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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION
TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**Review of the second series of regional fisheries workshops (1998/1999) and
future outlook**

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Introduction

In 1997, the Commission, acting on the basis of the findings in its communication on the implementation of the new common fisheries policy (CFP) tools,¹ arranged a series of regional workshops to explore ways of improving the conditions in which single-species fisheries are managed in maritime regions.² These meetings enabled discussions to be held between representatives of the interests directly involved in each group of fisheries, including fishermen, scientists, the Commission departments and national administrations. A review of the first series of meetings was drawn up by the Commission in the form of a communication.³

The Council subsequently asked the Commission to arrange a further series of meetings that was broader in geographical scope and to prepare a second review. The first part of this communication contains the review of that second series of meetings.

The second part sets out the best ways of prolonging the experiment by making use of the resources released by the reform of the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and recommends drawing up a schedule now of two new series of meetings for the period 2000-2001.

At the same time as these meetings are to take place, other discussions have been arranged between the groups involved in the CFP either by the Commission or in other forums. The increase in the number of these exchanges demonstrates the marked demand for dialogue from the industry. The concluding third part of this communication will set out the Commission's plans for continuing its examination of a whole range of initiatives which would help meet that demand.

1. Part I: Review of the second series of regional workshops

1-1. Rerun of the first series of meetings

In line with the undertakings that were given, a second workshop was arranged for each of the fisheries considered during the first series.

¹ COM(1993) 664 final.

² The word 'region' has created confusion. In some cases it is used to refer to administrative regions and in others to divisions of the territory of Member States. The regional workshops on the other hand refer to maritime regions based on the way the seas and oceans are divided for the management of fish stocks: for example, the North Sea, the Baltic and the Mediterranean.

³ COM(1998) 145 final.

A. The Baltic fisheries (26-27 August 1998)

This dealt with issues involving firstly the long-term management of cod although the herring and sprat fisheries were discussed also in conjunction with what it was agreed to call the "Baltic Agenda 21".⁴ The review was conducted on the basis of a working paper prepared by the staff of the Fisheries DG, which examined the implications of the various strategies. The discussion proved to be very valuable in preparing the ground for the meeting of the International Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission in September 1998 and paving the way for the adoption in 1999 of a medium- to long-term strategy in line with the precautionary approach.

The workshop made it possible also to take stock of enforcement in the Baltic, and indicated that the main barrier to including the economic strand was the unavailability of satisfactory data.

B. The North Sea flatfish fishery (28-29 April 1998)

The discussions between scientists and others, once again focusing on sole and plaice, concentrated on the "plaice box", the scientific reasons justifying it and its repercussions bearing in mind the differences in the appraisals of the research workers. On the biological side, several of the participants questioned the merits of the geographical boundaries used at present to manage the various quotas.

Economic considerations made it possible to broach the subject of possible compromises between short- and long-term choices in relation to safeguarding jobs and the profitability of businesses. The compatibility of the measures introduced for sole with those for plaice was discussed. This allowed the issue of discards to be examined in depth and in particular the prospects of reducing certain of them by closing zones or promoting quota exchanges between Member States or by making greater use of year-to-year flexibility. The examination of the potential of multi-annual strategies focused on setting mortality levels for individual reference fisheries and on methods of getting the most out of satisfactory recruitments. Emphasis was placed, lastly, on the importance of combining the management of catches and of fishing effort.

C. Small pelagic species in region II (2-3 September 1998)

A review was undertaken of a whole range of pelagic species, in particular stocks of herring, mackerel and horse mackerel in region II. Detailed discussions were held on the impact of the emergency plan introduced for North Sea herring, the need for it to be extended and its links with the implementation of a precautionary approach. It was possible, using simulations, to make a more detailed examination of the impact of various management strategies, the priority being to stabilise, depending on the circumstances, the annual TACs, the exploitation rates and the biomass. The scope of the measures for monitoring effort was examined in the specific context of small pelagic fisheries. Questions of enforcement focused lastly on the problem of

⁴ The Baltic coastal states have adopted a strategy for giving effect to the Rio Declaration of 1992 in conjunction with Agenda 21. The framework of this initiative is much broader than the management of fisheries and covers environmental issues. The resources strand is administered by the Baltic Sea Fisheries Commission, which provides liaison with the CFP.

fraudulent declarations of the origin of catches in conjunction with the forthcoming introduction of satellite-based position monitoring, and relations with non-member countries.

D. Demersal fisheries⁵ in the Celtic Sea (3-4 March 1999)

The discussions between scientists and the industry concentrated on hake, cod and monkfish. The condition of the hake stock was regarded as particularly worrying by all the participants, and especially fishermen. Emphasis was placed on the impact of the small juveniles fisheries, principally in the Bay of Biscay. A further meeting with the fishermen would allow the problem to be targeted better and possible solutions worked out.

