

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Regulation establishing Community financial measures for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy and in the area of the Law of the Sea'**

*(COM(2005) 117 final — 2005/0045 (CNS))*

*(2006/C 65/07)*

On 19 May 2005, the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 9 November 2005. The rapporteur was Mr Sarró Iparraguirre.

At its 422nd plenary session, held on 14 and 15 December 2005 (meeting of 14 December 2005), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion *nem. con.* with 122 votes in favour and four abstentions.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 The European Commission has called on the EESC to issue an opinion on the proposed Council Regulation establishing the framework for financial measures necessary for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) with funding of EUR 2,583 million, which comes in addition to the proposal for a Council Regulation on the European Fisheries Fund <sup>(1)</sup> (EFF), with a budget of EUR 4,963 million.

1.2 One of the aims of the CFP is to make financial intervention more effective. The proposal for a Regulation aims to help improve the conditions for implementing financial interventions in particular areas by setting specific objectives for each of them.

1.3 The Committee wishes to express its deep concern over the lack of any decision regarding the approval of the budget for 2007-2013. It believes that the European Union is facing a very serious situation, which will require great political effort if it is to be resolved. The financing of the CFP cannot be undertaken if the budgets for this Regulation and the EFF Regulation are not maintained. The Committee urges the Council to adopt political decisions that do not affect CFP financing, but that ensure sustainable exploitation of living aquatic resources in a manner that provides sustainable economic, environmental and social conditions. The EESC also regrets that, to date, the Council has not adopted any decision regarding the proposal for a Regulation on the European Fisheries Fund.

1.4 The proposed Regulation sets out four areas of action in which Community financial measures will be applied:

- control and enforcement of the CFP rules;
- conservation measures, data collection and improvement of scientific advice concerning the sustainable management of fisheries resources within the scope of the CFP;
- governance of the CFP;
- international relations in the area of the CFP and the Law of the Sea.

1.5 The Committee considers that this proposal for a Regulation is necessary and approves of the areas of application that it covers.

## 2. Community financial measures in each of the four areas of application

### 2.1 Control and enforcement of the CFP rules

2.1.1 The financial measures that will be applied to control and enforcement of the CFP will serve to improve the control of fishing activities undertaken by Member States, and evaluation and control activities carried out by the Commission services. The following expenditure by Member States shall be eligible for financing measures: spending on new control technologies, training programmes, pilot inspection and observer schemes, audits and information seminars.

2.1.2 Financing will be provided for Commission expenditure relating to administrative arrangements with the Joint Research Centre, spending on inspections by the Commission, and expenditure generated by the Community Fisheries Control Agency.

2.1.3 The Committee agrees with the proposed control and enforcement measures.

### 2.2 Conservation measures, data collection and improvement of scientific advice concerning the sustainable management of fisheries resources within the scope of the CFP

2.2.1 The proposal for a Regulation's second area of application covers financial aid to Member States with a view to drawing up multi-annual aggregated and science based datasets incorporating biological, technical, environmental and economic information, with the objective of assessing the state of the resources, the level of fishing, the impact fisheries have on resources and the marine eco-system, and the performance of the fishing industry, within and outside Community waters.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ C 267 of 27.10.2005.

2.2.2 To obtain this information, Member States will collect basic data, while additional data will be gathered by the Commission.

2.2.3 Bearing in mind that fisheries management depends on the availability of data concerning the biological state of fish stocks and the impact of fishing fleet activity, the EESC approves the proposed financial measures in the areas of basic data collection by Member States. It also supports the financing of additional data collection, by the Commission, as such data make it possible to optimise and standardise the collection of basic data from Member States. Nonetheless, the Committee believes that, in order to improve fisheries management, financing should also be provided, via the Member States, for expenditure incurred by the EU fishing sector in order to conduct the required studies to assess the environmental effects of fishing activities and the socio-economic situation in the sector.

2.2.4 The reform of the CFP has resulted in new demands for scientific advice, in particular concerning the adoption of an ecosystem approach and the management of mixed fisheries. The Committee therefore believes that the expenses eligible for Community financial measures in the field of scientific advice are appropriate.

2.2.5 However, in line with its opinion on the European Fisheries Fund<sup>(?)</sup>, the Committee reiterates that financial aid should also cover scientific advice to the fishing sector. Economic effort in this field is essential if the CFP rules are to be complied with properly.

### 2.3 Governance of the CFP

2.3.1 In this third area of application, the financial measures are geared towards involving stakeholders in all the phases of the CFP, and keeping them informed of the objectives of the CFP and related measures. This financial aid will be channelled via the EU Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Regional Advisory Councils, and through information and training seminars organised by the European Commission.

2.3.2 The Committee supports these measures and believes that, with regard to the Regional Advisory Councils, as suggested in point 5.3 of the Legislative Financial Statement appended to the proposal for a Resolution, the Commission should consider the possibility of extending the financing period for the operating costs of these Regional Advisory Councils.

