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## *Summary note*

### *Interparliamentary Committee Meeting Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy: the opinion of National Parliaments*

*Tuesday, 28 February 2012  
European Parliament, Brussels*

40 Members from 25 Parliamentary Chambers in 20 EU Member States participated in the interparliamentary committee meeting organised by the EP Committee on Fisheries with the support of the Directorate for relations with national Parliaments on 28 February. A video recording of the proceedings is available at the [EP website](#), background documents are available on the [ICM website](#).

#### **Introduction**

After an introduction by Gabriel Mato Adrover, Chair of the EP Committee on Fisheries, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki took the floor. Convinced that a greater involvement of national parliaments will improve the quality and the ownership of this reform, and happy to stress the obvious common ground, she insisted however on the main controversial points included in the reform proposals.

On the question of **maximum sustainable yield (MSY)**, the Commissioner took due note of the request for more time and flexibility. But she stressed that binding targets can't be avoided if we want to achieve results: the longer we wait, the harder will be the efforts to be made. In the past, improvements have been made under similar pressure.

On the proposed **discard ban**, she underlined that a gradual implementation is necessary: public opinion is strongly against discards, and the issue can't be left to the industry. She will work at defining pragmatic technical solutions for mixed fisheries and realistic deadlines.

On the question of **transferable fishing concessions (TFCs)**, she stressed that for the first time a European Commission proposal recognises the public ownership of fish stocks; in the Commission's mind, TFCs may be necessary in order to reduce overcapacity, but national Parliaments have a part to play in bringing the question urgently back to Member States to generate new ideas. In any case an exemption of small-scale fleet may be possible.

On **regionalisation**, the Commissioner was very open to new suggestions in the framework of the Treaty, but underlined that only the British contribution so far reacted to this part of the reform.

The Commissioner remained strict on the need for deadlines, but ensured that funds will help fishermen to adapt to new requirements, and that their income would be higher once MSY was achieved.

The floor was then opened to MPs and MEPs: Many interventions centred around the topics brought up by the Commissioner, but included some new aspects like the need for a sound scientific basis (Anne McIntosh, UK/House of Commons), the lack of legal recognition of small-scale fisheries (Ana Miranda MEP), the lacking social dimension of the reform proposal (Alejandro Alonso Núñez, ES/Congreso de los diputados), the necessity for the stocks to be governed at regional level (Paolo Russo, IT/Camera dei deputati), which could lead to go beyond the Treaty on decentralisation (Ian Hudghton MEP).

Commissioner Damanaki responded that regionalisation will have to take place within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty and that the diversity of the regions will be taken into account, once the proposals are adopted, in regionalised technical measures. On the definition of small-scale vessels, she saw no solution but to stick to the current definition, because the length of a vessel is easy to control. She stressed that if the definition is broadened in the sense of Member States' requests, even 90% of all vessels will be exempted. Regarding funding, the Commissioner's stated aim was a better allocation of money to reach better results, following the goal of a modernisation of fleet, but not increasing overcapacity, targeting efforts on selectivity and safety of fishermen.

## **Part I: Reform of the basic regulation of the CFP**

The first thematic session on the reform of the basic regulation of the CFP was opened by the EP rapporteur Ulrike Rodust (S&D, DE). Ms Rodust made the point that for the first time not only the Commission and national executives negotiated the future of CFP, but that the European Parliament now has the same co-decision rights as the Council of Ministers and that the EP would rely on the support of national Parliaments in achieving the best solution for all of Europe. To that effect Ms Rodust made it clear that she will submit her draft report only in the month of May and that the vote in the Committee on Fisheries will only take place in July so that contributions from national Parliaments could be taken aboard during the process.

With reference to the Commission proposal Ms Rodust indicated some areas where according to her amendments should be tabled. In general she supported the Commission's ambition to fix a timetable to achieve the **maximum sustainable yield (MSY)** but warned that the deadlines should be realistic. As some stocks cannot recover until 2015 for biological reasons she proposed to introduce the concept of "feasible" maximum sustainable yield (fMSY) in keeping within the deadline 2015 as proposed by the Commission.

This new proposal by the EP rapporteur was welcomed by Mr Pirklhuber (AT/Nationalrat), Ms Lövin (EP/V, SE) and Ms Faber-Van Der Klashorst (NL/Eerste Kamer-Senate). Messrs Harrington (IE/Dáil), Pupins (LT/ Seimas) and Fidalgo Arede (ES/Senado) made reference to the Commission proposal, called the deadline 2015 unrealistic and therefore opposed the concept, or called for an extension of the deadline 'at least until 2020' (Mr Garcia Diaz, ES/Congreso de los diputados). The EP rapporteur agreed that it was biologically impossible to achieve an overall MSY by 2015 but pointed out that, as the thinking behind that objective went in the right direction, she will propose fMSY.

Ms Rodust said that she was in favour of introducing a **discard ban** because more fish would be landed and deducted from the quota. At the same time she highlighted that she would prefer a discard ban based on fisheries instead of species, maybe with exceptions where this should prove to be counter-productive.

