





Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2007/2110(INI)	Procedure completed
Management of deep-sea fish stocks		
Subject		
3.15.01 Fish stocks, conservation of fishery resources		
3.15.04 Management of fisheries, fisheries, fishing grounds		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	 Fisheries		14/03/2007
		PSE MIGUÉLEZ RAMOS Rosa	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	 Environment, Public Health and Food Safety		03/05/2007
		ALDE MATSAKIS Marios	
European Commission	Commission DG	Commissioner	
	Maritime Affairs and Fisheries	BORG Joe	

Key events			
29/01/2007	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2007)0030	Summary
06/06/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
27/03/2008	Vote in committee		Summary
02/04/2008	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0103/2008	
07/05/2008	Debate in Parliament		
08/05/2008	Results of vote in Parliament		
08/05/2008	Decision by Parliament	T6-0196/2008	Summary
08/05/2008	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
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Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure

Procedure subtype	Initiative
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Committee dossier	PECH/6/47477

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document		COM(2007)0030	29/01/2007	EC	Summary
Committee opinion	ENVI	PE392.063	11/10/2007	EP	
Committee draft report		PE396.586	10/01/2008	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE402.724	07/03/2008	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0103/2008	02/04/2008	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0196/2008	08/05/2008	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		SP(2008)3593/2	12/06/2008	EC	

Management of deep-sea fish stocks

PURPOSE: review on the management of deep-sea fish stocks.

CONTENT: the Commission has carried out a review on the deep-sea fisheries carried out in Community waters and in the regulatory areas of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic Fisheries (CECAF). Deep-water species are generally considered to be those that live at depths of greater than 400 metres.

The Commission carries out an overview of Community regulations concerning deep-sea fisheries. The main body of scientific advice for deep-sea stocks is issued every two years, but there is sometimes specific advice for certain stocks, or decisions taken in the context of the regional fisheries organisations, that require specific measures to be taken within a relatively short deadline. An example is the recommendation adopted by NEAFC that fishing effort on deep sea stocks should be reduced by 30% in 2005 and 2006. The Commission included requirements to reduce fishing effort in kW days by 30% with respect to 2003 levels in its proposals for the Council Regulation (EC) No 27/2005 and Council Regulation (EC) No 51/2006 fixing fishing opportunities for 2005 and 2006 respectively in order to comply with the NEAFC recommendation. However the Council of ministers accepted only two successive reductions of 10% in effort in 2005 and 2006.

The Commission goes on to assess the effectiveness of the Regulations. It states that the TACs set for 2003 and 2004 were in most cases too high for the stocks to sustain. Moreover, the declared catches of most stocks were considerably lower than the TACs, suggesting that the TACs were not restricting the fisheries. In proposing TAC levels for deep sea stocks for 2005 and 2006 the Commission therefore attempted to make sure that they were genuinely restrictive by using the real level of catches, not the existing TACs, as the baseline. The Council of ministers was unable to accept the Commission's methodology, adopting instead more modest reductions of a maximum of 15% with respect to the existing TACs rather than the declared catches. Furthermore, the Commission points out that, for TACs to be effective in mixed fisheries, the TACs for the individual stocks should be fixed relatively to one another at levels that minimise discards and by-catches. This is extremely difficult to achieve, even in shallow-water mixed fisheries where there is much more information available on catch and discard rates. Another problem of trying to manage deep-sea stocks using TACs is that relatively little is known about the geographical stock structure of deep-sea species. The Commission feels that, despite the difficulties and shortcomings, the TACs have probably had some effect in curbing fishing mortality on some of the main targeted species. However, it is clear that the long-term management of deep-sea stocks must complement the TACs with other measures, in particular the restriction of fishing effort.

With some exceptions, the fisheries on deepwater species have developed and expanded before sufficient information was available on which to base management advice. This has been particularly true during the last decade, where exploitation has increased on a number of species as fishing extended into deeper waters or new areas. Landings and fishing effort data are poor, and discards largely unreported even though they may be significant. This has made it difficult for the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to suggest a level of exploitation that might be sustainable, but it does note that most exploited deepwater species were considered to be harvested outside safe biological limits, and that there should be immediate reductions in fishing effort. New fisheries should be permitted only when they expanded very slowly, and are accompanied by programmes to collect data that would allow evaluation of the stock status.

Most deep-water fisheries take a mixture of species. For example, about 70 deep-sea species have been recorded in the catches of trawlers targeting roundnose grenadier. Very little is known about the ecosystem effects of deep-sea fisheries, other than the direct damage that can be caused to the habitat by the fishing gears used. ICES has called for all the relevant information to be made available to the working group and the development of direct monitoring programmes, for example using research vessels.