### 2.4 International relations in the area of the CFP and the Law of the Sea

2.4.1 In the area of international relations, the financial measures will cover expenditure arising from the fisheries

agreements (including fisheries partnership agreements), and from the European Community's involvement in international organisations. The EESC believes that, within the specific objectives pertaining to international relations, it is essential to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources in third-country and international waters, and to maintain employment in fishing-dependent regions.

2.4.2 The Committee deems it essential for all Community policies that the European Union participate in all international organisations relating to fisheries or the law of the sea, given that the future of international fisheries resources depends on the responsible management of international organisations. It therefore approves the Community financial measures set down in the area of international relations.

2.4.3 The EESC believes that the financial measures in this area should also cover the attendance of fisheries sector representatives at meetings of international organisations, at the request of the Member States or the Commission.

### 2.5 Technical assistance

2.5.1 The Committee supports the Community financial measures for expenditure arising from the preparation, follow-up, monitoring, audit and evaluation required in order to meet the objectives of this Regulation.

## 3. Rates of co-financing, financing procedures, allocation of funds and assessment and control

3.1 The Regulation establishes the rates of co-financing with Member States for the financial measures applicable to expenditure in each of the areas of application. The EESC has no objection to the proposed rates.

3.2 The Regulation prohibits the accumulation of Community support, stipulating that actions financed under this Regulation shall not receive assistance from other Community financial instruments. The Committee believes that the financial instruments for other Community policies, such as development, research, external trade and the environment, should also contribute to the actions in the field of international relations set out in this Regulation. In the Communication from the Commission on an Integrated framework for fisheries partnership agreements with third countries, the European Commission clearly indicates that the objective of the European Union is to contribute to sustainable fisheries via the CFP and the objectives of other European policies such as development, research, trade and the environment.

<sup>(?)</sup> Idem 1, point 3.5.3.6.

3.3 Lastly, the Regulation sets out the financing procedures in each area of application. It describes how and when Member States should apply to the Commission for Community financial measures, and details the Commission's decision on these applications, setting the total amount, the rate of the financial contribution to the Member state, and any conditions applicable to this contribution. The Regulation also provides for the protection of Community financial interests by means of preventive measures against fraud, corruption and other illegal activities, along with inspections, controls and audits on the financial aid granted; the Committee therefore considers that the financing and control system set down in the Regulation is adequate.

#### 4. Conclusions

4.1 The EESC approves the proposal for a Council Regulation establishing Community financial measures for the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy and in the area of the Law of the Sea, and calls on the Commission to take the following observations into account:

4.2 The Committee believes that there is a need for the present proposal for a Regulation establishing the framework for financial interventions for the implementation of the CFP and the Law of the Sea, in addition to the proposal for a Council Regulation on the European Fisheries Fund.

4.3 The Committee deeply regrets that, at the time of writing, no decision has been taken to adopt the budgets for 2007-2013, which is the period of application for the financial measures covered in this opinion, and that the Council has not adopted a decision on the proposal for a Regulation on the European Fisheries Fund.

4.4 The EESC calls on the Commission to ensure that any variation in the budget, in the context of the financial perspectives, does not have a proportional effect on the CFP budget, as it would otherwise be impossible to achieve the objectives defined for the reform of the CFP.

4.5 The proposed areas of application are a necessity and are sufficient, since the Regulation provides Member States and the Commission with the means for more efficient financial implementation of the CFP.

4.6 Of the areas of application specified by the Regulation, the EESC would like to draw the Commission's attention to the

particular importance of improving scientific advice. The sustainable development of fisheries resources and, consequently, the success of the CFP depends on detailed, truthful, current scientific knowledge about the status of different fish species. An immense effort is being made by EU, Member States' and fishing authorities, along with the fisheries sector, making it essential for the European Union to have the best scientific advice on its own resources and those of international waters.

4.7 To this end, in order to improve scientific advice, the Committee believes that financing should also be provided, via the Member States, for expenditure incurred by the EU fishing sector in order to conduct studies to assess the environmental effects of fishing activities and the socio-economic situation in the sector.. It therefore believes that the financial aid should also cover scientific advice to the fisheries sector.

4.8 The Committee agrees with the proposed financial measures in the area of CFP governance, which will help to involve stakeholders in all the phases of the CFP and to keep them informed of the progress made towards its objectives.

4.9 The EESC believes that the financing period for the operating costs of the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) should be extended.

4.10 The Committee considers that it is particularly important for the European Union to participate in the international organisations relating to fisheries or the law of the sea, and therefore approves the financial assistance proposed for these areas and for fisheries agreements, including fisheries cooperation agreements with third countries, as these are essential in order to help conserve and sustainably exploit fisheries resources in third-country and international waters, and to maintain employment in fishing-dependent regions.

4.11 The EESC believes that the financial measures in the area of international relations should also cover the attendance of fisheries sector representatives at meetings of international organisations, at the request of the Member States or the Commission.

4.12 Lastly, the Committee considers that the financial instruments for other Community policies, such as development, research, external trade and the environment, should also contribute to the initiatives in the field of international relations for the CFP.

Brussels, 14 December 2005.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Anne-Marie SIGMUND