During the debate this turned out to be one of the most contentious points of the Commission proposal: while Mr Larsson (SE/Riksdagen) and Mr Garcia Diaz (ES/Congreso de los diputados) supported discard bans in general terms, Ms Rumpf (DE/Bundesrat), Mr Harrington (IE/Dáil), Ms Happach-Kasan (DE/Bundestag) and Mr Guedon (FR/Assemblée Nationale) preferred discard bans based on fisheries (instead of species), thereby supporting the EP rapporteur's proposal. Mr Blumfelds from the Latvian Saeima was in favour of a discard ban if this was taken into account in the quota and Mr Sintobin from the Flemish Parliament would only support a reduction of discards instead of a complete discard ban. Ms Herviaux (FR/Sénat) and Ms Faber-Van Der Klashorst (NL/Eerste Kamer-Senate) voiced their concerns as regards the potential consequences and suggested to reflect upon a progressive approach to introduce a discard ban.

Ms Rodust also vowed to analyse the proposed **transferable fisheries concessions (TFC)** in depth, as she found very convincing arguments for individual quotas - not individual *transferable* quotas as proposed by the Commission - e.g. because this would avoid the 'race on the fish'. In her view, quotas should only be transferable where there were overcapacities. The definition of the capacity of vessels should be equivalent not to their length, but to their ability to catch fish, taking into account the kind of gear used, etc. If Member States could prove that TFCs were not needed she would be ready for exceptions.

The original Commission proposal was only supported by Mr Fidalgo Arede (ES/Senado), under the condition of a flexible application and a distinction between industrial and small-scale fisheries. The overwhelming majority completely opposed the introduction of TFCs: Mr Garcia Diaz (ES/Congreso de los diputados), Ms Castiglione (IT/Senato), Mr Gallagher (EP/EPP, IE), Mr Sintobin (BE/Flemish Parliament), Mr Cadec (EP/EPP, FR), Mr Harrington (IE/Dáil), Mr Pupins (LT/Seimas) and Mr Guedon (FR/Assemblée Nationale). The two main arguments brought forward against the TFCs were the danger of a 'monetarisation' and concentration of fishing rights and linked to this the problem to maintain 'relative stability' with supranational transferable TFCs. Only two out of the seven seemed to be open for concessions in favour of TFCs if certain exceptions were made, for the Mediterranean or if the fishing effort was included respectively.

According to Ms Rodust a specific set of rules should apply for the **Black Sea and the Mediterranean** as they were very different from other seas (no quotas in the Mediterranean,

close to coast, mostly small-scale vessels, less transnational) and she confirmed that she was in favour of a specific chapter on the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In her point of view TFCs should only be transferable within one Member State and not be tradable beyond borders. She pointed out that the proposal under discussion would introduce TFCs if a Member State was not willing to reduce overcapacities once they were established. At the same time Ms Rodust invited everybody to present a viable definition of the 'small-scale fisheries' excluded from the TFCs which would become a difficult exercise since no country wanted to admit that it had overcapacities. She set out the tendency to be ready to accept other definitions for 'small-scale fisheries' than the length of a vessel (12 meters) like the strength of the engine or the gear used.

As regards **regionalisation** Ms Rodust expressed her support for consulting the stakeholders (the former Regional Advisory Councils, RACs) for the establishment of management plans. The EP rapporteur reminded the meeting that the Committee on Fisheries would consult the European Parliament's Legal Service in order to assess in how far a regionalised policy can be pursued. The discussion of the concept of regionalisation was relatively inconclusive as only five speakers made reference to it and support and opposition were relatively balanced. Basically both sides felt that a level playing field for fishermen in different Member States would be difficult to guarantee if this concept would to be applied but came to different conclusions: one Member rejecting it while another Member asking for a compulsory definition of regional fishery administrative areas.

Additional topics briefly touched upon were the support of an **eco-system based approach** for the reform versus the **socio-economic consequences**, the necessary support for more **research**, the integration of **regional policy measures** into the reform as e.g. the modernisation of fleets as well as financial support in case of temporary closures of fisheries. As requested by some Members during the debate, Ms Rodust also expressed her support for **sustainable aquaculture** and **small-scale fisheries**.

## **Part Two: The Common Market Organization and producer organizations as part of a reformed CFP**

The session was introduced by the EP rapporteur on the common market organization **Struan Stevenson** (ECR, UK). Mr Stevenson said that today there were 214 **Producer Organizations** in the EU, which are an important counterbalance to retailers and play a key role in coordinating the day-to-day management of fishing activities. The key objective of his report is to achieve a streamlining of POs so that they become more effective. Transnational POs should be encouraged in sea basins, while smaller POs should be merged. The European Commission should in his view offer a basket of options for day-to-day management from which member states can choose the most appropriate for their fisheries. POs would also have a key role to play in the management of the proposed transferable fishing concessions, which should be voluntary rather than mandatory. Member states must have the flexibility to allocate rights for only 7 or 8 years, rather than the 15 years proposed by the Commission, and they must have the final say whether such concessions are tradable at all.

