1999 – 1999/0163(CNS))

Committee on Fisheries

Rapporteur: Rosa Miguélez Ramos

Symbols for procedures

- * Consultation procedure
majority of the votes cast
- **I Cooperation procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- **II Cooperation procedure (second reading)
majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend the common position
- *** Assent procedure
majority of Parliament's component Members except in cases covered by Articles 105, 107, 161 and 300 of the EC Treaty and Article 7 of the EU Treaty
- ***I Codecision procedure (first reading)
majority of the votes cast
- ***II Codecision procedure (second reading)
majority of the votes cast, to approve the common position
majority of Parliament's component Members, to reject or amend the common position
- ***III Codecision procedure (third reading)
majority of the votes cast, to approve the joint text

(The type of procedure depends on the legal basis proposed by the Commission)

Abbreviations for committees

- I. AFET Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy
- II. BUDG Committee on Budgets
- III. CONT Committee on Budgetary Control
- IV. LIBE Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs
- V. ECON Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs
- VI. JURI Committee on Legal Affairs and the Internal Market
- VII. INDU Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy
- VIII. EMPL Committee on Employment and Social Affairs
- IX. ENVI Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy
- X. AGRI Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development
- XI. PECH Committee on Fisheries
- XII. REGI Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism
- XIII. CULT Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport
- XIV. DEVE Committee on Development and Cooperation
- XV. AFCO Committee on Constitutional Affairs
- XVI. FEMM Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities
- XVII. PETI Committee on Petitions

CONTENTS

	Page
Procedural page	4
LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL	5
DRAFT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION	7
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	8
Opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy	11

Procedural page

By letter of 17 September 1999 the Council consulted Parliament, pursuant to Article 37 of the EC Treaty, on the proposal for a Council regulation on closer dialogue with the fishing industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy (COM(1999) 382 – 1999/0163(CNS)).

At the sitting of 4 October 1999 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred this proposal to the Committee on Fisheries as the committee responsible and the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy for its opinion (C5-0145/1999).

At its meeting of 1 September 1999 the Committee on Fisheries had appointed Mrs Miguélez Ramos rapporteur.

It considered the Commission proposal and the draft report at its meetings of 23 September, 11 October, 22 November, 29 November and 7 December 1999.

At the last meeting it adopted the draft legislative resolution by 12 to 0, with 1 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Varela Suanzes-Carpegna, chairman; Miguélez Ramos, vice-chairman and rapporteur; Attwooll, Cunha, van Dam (for Farage), Fraga Estévez, Hudghton, van Hulten (for Lavarra), Katiforis (for Kindermann), Langenhagen, Maat (for Martin), Pérez Royo (for Ford) and Poignant.

The opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy is attached.

The report was tabled on 8 December 1999.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL

Proposal for a Council regulation on closer dialogue with the fishing industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy (COM(1999) 382 – C5-0145/1999 – 1999/0163(CNS))

The proposal is amended as follows:

Text proposed by the Commission¹

Amendments by Parliament

(Amendment 1)

Article 3

The Commission may carry out all the verifications it considers necessary to ensure compliance with the conditions and performance of the tasks assigned by this Regulation to the European trade organisations, which shall assist the representatives appointed for this purpose by the Commission.

The Commission shall ensure that meetings financed from the Community budget held by trade organisations within the framework of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries correspond to the purposes and tasks set out in Decision 1999/478/EC² and shall exercise financial control over the payments made in connection with those tasks.

Justification:

Greater precision.

(Amendment 2)

Article 3a (new)

The Commission shall present an annual report to Parliament and the Council on the substance and conclusions of debates held within the Advisory Committee on Fisheries (plenary) and the working groups referred to in Article 7 of the Decision on the creation of that Committee.

¹ OJ C 274, 28.9.1999, p. 37.

² OJ L 187, 20.7.1999, p. 70.

Justification:

Parliament and the Council need to know what issues are raised in the dialogue between the Commission and the social partners so that they are better able to determine the direction of the common fisheries policy.

DRAFT LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION

European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council regulation on closer dialogue with the fishing industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy (COM(1999) 382 – C5-0145/1999 – 1999/0163(CNS))

(Consultation procedure)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission proposal to the Council (COM(1999) 382³),
 - having been consulted by the Council pursuant to Article 37 of the EC Treaty (C5-0145/1999),
 - having regard to Rule 67 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinion of the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy (A5-0094/1999),
1. Approves the Commission proposal as amended;
 2. Calls on the Commission to alter its proposal accordingly, pursuant to Article 250(2) of the EC Treaty;
 3. Calls on the Council to notify Parliament should it intend to depart from the text approved by Parliament;
 4. Calls for the conciliation procedure to be initiated should the Council intend to depart from the text approved by Parliament;
 5. Asks to be consulted again if the Council intends to amend the Commission proposal substantially;
 6. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council and Commission.

