

Conservation of fishery resources: sustainable exploitation in the Mediterranean Sea

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The committee adopted the report by Carmen FRAGA ESTEVEZ (EPP-ED, ES) amending the proposal under the consultation procedure. The amendments, which introduce a number of fishermen-friendly changes to the proposal, were part of a compromise agreement reached by the rapporteur and the Commission:

- the minimum mesh-size of towed nets should be 40 mm until 31 December 2006. Afterwards, they should be replaced by a square-meshed net of 40 mm at the cod-end or, at the duly justified request of the ship-owner, by a rhomboid-meshed net of 50 mm. The Commission will be required to report on the implementation of these provisions to Parliament and the Council by 30 June 2010;
- the use of towed nets at depths of over 1000 metres shall be prohibited;
- the minimum sizes below which fishing is not allowed should be reduced for certain species, including sardines, hake, lobster and sole;
- whereas the Commission stipulated that the use of trawl nets and hydraulic dredges should be prohibited within 1.5 nautical miles of the coast in order to protect coral beds and smaller-scale coastal fishing, MEPs said that this distance should be reduced to 0.5 nautical miles for hydraulic dredges precisely because of their local and artisanal nature;
- given the specific characteristics of highly migratory species, the committee said that measures relating to those species should be laid down within regional fisheries organizations (in this case, the GFCM and ICCAT) rather than by the Commission. It therefore deleted Articles 22 and 23. In this way, such measures will be binding on both EU Member States and the remaining coastal states, thereby avoiding discrimination among fishermen. However, to avoid a lengthy absence of technical measures for the protection of juvenile swordfish in case there is no agreement within the two relevant fishery organisations, the Council should adopt a proposal from the Commission on this subject before 31 March 2006;
- longlining should be regulated on the basis of the number of hooks rather than the length of the gear. On board there should be no more than 2,000 hooks for vessels catching blue fin tuna, 3,500 hooks for vessels catching swordfish and 5,000 hooks for those catching albacore.