

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on:

- the 'Proposal for a Council Directive amending, with regard to *Gyrodactylus salaris*, Directive 91/67/EEC concerning the animal health conditions governing the placing on the market of aquaculture animals and products', and
- the 'Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 93/53/EEC introducing minimum measures for the control of certain fish diseases'<sup>(1)</sup>

(97/C 56/07)

On 9 July 1996 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 43 and 198 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned proposals.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 3 October 1996. The Rapporteur was Mr Kallio.

At its 339th plenary session, held on 30 and 31 October 1996 (meeting of 31 October 1996) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by 55 votes with one abstention.

**1. Proposal for a Council Directive amending, with regard to *Gyrodactylus salaris*, Directive 91/67/EEC concerning the animal health conditions governing the placing on the market of aquaculture animals and products**

1.0.1. The aim of the Commission's proposal is to organize trade in salmonid fish in such a way as to prevent the spread of the parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*, to introduce a certification requirement in order to prevent the spread of the viral diseases IHN and VHS and to shorten the period of sampling and testing required for obtaining approved zone status from four to two years.

1.0.2. The fish diseases subject to control are set out in Annex A of Council Directive 91/67/EEC, classified into three lists according to their seriousness and the control measures applicable to them.

**1.1. General comments**

1.1.1. The parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*, which causes gyrodactylosis, a fish disease which threatens wild stocks of salmon and occurs with certainty within the European Union in Finland, Sweden and Denmark. The parasite has also been identified in Spain, Portugal, France and Germany. In many Member States, however, the situation with regard to the parasite is not known, but it is probable that the parasite is widespread in Europe because of transfers of infected fish in the past.

1.1.2. *Gyrodactylus salaris* has been shown to cause major losses in wild stocks of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) in northern waters. The parasite destroys infected salmon stocks by killing riverine salmon fry. The destruction of salmon stocks reduces the biodiversity of

salmon and causes serious financial losses for the fishing industry, tourism and local inhabitants. *Gyrodactylus salaris* reproduces very quickly so that even a small number of parasites can have potentially devastating effects on fish stocks. The parasite can spread from infected regions to other regions through transfers of live fish or through migration of fish in the wild.

1.1.3. So far, there have not been any reports in the European Union of losses in salmon stocks caused by *Gyrodactylus salaris*. Studies show that Baltic salmon stocks are more resistant to the parasite than Atlantic salmon. In Norway, the parasite has caused heavy losses in Atlantic salmon stocks in 38 rivers. In the European Union, salmon stocks susceptible to the parasite are found in the salmon rivers of northern Finland that flow into the Arctic Ocean and they may also exist in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

1.1.4. It is very difficult and expensive to control *Gyrodactylus salaris* once a salmon stock has been infected by it. Eradication of the parasite is hard, particularly in large water systems comprising extensive catchment areas and lakes, and it is doubtful whether infected stocks can be saved at all.

1.1.5. A clearer picture needs to be obtained of the distribution of *Gyrodactylus salaris* so that the parasite's harmful effects and the risks associated with transfers of fish can be assessed. Similarly, it is necessary to establish the pathogenicity of parasites found in different regions and the resistance of different salmon stocks to the parasite.

1.1.6. *Gyrodactylus salaris* can be spread over a wide area by salmon and other species of fish through

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ No C 242, 21. 8. 1996, p. 13.

transfers and migration of wild fish. EU Member States should work closely with each other to prevent the spread of the parasite and with neighbouring non-EU states to chart the distribution of the parasite, obtain new information and disseminate information.

1.1.7. The European Commission has worked together with Norway to prevent the spread of fish diseases. Norway seeks to control fish diseases and parasites by applying the same methods as the European Union. The Commission does not have direct contacts with Russia in matters related to fish diseases.

1.1.8. Besides existing fish diseases and parasites, the fish-farming industry and wild fish stocks are threatened by new diseases and parasites that are harmless in other regions and by completely new pathogens that can be spread unintentionally through authorized transfers. In controlling fish diseases, the Commission should seek to create structures which, in addition to enabling the control of known fish diseases and parasites, could be used to check serious new fish diseases that are discovered in the future.

1.1.9. The spread of the viral diseases IHN and VHS to fish farms in non-approved zones (not officially declared free of IHN and VHS) has caused major economic losses. The Commission proposes that a certification requirement for IHN and VHS should be introduced with regard to trade in fish, eggs and gametes in non-approved zones. The introduction of a certification requirement would improve the chances of controlling the spread of IHN and VHS between non-approved zones and to fish farms in these zones.