³ OJ C 274, 28.9.1999, p. 37.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Commission has adopted a number of initiatives over the past year with the aim of improving communication between representatives of the fishing industry and Community bodies in both directions, on the one hand seeking to ensure that information on the needs of the industry reaches the Commission and on the other hand promoting the dissemination of the regulations and decisions adopted as part of the common fisheries policy.

The most significant of those initiatives was the reform of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, the Commission's main forum for consultation which included all the professional sectors concerned with the common fisheries policy but which – given that it had been set up in 1971 and its basic structure had not changed since that time – needed to be updated to encompass other parties which have been playing an increasingly prominent part in recent years in the management of the rational exploitation of marine resources, such as non-governmental organisations devoted to development, environmental groups, consumers, etc.

The reform of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries was brought about through the Commission decision of 14 July 1999, Decision 1999/478/EC⁴, which substantially altered the structure of the committee, the main changes being:

- inclusion of the above new sectors concerned with the general direction of the CFP;
- greater diversity as regards the professional sectors of the fishing industry represented, with a more prominent role being granted to the sectors hitherto underrepresented such as the aquaculture sector and those engaged in marketing;
- reduction in the number of members of the plenary committee in the interests of greater efficiency;
- increased role for specialised research bodies with four working groups being set up on access to fisheries resources and management of fishing activity; aquaculture, fish, shellfish and molluscs; markets and trade policy; and general questions: economics and sectoral analysis, which will have the task of delivering specific opinions on matters falling within their competence;
- priority for organisations which are most representative at Community level with the aim of ensuring that the committee is not merely a spokesman for the national interests of each of the sectors concerned.

The new Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture is exclusively a creation of the Commission, given that Parliament has not been consulted on the matter at any stage despite the committee's importance as the chief consultative body for the Community institution responsible for the management of the CFP.

⁴ OJ L 187, 20.7.1999, p. 70.

To accompany the reorganisation of the committee, the Commission is now submitting a proposal for a regulation aimed at strengthening European trade organisations and providing the sector with information on topics of Community interest.

1. In order to strengthen trade organisations at European level and underpin their role as the Commission's main discussion partner representing shared interests which go beyond the framework of the Member States, the Commission takes the view that, without diminishing the organisations' independence as regards regulation and operation, they need to be provided with financial assistance to enable them to meet the expenses involved in travelling to Brussels, where DG XIV is based, for consultations on matters of general interest.

The Commission takes the view that this aid is essential because trade organisations at Community level are in their infancy and are undergoing a process of consolidation and because, unlike representative organisations at national level, they do not receive any of the numerous State subsidies granted by national administrations in the Member States. It would therefore be highly doubtful whether they could carry out their task of acting as a partner in the dialogue without financial support.

2. To complement that initiative, the Commission wishes to boost the dissemination of information on the common fisheries policy, its objectives, mechanisms and legislation affecting the industry, bearing in mind that the industry itself is highly fragmented and not generally organised in corporate bodies, and that it is consequently difficult to ensure that those working in the industry have a real opportunity to acquire an accurate knowledge of the measures taken by Community institutions.

Up till now, the Commission has sought to publicise Community policy by means of information campaigns on specific issues and regular meetings with the various sectors involved. Given the technical complexity of some aspects of the CFP, such as those relating to technical measures and the Structural Funds, however, many of those working in the fishing industry have found it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of certain measures introduced as part of the CFP.

The Commission therefore intends to carry out measures designed to ensure that the bulk of those involved in the industry have wide access to easily understandable information by using the new information technologies.

Comments on the proposal

The rapporteur cannot but express her agreement with the Commission's initiatives designed to strengthen the dialogue with those working in the industry, since it is impossible for the Commission to draw up proposals and take decisions geared to solving the problems of the industry without knowing what the problems are, what difficulties are being encountered by those exercising their profession and the various options for resolving them, which nobody knows better than the industry itself.

That being said, a number of remarks might be made. Firstly, it is surprising that the Commission is now submitting to Parliament a proposal on important but secondary aspects

of the initiative geared to improving communication with the sector whilst it did not consult Parliament on the composition, organisation and functions of the key body through which the dialogue with the industry takes place, the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

In addition to this remark on the principle, attention might be drawn to some aspects which are not themselves covered in the text of the regulation under review but which are fundamental to the proper funding of the organisations concerned.

One of the key aspects concerns the representative nature of the organisations, since if dialogue between the Commission and those involved in the industry is considered essential, it follows that, if that dialogue is to be fruitful, those involved in the dialogue must be genuinely representative of the various sectors affected by fisheries policy. However, neither the Commission proposal nor the rules governing the Advisory Committee on Fisheries contain mechanisms to ensure that this is the case, which does not of course mean that the existing organisations are not representative. Nevertheless, in such a fragmented industry, which is scattered over wide areas and has little history of forming associations, it is difficult to ensure that the Commission's partners in the dialogue at Community level are reliable representatives of the sector concerned. With a view to enhancing their representativeness, it would perhaps be desirable for the Commission to take initiatives to boost the membership of existing trade organisations as an accompanying measure alongside those it is already undertaking.