According to the EP rapporteur, any interference with the free market such as storage mechanisms, trigger prices etc. must be handled with extreme care. In his personal view,

abolishing minimum price intervention mechanisms would incentivise POs to improve market conditions.

The ensuing debate focused mostly on the questions of labelling and how the EU can ensure a level playing field between imports from third countries and EU products.

As regards **labelling** provisions, EP rapporteur Stevenson said that there was a need to sweep away the many confusing ecolabels that have sprung up in the last years and which make competing claims. In fact, the EU itself should establish minimum rules for a voluntary ecolabel. As far as information on the labels is concerned, the date of landing should be mandatory, while the date of catch voluntary. Otherwise consumers will be confused by up to three different dates on a label (dates of catch, landing and processing). Mr Stevenson also reminded participants that the recently agreed EU consumer information regulation asked the European Commission to assess the impact of country of origin labelling for mixed food products, such as frozen pizzas. Producers might now face new labelling provisions for mixed fish products.

Mr Torres from the Spanish Senate agreed that the required date should be the date of landing, whereas Ms Behm from the German Bundestag underlined that the date of catch is important for the traceability of the product. According to Ms Behm, the label must also indicate whether the product has been processed fresh or after it had been frozen. Mr Pupinis (LV/Seimas) stressed that the consumer needs to know what is in a product, but on the other hand labelling requirements must not go too far in order to keep the administrative burden manageable. Mr García-Díez from the Spanish Congreso de los diputados suggested EU criteria for voluntary information, such as environmental or social information. Mr Papageorgiou (EL/Vouli Ton Ellinon) said that there is no information available on how and where aquaculture products from third countries were produced. Ana Miranda (EP, Greens-EFA/ES) urged more support for the "denominations of origin" labelling of EU aquaculture products.

Participants also urged the EU to ensure a **level playing field for fisheries products**. Examples included a recent EU free trade agreement with Papua New Guinea, where fisheries products are canned under poor conditions and imported into the EU (Mr Torres, ES/Senate), or the case of neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean which subsidise the export of fisheries products while applying customs duties on imports (Mr Papageorgiou, EL/Vouli Ton Ellinon). Mr García-Díez (ES/Congreso de los diputados) proposed that third country products which don't meet EU labour standards should not be allowed to enter the EU. EP rapporteur Stevenson replied that this might be difficult under WTO rules, but that a voluntary EU ecolabel could provide consumers with the relevant environmental and social information. Non-EU producers could then also apply for such a label.

### **Part Three: Perspectives of the new European maritime and fisheries fund**

EP rapporteur Alain Cadec (EPP, FR) presented his views on the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF). The EP rapporteur stressed that the EMFF is for fishermen and for fishing, but also needs to play its part in preserving the fishing stocks. Mr Cadec underlined

that we don't have a mandate to restructure fishing, but to maintain it, and that we need to facilitate the access of young people to the sector.

According to the EP rapporteur, the EMFF proposals lack support mechanisms for fishermen in case of short-term crises. Furthermore, fleet renewal has been totally dropped from the proposal but is necessary to increase safety and to reduce energy consumption. Mr Cadec also urged investments in the competitiveness of fishing harbours.

In line with Mr Cadec's introduction, Mr Naudins (LV/Saeima) urged support for measures of modernisation currently excluded from the EMFF, such as the replacement of engines with more environmentally-friendly ones, both for reasons of safety and energy efficiency. Mr Naudins also suggested that labour-intensive companies which employ a lot of workers but whose turnover doesn't exceed a certain threshold should receive the same intensity of EMFF support as small and medium-sized enterprises.

Most of the ensuing contributions focused on the balance between the fisheries-related and the maritime policy expenditure in the new EMFF. Mr Tysklind (SV/Riksdagen) said that environmental sustainability is a pre-condition for economic sustainability, and that we have to create the basis for continued fisheries in the future. Mr Guerriau (FR/Senat) stated that the EU had a specific fund for fisheries for 20 years. Now that support for the maritime and fisheries policies are merged into this new fund, where will the demarcation line be? Mr Nyland (FI, Eduskunta) urged EMFF aid for new infrastructure and fishing ports, the creation of a "start-up package" for young fishermen, aid for damage done by seals and seabirds and equal treatment for small-scale fisheries in maritime and inland areas. Mr Pringle (IE/Dáil) underlined the need to support not only fishermen in crisis, but also the crews of the ports concerned. Mr Pringle also asked support for communities that suffered from the decline in fishing. In his view, such support should not to be channelled through POs, which are often focused exclusively on fishing activities, but instead through local authorities and partnerships.

Mr Cadec stressed that environmental and social aspects are important in this context. As the EMFF also covers maritime issues, we need to make sure that fisheries and maritime policy don't undermine each other. According to the EP rapporteur, financial support for fisheries should be for fishing activities, not for restructuring the sector.

EP Fisheries Committee Chairman Mato Adrover welcomed the contributions from the national Parliaments which enriched the debate, and closed the meeting.

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*Prepared by the Directorate for relations with national Parliaments in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Committee on Fisheries*