

2.4.2.4. Although unlikely, the possible failure of another segment to comply with the CFP objectives in the countries affected by the agreement with Morocco should have no impact on this specific Morocco-related measure.

2.4.2.5. The aid for fishermen under paragraph 3 is not granted on equal terms, when compared with the increases planned for vessel owners.

2.4.3. Article 5

2.4.3.1. It ought to be ensured in this article that the regulation governing the procedure for the payment of aid is flexible, and that the dates are brought forward as far as possible, since the vast majority of vessels are at present not working and the aid they currently receive will end on 31 December 2001. Special procedures to ensure there is no delay in payments are therefore vital.

Brussels, 18 October 2001.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Göke FRERICHS

Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Proposal for a Council Directive 2000/29/EC on protective measures against the introduction into the Community of organisms harmful to plants or plant products and against their spread within the Community'

(2002/C 36/09)

On 24 April 2001 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 37 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the above-mentioned 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 unanimously on 27 September 2001. The rapporteur was Mr Jaschick.

At its 385th plenary session (meeting of 17 October 2001) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion with 78 votes in favour and three abstentions.

1. Introduction

International trade in plants and plant products is on the increase, bringing with it the risk of spreading harmful organisms. Hence it is particularly important to harmonise protective measures within the EU. In particular the Commission is proposing measures aimed at cooperation between plant health bodies and customs authorities and at uniform fees. Basically the Committee regards a revision of Directive 2000/29/EC as necessary and welcomes it, but would draw attention to the following comments, which should help to improve the proposed directive.

2. Comments

2.1. The Committee welcomes the fact that the definitions contained in the directive (e.g. 'office of departure', 'office of destination', 'transit') have as far as possible been brought into line with those in the customs code. Cooperation with the customs authorities on such matters as transit consignments or the import/export of wooden packaging⁽¹⁾ makes harmonisation absolutely essential.

2.2. The deliberate import of harmful organisms for scientific purposes — e.g. for research at universities — must be subject to authorisation. No such system exists at present.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2001) 183 final, Article 1(2).

Harmful organisms from research establishments which should be kept in quarantine have been known in the past to be capable of finding their way into local plant production and hence represent a danger ⁽¹⁾.

2.3. The plant passport system should be obligatory for seeds too. Inspections can only be carried out if identification is possible through a plant passport or labelling and certification ⁽²⁾.

2.4. There should be clear rules on the whereabouts of the original certificate after completion of the import inspection. One possibility would be for the original to remain at the office of entry, provided that inspection is not carried out only in the country concerned or at the destination; another would be to use a uniform model for the entry stamp ⁽³⁾.

2.5. To help the inspectors in the entry office to make a decision, the term 'small quantities of plants' should be defined

⁽¹⁾ Article 1(3).

⁽²⁾ Article 1(5)(a).

⁽³⁾ Article 1(8), new Article 13(2).

more precisely. In practice the import of small quantities of fruit (e.g. mangoes) often raises problems at entry offices ⁽⁴⁾.

2.6. Most Member States' plant health services keep a register of importers. Registration is checked at border entry offices. Registration makes no sense, however, if registration numbers are not recognisable as such and any combination of numbers can be passed off at the entry office as the 'official registration number'. A uniform code number system should be introduced ⁽⁵⁾.

2.7. In principle the Committee supports the idea of introducing a uniform fees system; the details of the rates have still to be agreed.

2.8. The Committee recommends examining to what extent it is necessary to extend the field of application of the directive to the European Economic Area (EEA).

⁽⁴⁾ Article 1(8), new Article 13a(2)(c).

⁽⁵⁾ Article 1(8), new Article 13a(7).

Brussels, 17 October 2001.

The President
of the Economic and Social Committee
Göke FRERICHS