Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Regulation introducing a scheme to compensate for the additional costs incurred in the marketing of certain fishery products from the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, and the French departments of Guiana and Réunion from 2007 to 2013

COM(2006) 740 final — 2006/0247 (CNS)

On 18 December 2006 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 37 and 299 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

On 12 December 2006 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the European Economic and Social Committee appointed Mr Sarró Iparraguirre as rapporteur-general at its 432nd plenary session, held on 17 and 18 January 2007 (meeting of 17 January), and adopted the following opinion by 81 votes to 3 with 7 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC endorses the Commission's proposal for a Regulation introducing a scheme to compensate for the additional costs incurred in the marketing of certain fishery products from the outermost regions of the EU from 2007 to 2013.

1.2 The EESC recommends that the Commission clarify the scope of this compensation with regard to fishing vessels flying the Venezuelan flag and operating in Community waters.

2. Introduction

2.1 Since 1992, the European Union has provided support to the producers of fishery products in the outermost regions in order to offset the extra costs of transporting those products to European markets.

2.2 In 2003, the Council adopted Regulation (EC) No 2328/2003 introducing a scheme to compensate for the additional costs incurred in the marketing of certain fishery products from the following regions:

— Azores
— Madeira
— Canary Islands
— French Guiana
— Réunion.

2.3 Regulation (EC) No 2328/2003 expires on 31 December 2006. As called for therein, the Commission has put forward a new Regulation proposing a longer period of application (from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013) and with an annual budget of EUR 15 million (the same as the previous budget).

2.4 On 29 October 2003, the EESC issued an opinion (1) in favour of Regulation (EC) No 2328/2003, in which various recommendations were made.

3. General comments

3.1 The Commission's current proposal was provided for in the previous Regulation, which required the Commission to submit, by 1 January 2007, a first report accompanied by proposals for any measures needed to achieve the compensation objectives for outermost regions which market fishery products on the European mainland.

3.2 The measures introduced by the Commission in the new Regulation take into account the consultations of interested parties and regional administrations, together with the conclusions of an external study on the structural aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy in the outermost regions, and the recommendations made by the European Parliament and the EESC.

3.3 On the basis of these principles and having analysed all the measures proposed by the Commission, the EESC endorses the new Regulation submitted to it.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The proposal for the continuation of the compensation scheme introduces a higher degree of subsidiarity, as it leaves the determination of eligible products, quantities and compensation amounts to the Member States.

4.2 It is therefore easier for Member States to adjust their compensation plans, within the overall financial allocation, if justified by changing conditions.

4.3 Submission and acceptance procedures have been updated so as to minimise the administrative burden for Member States' national and regional authorities and the Commission services. The proposal therefore falls within the Commission's rolling programme for the simplification of Community legislation.

4.4 The total amount of compensation per year must not exceed:

a) Azores and Madeira — EUR 4,283,992

b) Canary Islands — EUR 5,844,076

c) French Guiana and Réunion — EUR 4,868,700

4.5 For the period 2007-2013 an annual budget of around EUR 15 million is envisaged (the same as for the previous period), covered by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund.

4.6 These changes in relation to the previous regulation are in line with the recommendations made by the EESC in its earlier opinion, and the EESC therefore endorses them.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Equal opportunities for people with disabilities
(2007/C 93/08)

On 24 May 2006, the Austrian presidency decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community on Equal opportunities for people with disabilities

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 19 December 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Joost.

At its 432nd plenary session, held on 17 and 18 January 2007 (meeting of 17 January 2007), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 152 votes, with one vote against and with one abstention:

1. Introduction

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the Austrian presidency’s request to draw up an opinion on equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities must be seen as an ongoing process that should feature high on the work programme of every EU Council presidency.

1.2 With the current opinion the EESC wants to look ahead and start outlining the challenges that the Commission will have to face on the disability front during the second half of its current mandate and even beyond. The present opinion should also be framed in the wider context of the identification of priorities for the last phase of the Disability Action Plan (2008-2009), as well as the re-opening of the budgetary discussions (with its subsequent impact on programming and priority definition) in two years time.

1.3 People with disabilities make up 15 % of the total population — a figure that is rising as the population ages. This means that, in the enlarged EU, more than 50 million people are currently living with disabilities (1). They therefore represent a very significant share of EU citizens and providing them with equal opportunities is a social, ethical and political imperative, which should be at the top of the EU’s agenda. Furthermore, there is a clear business case for the integration of people with disabilities and for making services and goods fully accessible to them.

(1) According to Eurostat figures for 2002. 44.6 million people in the 16-64 age group — i.e. one in six (15.7 %) — stated that they had a long-standing health problem or disability (LSHPD).