

Opinion on the proposal for a Council Regulation (EEC) establishing a Community system for fisheries and aquaculture

(93/C 73/09)

On 23 November 1992 the Bureau of the Economic and Social Committee, acting under the third paragraph of Article 20 of its Rules of Procedure, decided to ask the Committee to draw up an Opinion on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Agriculture and Fisheries, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 7 January 1993. The Rapporteur was Mr Silva.

At its 302nd Plenary Session (meeting of 27 January 1993), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

1. Taking as its basis the reports issued by the Commission in fulfilment of the requirements of Regulation (EEC) No 170/83⁽¹⁾, the Committee has already played a part in discussions on the situation of the fisheries sector over the period 1983-1990 and its prospects for 1993-2002. These earlier Opinions⁽²⁾ remain fully applicable.

2. The present Opinion supplements Opinion CES 1328/92 which was adopted at the Plenary Session of 24 November 1992 and which endorsed the proposal on condition that certain of its recommendations were accepted.

3. General comments

3.1. The proposed new Regulation is more than just a revamped or updated version of Regulation (EEC) No 170/83. In this context, it must be emphasized that the main aim of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to ensure continuity of supply and to improve the incomes of those working in the sector; this is only possible if sustainable fishing activity is guaranteed.

3.2. The survival and stability of the sector depends *inter alia* on resource conservation policy.

3.3. Earlier ESC Opinions have stressed that fishermen do not bear sole responsibility for the sector's current vulnerability. But the fact remains that fish stocks—particularly certain species in certain areas—are depleted. The situation demands new provisions to ensure stable, rational exploitation of fishery resources.

3.4. The management of fishing effort along these lines will impose additional constraints which will affect the entire socio-economic fabric of a sector already beset by difficulties. Financial compensation and social support measures must be devised to cushion the impact, with proper linkage between the CFP and the structural funds. Special attention will have to be devoted to regions particularly dependent on fisheries.

3.5. In view of the EC fisheries sector's present situation and the need to avoid unnecessary upheaval, the proposed measures should be phased in and applied with a degree of flexibility.

4. The Committee reaffirms its position as regards the retention—albeit with improvements—of the TACs and quotas system as an adjunct to the policy of adjusting fishing capacity to the resources available.

4.1. As the Committee has said before⁽²⁾, fishery resources are a common asset which should not be open to appropriation by the individual. The establishment of an EC licensing system, designed to help rationalize and manage the exploitation of fishery resources, should bring significant benefits. A licence should be considered as an administrative instrument authorizing a vessel to exploit a shared resource within the limits set by EC legislation. It does not automatically confer the right to a fishing quota.

4.2. Under the terms of the present framework Regulation, fishing licences or vessel identity cards are to be issued and administered by the Member States. The implementing arrangements and conditions for granting the licences are to be adopted later.

⁽¹⁾ OJ No L 24, 27. 1. 1983.

⁽²⁾ OJ No C 339, 31. 12. 1991, p. 75, OJ No C 223, 31. 8. 1992, p. 30.

4.3. In future, consideration will have to be given to the relationship between the issuing of licences and the new quota-management powers being delegated to trade organizations.

5. The Committee endorses the continued derogation to free access within the 12-mile band, designed to protect traditional fishing activities within that area. This principle should be linked to the granting of licences that respect certain criteria (e.g. length and type of gear used).

5.1. As stated in Opinion 1328/92, the principle of relative stability should be retained, subject to any adjustments that may be warranted in overall terms by changes in the situation since 1983.

6. The Common Fisheries Policy cannot continue to neglect the social aspects. The Committee reiterates the demands made in its previous Opinions.

6.1. It is worth reiterating certain prerequisites for striking the right balance between resources and fishing effort: policies must be formulated and applied with a high degree of transparency; measures must be applied with a certain flexibility; there must be effective participation by interested parties; and the social problems raised by restructuring and the reduction of capacity must be settled.

7. A resource-management policy, drawing on accurate information about the level and development of stocks fished in EC waters, is extremely important. A sound marine scientific research policy should enable marine resources to be exploited more rationally, effectively and coherently. As the Committee has said before, the resources allocated to research should be increased, in line with the importance of the task.

8. It seems inconsistent to draw attention to the deterioration of fishery resources without men-

tioning the important role played by industrial fishing. Data⁽¹⁾ show that 30 million tonnes of fish (around one third of total world catch) is used for fishmeal.

9. Community structural aid for aquaculture, aimed mainly at developing the sector, is governed by Regulation (EEC) No 4028/86. The Committee reaffirms the principle that aquaculture must continue to be treated as an activity which complements fishing.

10. Specific comments

10.1. Article 1(2)

After the word 'resources' in the fifth line, add:

'so as to ensure a fair income for the sector's workforce'.

10.2. Article 2(2)

Add a category (h):

'providing financial or other compensation to producers who are likely to be affected by the provisions of the present Article.'

10.3. Article 6(5)

The Commission should define what it means by 'at regular intervals' in the context of setting multi-annual TACs.

10.4. Article 7

At the end of the second paragraph, after the words 'fishing mortality', add:

'The Council shall also determine the financial provisions and social measures needed to cushion the economic and social impact of restructuring.'

⁽¹⁾ *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Done at Brussels, 27 January 1993.

*The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee*

Susanne TIEMANN