

What are the Council's views on the communication on fisheries subsidies presented by the above governments?

How does the Council intend to defend our fisheries sector at the third Ministerial Conference in Seattle?

Does it intend to draw attention to the social, environmental and health aspects of the fisheries sector, as well as the purely industrial considerations?

### Answer

(24 January 2000)

1. The competent bodies of the Council have been informed of the communication on fisheries subsidies submitted by Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines and United States to the WTO General Council in the framework of the preparation of the Third WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Seattle from 30 November to 3 December.

2. In its Conclusions of 26 October 1999 concerning the preparation of the Seattle Conference, the Council has made it clear that any decision on trade liberalisation will take due account of the compliance with the United Nations International Convention on the Law of the Sea and the objectives of International Agreements on environmental conservation and natural resources management and of International Fisheries Agreements. Furthermore, among the general objectives for the negotiations, the Council has stressed the need to ensure that an appropriate balance between the further liberalisation of trade and the strengthening of multilateral rules contributes towards sustainable development, environmental protection, social progress the reduction of poverty and consumer health.

3. The Council will follow closely the developments of the preparatory process for the Seattle meeting and will in particular meet in special session in Seattle throughout the duration of the Conference.

(2000/C 203 E/144)

### WRITTEN QUESTION E-2008/99

by Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE) to the Commission

(9 November 1999)

*Subject:* The fisheries sector and the Millennium Round

The communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the EU approach to the WTO Millennium Round (COM(1999) 331 final) makes no specific mention either of fisheries or of the common fisheries policy. Meanwhile, the governments of Australia, the United States, the Philippines, Iceland, Norway, New Zealand and Peru have presented a communication to the WTO on subsidies to the fisheries sector which, should it become reality, would represent a serious threat to the common fisheries policy and the Community fishing industry.

The joint document, based on unsubstantiated assumptions which are not backed up by scientific data on zones and fleets, proposes that in the forthcoming WTO negotiations, members should agree to abolish subsidies which encourage over-capacity in the fisheries sector as they distort trade, are a particular threat to sustainable management of fish stocks and hinder sustainable development.

Given the fragile state of the Community fisheries sector and of areas dependent on fisheries, the Millennium Round could have serious consequences if the European Union does not mount a determined defence of our fishing industry.

What is the Commission's position on the fisheries sector with a view to the Millennium Round?

What are the Commission's views on the communication on fisheries subsidies presented by the above governments?

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Does it intend to draw attention to the social, environmental and health aspects of the fisheries sector, as well as the purely industrial considerations?

In addition, at the Verona agricultural fair Commissioner Fischler announced the creation of a WTO Forum for the defence of the European agriculture model, made up inter alia of representatives of agricultural federations, the processing industry, consumers, workers and environmentalists. Does the Commission also intend to create a similar forum for fisheries issues?

**Answer given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission**

*(30 November 1999)*

In its communication of 8 July 1999 on the EU Approach to the WTO Millennium Round, the Commission set out a possible Community agenda. This covers a series of areas such as agriculture and services, customs duties on non-agricultural products, investment, competition, facilitating trade and the relation between trade and the environment.

The Commission believes that tariff aspects of the fisheries sector should be included in the framework of tariff negotiations for non-agricultural products.

As regards customs duties, the Commission advocates a global tariff negotiation aiming to reduce tariffs, eliminate large variations and harmonise tariff structures. Tariff bracket definitions (low, average and high) applicable to all tariffs could provide a certain degree of flexibility, enabling a reasonable level of protection to be maintained for products that contribute most to maintaining producers' revenue and still constitute the main economic activity for some Community coastal regions.

Concerning subsidies in the fisheries sector and their effects on trade, the state of fishery resources and the environment, there is no guarantee that this topic will appear on the WTO Millennium Round agenda itself. Recently, during debates with the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment, the Commission expressed its support for the work of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and in particular for the international action plan for managing fishing capacity. The FAO assessment of the possible factors influencing fishing capacity (insufficient monitoring of the fleet, unsustainable management of fisheries, subsidies) is a prerequisite to any discussion with the WTO on a possible link between subsidies, overcapacity and overfishing.

With reference to defending Community interests in the fisheries sector, the Commission will ensure that the results of the negotiations are balanced regarding customs duties and other areas and will act in accordance with the negotiating instructions issued by the Council.

Regarding the Honourable Member's suggestion to create a 'WTO Forum' for fisheries similar to that for agriculture, the Commission will consider whether this is appropriate with regard to the scope of WTO negotiations on fisheries as it will be decided at the Seattle ministerial conference.

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(2000/C 203 E/145)

**WRITTEN QUESTION E-2009/99**

**by Ulpu Iivari (PSE) to the Commission**

*(9 November 1999)*

*Subject:* The role of libraries in modern society

On 15 May 1998, at the request of the Conference of Presidents, the President of Parliament announced that Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education and the Media had been authorised to table a report on the role of libraries in modern society. The committee appointed Mirja Rynnänen MEP, rapporteur. The own-initiative report was adopted in plenary at the October 1998 part-session<sup>(1)</sup>. The discussion on the report was said to have reached the Green Paper stage.