

Monitoring fisheries activities and conservation of fisheries resources: electronic recording and reporting of fishing activities, remote sensing

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PURPOSE : to improve the electronic recording and reporting of fishing activities and on means of remote sensing.

PROPOSED ACT : Council Regulation.

CONTENT : the European Community is at the forefront in introducing modern technologies in order to improve management and monitoring of fisheries activities. Since 1992 it promoted the introduction of the satellite-based vessel monitoring system (VMS) as a tool to efficiently control its fishing fleet, irrespective of where it is operating, and third country fleets when operating within Community waters. After a series of pilot projects, the fitting on board of a vessel localisation device became mandatory for certain categories of vessels. As of 1 January 2005, save few exceptions, all Community vessels greater than 15 metres in length overall will be subject to VMS and cannot fish without an operational satellite localisation device on board.

A further step towards the utilisation of modern technologies is now proposed. The rational exploitation of fisheries resources, which is one of the main aims of the Common Fisheries Policy, requires accurate and timely reporting of information relating to fishing activities, such as quantities of catches on board, species, time spent at fishing, the area where catches have been taken and the gears used. This essential information is currently collected by the masters of the fishing vessels by recording it with a pen on a paperbound logbook. The same procedure is used when catches are transhipped, landed, transported or sold.

As a consequence, in order to be gathered, analysed and transmitted to the authorities in charge of managerial or control tasks, this information needs to be digitalised. This process is slow, costly and conducive to typing mistakes which can hinder the quality of the data.

In order to make it more efficient, accurate and less expensive, the Commission favours an electronic recording and reporting system which will replace the current manual and cumbersome process. This system will be designed to alleviate the administrative burden on the masters and the main actors of the commercial chain and dramatically simplify the tasks of the national authorities.

Pilot projects on electronic recording and reporting of information relating to fisheries activities have been carried out in recent years. Some have already been conducted with conclusive results, others are still ongoing. There is no doubt about the feasibility of the electronic recording of fishing activities. Specific software is already available on the market. What is necessary now is a legislative text laying down the minimal requirements.

The setting of technical specifications, which are required in order to satisfy Community and third countries legislation, is the aim of an international project on secured and harmonised electronic logbook. This project is currently being carried out and specifications will be made available in 2005. A Commission Regulation will amend the current legislation on logbook and other recording requirements accordingly.

With a view to facilitating the introduction of this technology, the Community may grant financial assistance to fishermen as well as to national authorities under the framework of Decision 2004/465/EC, as it did in the past in order to promote the setting up of the vessel monitoring systems.

Furthermore, the Commission proposes to take advantage of the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) in order to track fishing vessels operating in a given fishing zone which may be in breach of national or Community legislation. Remotely sensed images may be used to detect such vessels. This technology is not new since it is already in use in other fields. Pilot projects focused on fishing activities have been carried out and they have proved to be successful. The objective is to cross-check the status of fishing vessels detected, thanks to this technology (Vessel Detection System), with position reports from VMS. Fisheries Monitoring Centres may wish to further investigate as regards those vessels which do not transmit position reports.