The main conclusion of the review were as follows:

- many deep-sea stocks have such low productivity that sustainable levels of exploitation are probably too low to support an economically viable fishery. It must therefore be recognised that current levels of exploitation on those stocks must inevitably be reduced, either by choice in order to conserve the stocks or else because the stocks become fished to depletion. Moreover, stock recovery times are so long that the

reductions in exploitation must be regarded as permanent, not as a means to rebuild stocks to allow higher exploitation rates in the longer term;

- in any case, the measures currently in force have been too poorly implemented to protect deep-sea stocks;

- current effort controls apply to all fisheries combined, yet some are likely to be more sustainable than others. The most pressing need is for better information on the distinct fisheries that are catching deep-sea species so that the fishing effort levels can be adjusted in each of them individually according to the target species and by-catch species. Licences to take part in each of the fisheries should be dependent on the vessel having a suitable track record;

- the sampling schemes to collect scientific information should be decided after consultation both at Community level and with other NEAFC contracting parties. One of the major criticisms that could be levelled at the existing legislation is that despite the obligation to collect and report data there was little or no guidance on how to do it. The sampling schemes therefore differed in content and quality between Member States. Moreover, since there was no agreed reporting format the data that were collected were difficult to aggregate. Reporting formats should therefore be clearly specified and the data made more easily available to scientific working groups;

- monitoring and control procedures must be made more rigorous, including clear procedures for reporting VMS data;

- there should be a greater emphasis on collecting relevant data to assess the ecosystem impact of deep-sea fisheries, both from commercial fishing vessels and from co-ordinated research vessel surveys.

Management of deep-sea fish stocks

The Committee on Fisheries adopted an own initiative report by Rosa MIGUÉLEZ RAMOS (PES, ES) on the management of deep-sea fish stocks, in response to the Commission's Communication on this issue.

MEPs believe that, before new management measures are adopted, an analysis should be made to establish why existing measures are not applied and the reasons that lead to the Member States failing to fulfil their obligations, or fulfilling them late or using different methodologies.

The report agrees with the Commission that the systematic collection of reliable data is the cornerstone of stock assessment and scientific advice. Therefore, MEPs call on the Commission, the Member States and the fishing industry to fill in the gaps that exist so that effort control measures can be adapted to each fishery, recognising that most deep-water fisheries are mixed fisheries.

The Committee on Fisheries stresses the need to introduce a ban on discards in the deep-water fisheries. Within the framework of measures to reduce by-catches and ban discards, the Commission should impose a ban on all fishing activity over seamounts, hydrothermal vents and within five miles of all identified cold-water corals. Bottom-trawling at depths below 1000m should also be banned, whilst at the same time monitoring and control procedures should be strengthened.

MEPs propose that fishing should not be permitted in deep-sea areas where there has not yet been any fishing activity until those areas have been investigated and the scientific evidence confirms that sustainable fishing might occur without risk of biodiversity depletion or habitat damage. They agree with the Commission on the need to adopt an ecosystem-based approach for this type of fisheries, whilst warning that the measures must have a minimum level of credibility and must not be applied wholesale but on the basis of environmental impact assessments.

The Commission is called upon to:

- carry out a socio-economic assessment of deep-sea fisheries and an analysis of the impact that new fishing effort reductions will have on the industry, as well as the impact of continued depletion of the fish stocks that the fisheries depend on;
- introduce new programmes for the collection of scientific information, if necessary using research vessels;
- improve monitoring and control procedures in the Member States;
- make every effort to ensure the implementation and possible improvement of existing international deep-sea fishing agreements.

The Commission and Member States are called upon to:

- develop common guidelines, exchange best practices, improve the use of available Community technology and involve think tanks and NGOs in order to implement better measures to reduce illegal fishing and the sale of illegal catches on European markets;
- promote more environmentally-friendly catching methods which do not harm either the environment or ecological biodiversity as a result of unwanted by-catches.

Management of deep-sea fish stocks

The European Parliament adopted, by 579 votes to 49 and 4 abstentions, a resolution on the management of deep-sea fish stocks in response to the Commission Communication on the subject. The own-initiative report was tabled for consideration in plenary by Rosa MIGUÉLEZ RAMOS (PES, ES) on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries.

Members welcome the attempts by the Community fleet to pursue a sustainable fishery policy and notes a certain lack of symmetry between the situation described in the Commission Communication and the actual situation. They point out that, before new management measures are adopted, an analysis should be made to establish the reasons why existing measures are not applied and the reasons that lead to the Member States failing to fulfil their obligations, or fulfilling them late or using different methodologies.

Parliament agrees with the Commission that the systematic collection of reliable data is the cornerstone of stock assessment and scientific advice. It calls on the Commission, the Member States and the fishing industry to fill in the gaps that exist so that effort control measures can be adapted to each fishery, recognizing that most deep-water fisheries are mixed fisheries.

It points out to the Commission that, even where total allowable catches (TACs) and effort limitations for these fisheries have been fixed arbitrarily owing to the lack of biological knowledge, the precautionary approach to and the exploitation of each species considered as a deep-water species must be observed and TACs must be set accordingly, on the basis of precise scientific studies. Given that many of these

stocks are managed in international waters, measures must be coordinated within the various RFOs so that the measures adopted take account of all fleets operating in these fisheries. Parliament believes all restrictions should apply to fishermen from all contracting parties, in order to prevent disadvantages from arising.

Members stress the need to introduce a ban on discards in deep-water fisheries, which would enable scientists to study with more precision the complex diversity of species, many of them inedible, being landed. Within the framework of measures to reduce by-catches and eliminate discards, the Commission should vary the levels of fishing effort according to the species targeted and those caught merely by accident, whilst at the same time strengthening monitoring and control procedures.

The Commission is requested to:

- carry out a socio-economic assessment of deep-sea fisheries and an analysis of the impact that new fishing effort reductions will have on the industry, as well as the impact of continued depletion of the fish stocks that the fisheries depends on;
- introduce new programmes for the collection of scientific information, if necessary using research vessels;
- improve monitoring and control procedures in the Member States;
- make every effort to ensure the implementation and possible improvement of existing international deep-sea fishing.

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