

Thursday 8 May 2008

Management of deep-sea fish stocks

P6_TA(2008)0196

European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2008 on the management of deep-sea fish stocks (2007/2110(INI))

(2009/C 271 E/05)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the review of the management of deep-sea fish stocks (COM(2007)0030),
 - having regard to the proposal for a Council regulation concerning the establishment of a Community framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the Common Fisheries Policy (COM(2007)0196),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A6-0103/2008),
- A. whereas the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) points out in both its 2002 and 2004 recommendations for deep-sea species that most species are outside safe biological limits; whereas the EU has reduced its fishing effort to a significantly smaller extent than was called for in the ICES recommendations; whereas, further, improved biological background data are important in order to set quotas that will guarantee sustainable fishing,
- B. whereas fishing activities by distant water fleets, whether operating in the waters of third countries, in areas regulated by a regional fisheries organisation (RFO) or in unregulated areas on the high seas, should take place in a rational and responsible manner, in accordance with the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea, the UN Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of that Convention relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; and whereas both the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the FAO Code of Conduct require the application of the precautionary principle,
- C. whereas the EU committed itself at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit to ensuring the sustainable character of fisheries worldwide, and to maintaining or restoring stocks, especially over-exploited stocks, to the maximum sustainable yield level, if possible by 2015,
- D. whereas effectively protecting the marine environment and practising sustainable fishing are possible only with the consensus and cooperation of all interested States,
- E. whereas the systematic collection of reliable data is the cornerstone of stock assessment and scientific advice, and is therefore of vital importance for the implementation of the common fisheries policy (CFP); and whereas in its abovementioned Communication the Commission acknowledged the lack of sufficient data to carry out a scientific assessment of the state of deep-sea stocks, and the discrepancies that exist as regards their definition,
- F. whereas the report published in April 2007 by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture (ACFA) addresses the changing of the timing for the submission of scientific advice and improving its quality,

Thursday 8 May 2008

- G. whereas appropriate socio-economic measures are necessary to compensate fishermen for the costs of reductions in activity connected with stock recovery plans,
- H. whereas its resolution of 14 November 2006 on a Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment ⁽¹⁾ advocated a number of measures to promote a sustainable use of the seas and the conservation of marine ecosystems,
1. Welcomes 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;
 2. Points 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, thereby hampering an analysis of the factors influencing these fisheries;
 3. Warns that constant changes in the rules, and the launching of fresh proposals without allowing time to implement existing proposals and adequately process the information obtained, result in a loss of credibility for the CFP, and existing effort restrictions have been better suited to some species rather than others;
 4. Agrees with the Commission that the systematic collection of reliable data is the cornerstone of stock assessment and scientific advice; 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;
 5. 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;
 6. Notes that Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 of 20 December 2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy ⁽²⁾ requires the application of the precautionary approach, defined in Article 3 to mean 'that the absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take management measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species and non-target species and their environment';
 7. Stresses 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;
 8. Takes the view that the Commission, within the framework of measures to reduce by-catches and eliminate discards, 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;
 9. Notes that many deep-water species are taken as by-catches, and therefore urges the Commission to place more emphasis on effort control as a way of reducing by-catches; notes, however, that restrictions on mesh sizes are inappropriate due to the shape and size of deep-water species;
 10. Calls on the Commission 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; points out that it is crucial to strike a balance between socio-economic needs and environmental sustainability;
 11. Points out that, 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; considers that the EU should work to ensure the full and effective implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 61/105 in relation to deep-sea and bottom fisheries on the high seas; believes all restrictions should apply to fishermen from all contracting parties, in order to prevent disadvantages from arising;

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 314 E, 21.12.2006, p. 131.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 358, 31.12.2002, p. 59.

Thursday 8 May 2008

12. Proposes 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 may occur without risk of biodiversity depletion or habitat damage and the corresponding management measures are put in place;
 13. Calls on the Commission to introduce new programmes for the collection of scientific data, if necessary using research vessels; believes that one example might be that undertaken by the Spanish fisheries administration in the regulatory area of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, mapping the Hatton Bank, where deep-water species are caught, and where the research focused on the distribution of seamounts, cold-water coral reefs and hydrothermal vents in order to identify sensitive zones in the areas in which fishing fleets operate;
 14. Agrees 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, so as to avoid zones being closed where there is no risk, while closing zones to bottom fisheries where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known or likely to exist or where fish stocks are outside safe biological limits; research relating to the mapping of the seabed, interaction between the characteristics that make up ecosystems and the natural resources of the oceans must be a priority if the aim is for the new European maritime policy to become a reality;
 15. Reiterates that fishermen and the associations that represent them must be heard and must be involved in the definition of measures for the protection of the marine environment, the management of resources and stock recovery;
 16. Agrees with the ACFA on the need to devote more resources, both human and financial, to analysing biomass and fish mortality in almost all fisheries; takes the view, likewise, that if scientific advice is to be accepted by all the parties, a clear strategic direction needs to be set to avoid the duplication of work and lack of synergies;
 17. Expresses its concern over the inefficiency and poor implementation of the current CFP Regulations; calls on the Commission to improve monitoring and control procedures in the Member States;
 18. Stresses the importance of developing new techniques in order to ensure a functioning control and surveillance system; calls on the Commission to continue to develop control techniques, and points in this connection to the possibility of electronic logbooks;
 19. Highlights the advantages of setting up a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) within the Natura 2000 network, and believes that such a move will have positive effects on over-exploited fish stocks; encourages the Member States to make use of all the possibilities afforded by the marine components of the Natura 2000 network;
 20. Urges the Commission to make every effort to ensure the implementation and possible improvement of existing international deep-sea fishing agreements;
 21. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop common guidelines, exchange best practices, improve the use of available Community technology and involve think tanks and NGOs in order to better implement measures to reduce illegal fishing and the sale of illegal catches on European markets;
 22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote more environmentally-friendly catching methods which do not harm the environment and ecological biodiversity as a result of unwanted by-catches or unnecessary injury to other living organisms;
 23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
-