

European Economic and Social Committee

NAT/168

Fisheries resources/

Mediterranean

Brussels, 26 March 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament laying down a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy

(COM(2002) 535 final)

On 9 October 2002 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament laying down a Community Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean Sea under the Common Fisheries Policy

(COM(2002) 535 final).

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 11 March 2003. The rapporteur was **Mr Chagas**.

At its 398th plenary session (meeting of 26 March 2003), the European Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following opinion.

1. Introduction

1. This Communication from the Commission¹ lays down an action plan for Mediterranean fisheries, thereby laying the foundations for a new vision and a new framework for fisheries in the region.
2. This new vision would take full account of all the factors allowing for responsible and sustainable fisheries, and would be part of an integrated approach based on new requirements regarding the environment in which fishing activities are conducted in each Member State.
3. The new framework, meanwhile, would be based on a new approach to the jurisdiction of maritime waters and relations with third countries operating in the area, and allow for the full application of all components of the CFP, in particular fisheries conservation policy; studies and research conducted by official bodies in the Member States and other international organisations suggest that stocks are overexploited and require effective action to promote regeneration.
4. In particular, the Commission action plan recommends the following:
 - adopting a concerted approach to the declaration of Fisheries Protection Zones,
 - using fishing effort management as a key instrument,
 - improving fishing methods to reduce the negative impact on stocks and the marine environment,
 - improving control and enforcement measures,
 - improving the availability of scientific advice,
 - increasing the participation of the fisheries sector in the consultation process,
 - promoting international cooperation.

2. General comments

1. Fishing activities in the Mediterranean are very important both economically and socially and, in many instances, their specific importance far exceeds their relative importance in terms of contribution to GDP. In terms of employment, the Mediterranean fleet generates 42% of EU jobs in the sector.

2. The overwhelming majority of vessels operating in the Mediterranean – and 80.2% of all Community vessels operating in the area - are less than 12m long. The Mediterranean fleet can therefore be described as an essentially artisanal fleet.
3. Owing to the narrowness of the continental shelf and the types of vessel operating in the area, this fleet fishes very close to the coast in territorial waters. It is therefore unique not only in terms of enterprise structure, but also in terms of type of activity, nature of the work, capital investments and amount of catches.
4. The special nature of Mediterranean fisheries also determined the way in which the Common Fisheries Policy was applied in the area and subsequently adapted since it was introduced.
5. Although, in general terms, the CFP's structure and market policies were applied in the Mediterranean as in other Community areas, its conservation policy – possibly the most important part of the Common Fisheries Policy – was not applied as rigidly. This is also true of control policy.
6. Integrated fisheries management requires an analysis of biological, economic and social aspects, appropriate management instruments, and dialogue between the sector, the authorities and the scientific community.
7. The Committee welcomes this Commission Communication and the measures it proposes to meet its objective of redefining the Common Fisheries Policy in the Mediterranean within three years, which implies – inter alia – applying the full array of management instruments that already exist within the CFP. This is a very ambitious objective given the short space of time the Commission has given itself to achieve it.
8. The EESC has, furthermore, called for such action in a number of previous opinions².
9. The Committee also highlights the Commission's intention that actions taken at Community level to meet this objective should be the result of a broad debate with the social partners, either within the existing relevant bodies or in bodies set up for this purpose. Setting up a Regional Advisory Council for the Mediterranean, as envisaged in the roadmap, could be a major step in the right direction. The EESC also welcomes the work being done to set up a Mediterranean-wide fishermen's association, and stresses the importance of involving all the main stakeholders - in particular, ship owners and employees' representatives - in this process.
 1. The widespread illegal fishing that is practised in the Mediterranean by vessels from outside the region flouts good practice and is incompatible with responsible and sustainable fisheries. The Committee stresses the need to promote cooperation between coastal states, and therefore welcomes the holding of a regional conference to map out new developments for Mediterranean fisheries.

