

European Fisheries Fund (EFF)

2004/0169(CNS) - 06/07/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution drafted by David CASA (EPP-ED, MT) by 524 votes with 89 against and 50 abstentions, and made numerous amendments to the Commission's proposal on reforming the system of financial aid to fishermen. Whilst Parliament accepted the principle behind the plans - to conserve fishing resources, it felt that the reform's socio-economic impact must be looked at too.

The amendments adopted focused on the following issues: the permanent withdrawal of vessels from fishing, the financing of fishing equipment and investment in aquaculture. The main points are as follows:

- On the withdrawal of boats from fishing, the Commission proposal would only allow subsidies for scrapping vessels or re-assigning them to non-profit making purposes. Parliament wanted to widen the scope of this policy, with amendments suggesting that public subsidies should be given for the scrapping of vessels or re-assigning them to non-fishing activities, or for creating joint ventures or for exports for non-fishing purposes. The Fund should be allowed to make lump-sum payments to crews of the vessels concerned.

- One of the objectives of the legislation should therefore be to promote the renewal and modernisation of the fishing fleet, provided that the sustainable balance between resources and the fishing effort and economic viability of the Community fleet is secured in order to ensure the highest possible level of supply of the Community market. There are new clauses on aid for the renewal and modernisation of the fishing fleet that does not result in an increase in capacity. Parliament stated that a Community Register of Vessels should be established which is harmonised across the Member States, with an indication of capacity and power measured using identical criteria, and which can easily be accessed for the purposes of monitoring, which shall be carried out by the Commission.

- A new objective inserted by Parliament is the promotion of more favourable treatment for the outermost regions. New clauses were introduced on public aid for renewal and modernisation of the fleet in the outermost regions.

- There are new provisions on aid for the conducting of experimental campaigns, as well as aid for the constitution of joint enterprises with Third States.

- Whilst the Commission text states that operations financed by the Fund shall not contribute to increasing fishing effort, Parliament states that funding of fisheries measures relating to clearly underexploited species shall be permitted.

- Member State shall adopt a national strategic plan within six months following the adoption of the strategic guidelines, and not three months. The national strategic plans shall be made public after their approval by the Commission.

- Member States may introduce one-off compensation for owners of vessels and fishermen in the context of marine resource protection plans such as Natura 2000 if this results in a reduction in fishing capacity.

- Aid may be granted for adaptations that enhance on-board safety, living and working conditions and, in general, the welfare of workers on board vessels, including engine replacement. Aid shall only be granted for the replacement of engines where this is for reasons of safety, fuel economy, or greater environmental

friendliness, and on condition there is no increase in fishing capacity. Parliament stated too that the Fund shall make provision for the modernisation of all categories of fishing vessel, including their engines for safety reasons and on condition that the power of the new engine does not exceed that of the old one.

- Special emphasis was placed on smaller and older boats. Funding should be "for fleet renewal aimed at the replacement of vessels with an overall length of less than 12 metres" and on replacing "vessels older than 20 years which are not operating safely". The Commission proposal makes no mention at all of "fleet renewal" or vessels "eligible for replacement".

- The Fund may finance individual premiums for fishermen under the age of 35 who can prove that they have worked as a fisherman for at least five years or have equivalent vocational training and who are becoming owners or part-owners of a second-hand fishing vessel for the first time. It may also finance training measures and training incentives for young fishermen who wish to become owners of a fishing vessel for the first time.

- The Fund may grant contributions in the form of lump-sum premiums for crews of vessels affected by the permanent withdrawal from activity.

- On aquaculture, aid was originally restricted to micro and small enterprises, but this restriction has been deleted by Parliament. Parliament wanted EFF investments to cover all parts of the production chain, including the construction of new installations and the expansion and modernisation of existing installations and mussels dredgers, especially to increase production of species with good market prospects, provided they are technically and financially viable and do not generate excess production capacity.

- On the sustainable development of coastal fishing areas, Members disagree with the Commission, which wants the fund to invest only in communities with more than 100,000 inhabitants.