

More environmentally-friendly fishing methods

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The Council adopted the following conclusions in which it welcomes the Commission's Communication on promoting more environmentally-friendly fishing methods: the role of technical conservation measures. It recognises that making fishing activities more environmentally friendly will contribute to a sustainable fishing industry.

Moreover, the Council believes that improving research and developing technology in partnership with the fishing industry can contribute to developing ways of fishing that will better meet the challenge of rebuilding stocks and maintaining sustainability. It confirms its commitment to dialogue with stakeholders and highlights the key role of Regional Advisory Councils, and recognises that the active involvement of stakeholders, especially the fishing industry, in the development of environmentally friendly fishing measures, can enhance compliance and effectiveness.

In addition, it underlines the importance of encouraging fishermen to move towards more environmentally friendly fishing methods, and in that context calls for an evaluation by the Commission, by end 2005, of the potential for the provision of financial and non-financial incentives.

It is considered that environmentally friendly fishing methods should be promoted equally throughout the Community. In this context, the existing technical measures for the Atlantic and North Sea should, in 2004-2005, be evaluated with a view to their simplification in accordance with the fundamental requirement of ensuring the effectiveness and enforceability of such measures and considering the need for a localised approach.

Priority in research should be given to extending research to the application of environmentally friendly fishing gear technology; improving the understanding of the structure and dynamics of marine ecosystems to aid the development of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management; developing low-impact, species-selective fishing gears and fishing techniques that prevent undesired effects on habitats and on non-target species; the use of closed areas or Marine Protected Areas as a means of protecting sensitive habitats and non-target species; developing appropriate environmental impact assessment techniques for new fishing and aquaculture practices.

Taking into account the above, the Commission is invited to evaluate, by end 2005, the potential for the provision of financial and non-financial incentives in order to encourage fishermen to move towards more environmentally friendly fishing methods; to submit, as soon as practicable, after consultation with stakeholders including the relevant Regional Advisory Councils, a simplified Proposal for technical conservation measures for the Atlantic and North Sea; to give a high priority to schemes promoting and evaluating environmentally-friendly fishing, including, where appropriate, the development and use of more selective gears, compensation for short-term losses for vessels participating in trials of more environmentally-friendly fishing methods, and the training and education of fishermen; when introducing significant new proposals on environmentally friendly fishing

methods, to carry out, as appropriate and on the basis of available information, an assessment of possible economic and social impacts covering an evaluation of both short and long-term effects and consider temporary remedial measures that may be required; to develop a pilot project to address the problem of ghost fishing in Community waters which will include a retrieval system to remove lost gears, gear adjustments that lessen the impact of lost gears and methods to reduce the losses of gears; to report to the Council and to the European Parliament during 2007 on the implementation and impact of the actions set out in these conclusions.