



*European Economic and Social Committee*

**NAT/212**  
**Fisheries - conversion**  
**(Morocco)**

Brussels, 29 October 2003

## **OPINION**

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on the

**Proposal for a Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 2561/2001 aiming to promote the conversion of fishing vessels and of fishermen that were, up to 1999, dependent on the fishing agreement with Morocco**

COM(2003) 437 final - 2003/157 (CNS)



On 4 August 2003 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Articles 36 and 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

*Proposal for a Council Regulation (EC) No. 2561/2001 aiming to promote the conversion of fishing vessels and of fishermen that were, up to 1999, dependent on the fishing agreement with Morocco*  
COM(2003) 437 final – 2003/157 (CNS).

On 23 September 2003 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment to undertake the preparatory work.

In view of the urgency of the matter, at its plenary session on 29 and 30 October 2003 (meeting of 29 October) the European Economic and Social Committee appointed **Mr Chagas** as rapporteur-general and adopted the following opinion by 66 votes in favour, with two abstentions.

## 1. Introduction

1.1 When the Council adopted its Regulation 2561/2001, which aims to promote the conversion of fishing vessels and fishermen that until 1999 were dependent on the fishing agreement with Morocco, it included in the regulation a number of derogations from certain provisions of Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector. It also approved complementary appropriations for structural and socio-economic measures.

1.2 These decisions were justified as an exceptional measure to facilitate the implementation of the conversion plans for Community fleets affected by the non-renewal of the fishing agreement with Morocco, and to provide the resources needed for individual or collective plans enabling fishermen to take early retirement or retrain for work outside the sea fishing sector.

1.3 It is worth noting that, as proposed by fishermen's organisations, a minimum of 32% of the total amount of aid was to be allocated to socio-economic measures.

## 2. The Commission proposal

2.1 The Commission proposal introduces a series of amendments to address the exceptional situation that has arisen. The aim is to reach a maximum number of fishermen and treat them on an equal footing by abolishing the rules which currently restrict the grant of individual lump sums exclusively to fishermen whose vessel has permanently stopped its activities.

2.2 At the same time, the Commission proposes to extend by twelve months the period of eligibility for aid and the final date for submitting the request for payment of the balance. The reference date for taking account of the period of unemployment is to be set at 1 January 2002.

3. **General comments**

3.1 The Committee supports the amendments proposed by the Commission, which are designed to address problems in implementing the exceptional regulation adopted in 2001 and to reach a maximum number of fishermen affected by the breakdown of negotiations for the renewal of the fishing agreement with Morocco.

Brussels, 29 October 2003.

The President  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General  
of the  
European Economic and Social Committee

**Roger Briesch**

**Patrick Venturini**

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