It should also be borne in mind that circumstances, situations and interests vary widely throughout the Union, and it is therefore difficult for representatives of the industry chosen as partners for the dialogue with the Commission to represent the 'Community interest'. For example, how are the representatives of the processing sector within the Advisory Committee to reach a common position on protection for the German herring processing industry or the canning sector in the Rías Bajas in Galicia? Is it not possible that positions on some topics such as tariff policy might be diametrically opposed within a single sector?

Moreover, with regard to the means by which information on Community policy is to be disseminated, and without questioning the desirability of making use of new information technologies, audiovisual media, etc., which the Commission rightly intends to encourage, it should not be forgotten that the means should be chosen with the target group in mind. Small-scale coastal fishing exists in all the countries of the Union, and it is this sector which, given its cultural characteristics, small size and peripheral location, encounters the greatest difficulties in gaining access to information and which may have most need of such information. These groups are neither familiar with the new technologies nor have access to them. It would therefore be prudent to give priority to information campaigns in these sectors using media which are accessible to them.

24 November 1999

OPINION

(Rule 162)

for the Committee on Fisheries

on the proposal for a Council regulation on closer dialogue with the fishing industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy (COM(1999) 382 – C5-0145/1999 - 1999/0163(CNS)); report by Mrs Miguélez Ramos)

Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy

Draftsman: Mr Pat the Cope Gallagher

PROCEDURE

At its meeting of 4 October 1999 the Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy appointed Mr Gallagher draftsman.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 23 and 24 November 1999.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions by 32 votes to 1, with 3 abstentions.

The following were present for the vote: Westendorp y Cabeza, chairman; Ahern, vice-chairman; Gallagher, draftsman; Alyssandrakis, Baltas, Beysen (for Plooij-van Gorsel), Bodrato, Chichester, Désir, Ferrer, Folias, Foster (for Roving), Glante, Hansenne, Harbour, Lange (for Caudron), Langen, Linkohr, Lucas, McAvan, McNally, Maes, Erika Mann, Montfort, Niebler, O'Toole (for Ford), Piétrasanta, Purvis, Quisthoudt-Rowohl, Rothe, Rübig, Seppänen, Thors, Valdivielso de Cué, van Velzen and Vidal-Quadras Roca (for Wijkman).

BACKGROUND/GENERAL COMMENTS

In 1971, the Commission set up the Advisory Committee on Fisheries, following the pattern of the agricultural advisory committee. The result became unsatisfactory and in 1997 the Commission decided to undertake the reform of the Advisory Committee.

The new structure should achieve:

- closer dialogue with the fishing and aquaculture industry
- broader dialogue involving the relevant associations.

At the same time, it appears necessary to help the trade organisations represented on the Committee to carry out all these tasks (initiative, representation, coordination, information).

Four measures are proposed to enhance the capacity of these organisations to take part in the dialogue:

- giving preference to European organisations and associations (European instead of national or local), in order to stimulate national organisations and associations to join the European ones which will become more representative with greater resources. Direct contacts between the Commission and the organisations themselves should be confined to discussing specific issues relevant to limited interest groups;
- ensuring that European trade organisations are freely accessible to all suitable national organisations;
- clarifying the tasks and objectives of the organisations, and elimination of confusion between the interests of employers and employees, fishermen and fish farmers importers and processors;
- financial support to improve European coordination: the financial resources of European trade organisations are limited compared to those available to national organisations, although the cost of attending meetings in Brussels is very high. The Commission proposes to contribute up to 100% of the costs of meetings arranged by the European trade organisations for the purpose of preparing meetings of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries. The possible budget needed could amount to EUR 400 000.

Commission action should focus on two priorities:

- establishing contacts with existing trade and association networks to improve communication with and between these networks, as well as producing and disseminating documents tailored to the special interests and needs of the various groups (written, audio-visual and electronic material);
- communication with all the groups concerned and putting in place instruments giving very wide access to data and explanatory material mainly concerning Commission proposals. This involves developing a special Commission Internet website and a regular explanatory publication with sections covering the various interests of the industry and the groups concerned.

The necessary funds may amount to around EUR 1 million a year.

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy:

1. admits the need to modernise and update the dialogue with the fishing industry and especially the Advisory Committee on Fisheries;
2. supports the new objectives proposed by the Commission;

3. would appreciate a detailed report at the end of the first year concerning the share-out of funds among the various Member States and organisations concerned by the proposal.