10. The Committee particularly welcomes the idea of considering a new approach and common position on extending the area of jurisdiction over territorial waters, as the current situation is very inconsistent. Some Member States in the area have between 6 and 12 miles of territorial waters, another has a 49-mile Fisheries Protection Zone, and a future Member State has a 25-mile Exclusive Fishing Zone. This situation and initiatives by some Member States, who in practice have extended their waters by adopting environmental protection zones, point to the need to address this issue carefully but ambitiously.
11. The EESC welcomes this approach and calls for efforts to be made at EU level with a view to reaching a common position on the jurisdiction of maritime waters, and for this to be pursued multilaterally between all the coastal states of the Mediterranean. This could be the cornerstone of successful CFP reform in the Mediterranean.
12. A common position on extending territorial waters could make a huge contribution, inter alia, to standardising CFP management, harmonising procedures, increasing the level of responsibility of stakeholders, and combating illegal fishing and any other actions that flout good practice or fail to meet responsible fishing criteria.
13. The Committee welcomes this approach, which should not lead to an increase in fishing effort, but should ensure that the Member States concerned can control this effort more effectively. However, the Member States must be given the human, technical and financial resources needed to apply control measures properly.
14. Studies and advice produced by the relevant official bodies in the Member States and other scientific bodies all agree on the depleted state of fisheries resources in the Mediterranean. It is therefore a matter of urgency that the conservation policy is fully applied in order to ensure the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources and the continuity of this activity, which is very important both economically and socially for the survival of certain regions and their communities.
15. Simultaneously implementing Community fisheries conservation and management policy in the Mediterranean and encouraging the active intervention of regional coordination bodies – e.g. by improving cooperation with other neighbouring countries in the region - could be highly beneficial for the future of Mediterranean fisheries and would also have positive repercussions for other areas. The FAO's sub-regional projects (e.g. ADRIAMED, COPEMED and MEDSUDMED) could provide the basis for consolidating scientific cooperation.
16. Preparing the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in the Mediterranean requires knowledge of the situation in which action will be taken and, in particular, of the state of stocks, their biological make-up and/or their chance of regenerating.

17. Fishing depends on a complex biological situation that is affected by many factors - climatic, environmental and others – about which more needs to be known.
18. If this economic activity is to continue and biodiversity be preserved, very specific rules for the conservation and management of biological resources must therefore be introduced. Failing this, we are simply contributing towards their depletion.
 1. By increasing multilateral cooperation, these rules should be harmonised and applied to all fleets operating in the Mediterranean.
19. To ensure that decisions – and indeed all the regulatory machinery governing Mediterranean fisheries – are sound, scientific advice on fisheries also needs to be improved.
20. While the various institutes and scientific communities throughout the Member States have made an effort to produce scientific studies and advice relevant to the sector, these efforts must be adapted to the genuine realities and needs of the sector if such material is to be objective and relevant.
21. Moreover, with regard to fisheries in both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, the EESC has already stressed that there is a need to "strengthen research in this field, encouraging better cooperation and exchange of information at European level and allocating appropriate resources"³. The Committee is therefore concerned by the reduction of funding available for research in the sector under the 6th Framework Programme.
22. Setting up a Mediterranean subgroup within the STECF⁴ could be extremely useful in supporting new management actions and measures, if it is given the appropriate human and financial resources.
23. As previously stated in its Opinion⁵ on the roadmap (COM(2002) 181), the EESC welcomes the gradual reduction of fishing practices and methods that have a negative impact on the marine environment, and calls for more selective and environmentally-friendly methods and fishing gear to be adopted. As it has stated on numerous occasions, it is essential that social and economic stakeholders are involved in drawing up these measures and in preparing the planned revision of Regulation 1626/94.
24. An in-depth analysis is also needed of fishing activities that are termed "recreational fishing" but which are sometimes comparable to professional activity.
25. The CFP's objectives in the Mediterranean must safeguard the Community's leading role in applying its various policies in order to ensure sustainable activities and consistent policies, while also ensuring that national and local bodies are properly involved in the various areas, in particular through Regional Advisory Councils.

26. In order to safeguard the environmental conditions necessary for protecting fisheries resources, considerable vigilance is needed regarding environmental measures and actions to fight pollution and protect the biotope. This is particularly pressing in a sea such as the Mediterranean.
 1. Protection of the marine environment is essential if fishing activities are to be sustainable. Greater consideration must be given to this area and words translated into action as part of a genuinely comprehensive and integrated policy for the protection of the marine environment that addresses, inter alia, the serious pollution problems caused by accidents involving ships carrying fuel or dangerous goods, or oil spills at sea.
27. The adjustments and reforms that will need to be introduced to enable the CFP to be applied in the Mediterranean are bound to have repercussions on the social fabric.
28. Indeed, the full application of the conservation, structure and market policies in the Mediterranean - even after they have been adapted to the specific characteristics of the area – will have social consequences for people who make their living from the sea.
29. The Committee stresses that support should be provided for the development of aquaculture as a complement to traditional fishing activity⁶.
30. The EESC recommends that Common Fisheries Policy reform in this region should take full account of the social dimension, as this is a key element that will lend it credibility. In particular, it points to the Opinion currently being prepared on the *Action plan to counter the social, economic and regional consequences of the restructuring of the EU fishing industry*⁷ and, given the essentially artisanal nature of the sector in this region, the role that could be played by women.
31. In the meantime, the introduction of socio-economic measures by the Member States must be harmonised so as to prevent undesirable distortions of competition and ensure appropriate levels of social protection. This is currently not the case.

Brussels, 26 March 2003.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

European Economic and Social Committee

European Economic and Social Committee

Roger Briesch

Patrick Venturini

¹ COM(2002) 535 final

² For example, CESE 1369/2002

³ CESE 1369/2002 (Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy)

⁴ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries

⁵ See footnote 3

⁶ CESE 1412/2003 fin

⁷ R/CESE 164/2003

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