1.1.10. EU rules on fish diseases seek to take account of the recommendations of the International Office of Epizootics (OIE). In accordance with the OIE's recommendations, it is proposed that the period of intensive sampling and testing required to achieve approved zone status with regard to a particular fish disease should be shortened from four to two years.

## 1.2. Specific comments

### 1.2.1. Article 1

1.2.1.1. The Commission's proposal contains the amendments made necessary by transferring *Gyrodactylus salaris* from list III to list II of Annex A. In addition, the rules applicable to list II diseases are specified separately for viral diseases and *Gyrodactylus salaris*.

1.2.1.2. The Section would point out that transfers of live fish to waters in which there are wild stocks of

salmon that are susceptible to *Gyrodactylus salaris* always carries the risk that the coverage of the sampling and testing undertaken to detect the presence of the parasite and on the basis of which approval is obtained for transferring fish to fish farms or waters in the wild is not sufficiently extensive.

### 1.2.2. Article 1, point 3

1.2.2.1. In order to avoid different interpretations, it should be stated more precisely in Annex A which species of fish are referred to by using scientific names with regard to all species and classes of fish.

## 1.3. Conclusions

1.3.1. The ESC supports the Commission's proposal to amend Directive 91/67/EEC in order to transfer the parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris* from list III to list II of Annex A. The amendment will enable more effective control of the parasite, which poses a very serious threat to wild stocks of Atlantic salmon.

1.3.2. The ESC feels that special attention should be paid to improving the readability of existing Directives. In particular, the Directives should be rewritten in full from time to time on account of the amendments made to them.

1.3.3. The ESC would underline the importance of cooperation within the European Union and the need to step up cooperation with neighbouring non-EU states so that more effective action can be taken against dangerous fish diseases and parasites.

1.3.4. The ESC proposes that research related to fish diseases and parasites should be increased so as to ensure that adequate prerequisites exist for the control of dangerous fish diseases. Research is also important for economic and health reasons because the consumer must be able to rely on the good quality of fish-based food products.

1.3.5. The ESC would emphasize that it must be possible to prevent fish diseases and parasites from being used without reason as an obstacle to trade in fish. The transfer of *Gyrodactylus salaris* from list III to list II could have unpredictable effects on trade in fish throughout the European Union if it leads to the parasite being confused with viral diseases that are known to be serious fish diseases.

1.3.6. The ESC backs the Commission's proposal for the introduction of a certification requirement in order to prevent the spread of IHN and VHS through transfers in non-approved zones.

1.3.7. The ESC endorses the Commission's proposal to align EU rules with the OIE's recommendations by shortening the testing and sampling period required for obtaining approved zone status from four to two years.

However, the ESC presumes that sampling and testing will be carried out on a scale that is sufficient to ensure that the change does not undermine the reliability of the tests, on the basis of which approval is granted.

## 2. Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 93/53/EEC introducing minimum Community measures for the control of certain fish diseases

2.0.1. Classifying gyrodactylosis as a list II disease would make the measures laid down in Directive 93/53/EEC applicable to the parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris*. However, these measures are designed for the control of viral diseases and should not therefore be applied as such to *Gyrodactylus salaris*. The aim of the Commission's proposal is therefore to amend the Directive so that it applies to viral diseases only.

### 2.1. General comments

2.1.1. The Commission's proposal is essentially technical and is connected with the Commission's proposal for a Council Directive amending, with regard to *Gyrodactylus salaris*, Directive 91/67/EEC concerning the animal health conditions governing the placing on the market of aquaculture animals and products.

2.1.2. In the ESC's view, the name of each disease should be followed by its established abbreviation. This

would improve the readability of the changes and also ensure that the diseases concerned are interpreted correctly. The abbreviations are listed in Annex A.

### 2.2. Specific comments

#### 2.2.1. Article 1, point 3

2.2.1.1. The ESC proposes that, since this point has been amended in Directive 91/67/EEC by Directive 93/54/EEC, a reference thereto should be made in the text for the sake of clarity.

### 2.3. Conclusions

2.3.1. The ESC backs the Commission's proposal to amend Directive 93/53/EEC so that it applies to viral diseases only, because the measures laid down in the Directive should not be applied to gyrodactylosis, which is to be classified as a list II disease.

2.3.2. In the ESC's view, special attention should be paid to improving the readability of existing Directives. In particular, the Directives should be rewritten in full from time to time in connection with significant amendments.

2.3.3. The ESC would also underline the importance of disseminating information on amendments to the Directives to consumers and industry and commerce.

Brussels, 31 October 1996.

*The President*  
*of the Economic and Social Committee*  
Tom JENKINS

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