

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing a multiannual plan for demersal stocks in the North Sea and the fisheries exploiting those stocks, and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 676/2007 and Council Regulation (EC) No 1342/2008

(COM(2016) 493 final — 2016/0238 (COD))

(2017/C 075/18)

Rapporteur: **Thomas McDONOGH**

Consultation	Parliament, 12 September 2016 Council, 26 September 2016
Legal basis	Articles 43(2) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Bureau decision	20 September 2016
Section responsible	Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted in section	24 November 2016
Adopted at plenary	14 December 2016
Plenary session No	521
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	211/1/3

1. General and specific comments and recommendations

1.1. The common fisheries policy was introduced in the 1960s and 1970s and needs constant revision. The Committee welcomes this process of updating the policy to keep pace with technological changes, with a view to improving conservation and protecting fish stocks. The Committee welcomes the moves proposed by the Commission, many of which are suggested in the 2016 WGNSSK report ⁽¹⁾. This will help bring European fisheries law up to date and protect a very valuable industry.

1.2. The fisheries of the North Sea and adjacent areas are highly complex, involving vessels from at least seven coastal Member States, as well as Norway, using a wide variety of different fishing gears to target a wide range of different fish and shellfish species. A key issue is that many of the most important demersal stocks (i.e. those that live on or near the bottom of the sea) are caught in mixed fisheries. In practice, this means that each time a vessel retrieves its fishing gear, its catch will consist of a mix of different species. The composition of that mixture will change depending on the type of fishing gear in use, and on when and where it is used.

1.3. For vessels catching fish stocks subject to total allowable catches (TACs), it means that they should stop fishing once their quota for that stock is exhausted. Prior to the adoption of the Basic Regulation ⁽²⁾, vessels did not have to stop fishing once their quota for one of these species was exhausted. Instead, they were able to continue fishing for other target species and, as a result, they continued to catch the species for which quotas were already exhausted, even though they could not legally land these catches. These catches in excess of the quota had to be discarded. Once the quota for that stock was exhausted, it would block the opportunities to continue fishing for other stocks. It is, therefore, desirable to account for the fact that some stocks are caught together in mixed fisheries when setting TACs for these stocks. Such an approach should have advantages for both stock conservation and for exploitation of the stocks. This proposal takes this approach.

⁽¹⁾ Report of the ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea), Working Group on the Assessment of Demersal Stocks in the North Sea and Skagerrak, convened in Hamburg, Germany, from 26 April to 5 May 2016.

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC (OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22).

1.4. The Basic Regulation aims at solving the problems of overfishing and discarding fish more effectively than past legislation. Hence, appropriate measures should be taken in order to avoid negative economic and social consequences for the fishing industry. The first step towards such adaptive management would be to incorporate all relevant stocks into a single management plan. This would include target fishing mortalities expressed in ranges for each of the stocks, where available, which would be the basis for setting annual TACs for those stocks.

2. Other comments and recommendations

2.1. An independent commission should be set up to review national quotas. However, the regeneration of fish stocks not only depends on fishing mortality but also on other factors such as climate change. Any moves towards sustainable fisheries will require the adaptation of fishing vessels and gears (which is expensive), sound scientific data and continuous measures to train and raise awareness among fishermen. The social aspect of fishing also needs consideration since small-scale fishermen are being driven out of business. It is a priority to maintain existing jobs in the communities in many EU coastal areas that are dependent on fisheries.

2.2. More research needs to be carried out into the effects of fish farming on wild stocks. Wild salmon is in danger of extinction — mainly because of overfishing and poor regulation, but the effect of fish farms on the wild salmon is an unknown quantity. With proper marketing, wild salmon should achieve a premium price over farmed salmon. Sport fishing makes a major contribution to the economy in more remote areas: it is estimated that each wild salmon caught contributes EUR 1 200 on average to the local economy by way of salaries paid to gillies, accommodation, transport, etc.

2.3. Measures need to be taken to reverse the decline in eel fishery. The problem of juvenile fish catch should be dealt with by increasing the minimum net mesh size. There should also be restrictions on mono-filament nets.

2.4. Penalties should be increased for violations of the fishing laws. Strong measures should be taken against the employment of illegal immigrants on fishing boats, many of whom are not even paid and are virtual prisoners since their passports are seized (this has been known to happen to people from Central America). Living and working conditions at sea have to adhere to the highest EU standards. This also applies to non-EU workers.

Brussels, 14 December 2016.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Georges DASSIS
