

Implementing sustainability in EU fisheries through maximum sustainable yield

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The Fisheries Committee adopted by a large majority an own-initiative report drafted by Carmen **Fraga Estévez** (EPP-ED, Sp) on the implementation of sustainable fishing in the EU on the basis of maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The report began by stating that the greater part of the Community's fisheries resources having significant commercial value are being overfished or are almost in that situation. The Community system of conservation and management based on total allowable catch (TAC) and quotas has not led to the rational exploitation of stocks - on the contrary, the rigidity of the system and its dependence on political rather than biological guidelines have proved obstacles to rational management, making controls difficult and encouraging discards. The report welcomed the Commission's recognition that the existing fisheries management policy has failed and welcomed its objective of creating a new management model making it possible to ensure stock recovery, adapt the fishing effort to fisheries' real circumstances, and improve the reliability and stability of the fishing fleet.

The Community system must be based on scientific fisheries research and have at its disposal reliable and detailed statistical information covering many years. Members stressed the need to increase the appropriations earmarked for scientific fisheries research in the seventh framework programme for RTD. Whilst they noted the Commission's intention of making MSY the yardstick for fisheries management, they warned that the traditional MSY model has been superseded by new cutting-edge approaches which conceive the ecosystem as a whole and incorporate aspects relating to the environment, species interrelation, economic and social factors. It will be difficult to apply the MSY model to multispecies fisheries (i.e. the majority of those in the EU), since this could lead to overfishing or underfishing depending on the species chosen.

The Committee was, therefore, obliged to deplore the deficient analysis and inadequate solutions offered by the Commission's communication, as well as the absence of an in-depth evaluation of what applying an MSY model would actually mean, in terms of its shortcomings, the particularities of its application, and the potential risks of any errors in the model. Accordingly, the time was not ripe to propose the introduction of an MSY system, and a deeper analysis was needed of the problems, with a view to deciding, with all political courage, the most suitable measures for introducing the changes that are most needed to the present CFP.

The Committee stressed the following:

- the Commission must seize this opportunity to devise a system of access to resources that puts the accent on sustainability, discourages discards, simplifies the technical measures, eliminates discrimination and excessive competition for stocks, introduces the necessary flexibility, and boosts the sector's competitiveness;

- any change to the management system must necessarily include financially acceptable compensation mechanisms, and this will require an assessment of the social and economic impact of the final proposal.

The Committee called, all in all, for the phasing-in of a system which can finally produce a fisheries policy that is ever more in line with the biological capacity of stocks that are in recovery, so that the sustainability of the Community's fisheries evolves towards becoming a given rather than an anxiety.