Because there was no specialist economist present, it was difficult to broaden the discussion to include economic aspects. A discussion on price trends, however, revealed the importance of data being available on sizes, and for monkfish of figures for the individual species. Emphasis was placed on the volume of imports in some Member States along with the lack of usable data on import flows.

The discussion on monitoring showed that progress had been achieved but also disclosed concern that the progress that had been made in the Celtic Sea could be undermined by the continuation of harmful methods in other sectors (e.g. the Bay of Biscay). The industry was pressing for the inspection authorities to endeavour to reduce any unnecessary disturbance of fishing activities to the minimum. It was pointed out also that inspection methods differ considerably from one Member State to another.

The discussions on the multispecies fisheries revealed that the difficulties, particularly in the Baltic and the North Sea and for pelagic species, were much more complex than foreseen.⁶ Considerable differences exist regarding the solutions that may be possible.

Contrary to what happened in other workshops, the discussion on multiannual strategies was not very productive. The topic is new for this area and the multispecies aspect of the fisheries may make it more complicated still.

E. Tropical tuna (3 July 1998)

As the first workshop held in 1997 concentrated on the topic generally, the one in 1998 dealt with the introduction of boxes in the Gulf of Guinea to reduce catches of juveniles.⁷ The outcome was considered positive by all the participants although there were slight differences regarding, for example, the area to be included in the box. The main difficulty was that the measure did not apply to non-Community vessels. The

⁵ Eight Member States carry on fishing in this region. Invitations were sent to representatives of all the Member States. Only one, for whom the Celtic Sea is relatively unimportant, was not represented.

⁶ The discussions, however, concentrated on topics that were considered important, including:
- by-catches of fin fish in the Norway lobster fishery and by-catches of monkfish in the megrim fishery;
- the impact of some quotas being entirely used up (e.g. sole); the existence of mini-quotas for some species. On the former item, improvements are expected in early 2000 from new technical measures adopted in 1998 and from the development of more selective gear.

⁷ The Community shipowners had agreed voluntarily not to fish under floating objects during the three-month period when juveniles were most abundant.

priority in future therefore was to ensure that similar measures were adopted within the framework of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT).

1-2. Expansion of the geographical area: Iberian sardine fishery

The Atlantic sardine fishery along the Iberian peninsula was given a workshop of its own. This fishery raises a particularly sensitive issue. It is very important for the two Member States concerned (Spain and Portugal). Indeed for Portugal it is crucial. To date no Community management measures have been adopted as it was considered not to require active management. The stock was thought to be in sound health and the national measures seemed adequate. Since 1996, however, opinions from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) about the state and development of the stock have been pessimistic. Its findings were discussed by the Commission and the Member States concerned, as a result of which the national measures were tightened up.

The question now is whether these national measures are adequate or whether additional Community ones are needed. The issue is particularly sensitive for a number of reasons. The scientific assessments show sharp year-on-year variations. Disagreement is rampant among the Community scientific experts. Depending on area, and especially where the Northern coast of the Iberian Peninsula or the western or southern areas are concerned, catches of sardines have been fluctuating sharply. Fishermen who have not experienced a significant drop in catches refuse to accept the appraisals of scientists regarding the increasing scarcity of stocks. Community management, furthermore, has not been practised in this fishery.

The workshop in late 1998 laid the foundations basically for continuing the dialogue. The exchanges of views between scientists and the industry, by ranging further than national divisions, was especially valuable, as was the discussion on the limitations and benefits of the different management tools. A parallel study was launched by the Commission to undertake a bio-economic simulation of the repercussions of various scenarios demonstrating different approaches to management. It was decided to hold a further meeting when the results of the study became available.

1-3. Successes and difficulties

A. Positive aspects

The industry expressed considerable support for meetings of this kind, from which a number of positive points emerged as had happened at the previous series of meetings.

The workshops offer the Commission an invaluable opportunity of making a direct appraisal of the situation in the various fisheries, of considering the successes and failings of the management measures, of understanding the expectations and anxieties of fishermen and of registering the difficulties that face national administrations administering the practical day-to-day implementation of the measures adopted under the CFP. The knowledge acquired in this way is of crucial importance as it makes it possible to understand better the full extent of the difficulties involved in applying the CFP.

On the industry side the response to the meetings is very favourable, although certain difficulties remain that will be examined below.

There are grounds for believing that a better understanding of the management measures and their application will result in more effective management procedures being put in place. Progress in this area has been noted in relation to the stocks discussed at the regional workshops (see, for example, North Sea herring and plaice, Atlanto-Scandian herring, North Atlantic mackerel and the Baltic fisheries). This progress includes a better understanding of the multiannual management strategies and the adoption of a precautionary approach. No-one is in any doubt that these developments are due, in part at least, to the regional workshops.

Over and above the advantages experienced by each participant, the workshops have in addition demonstrated the usefulness of discussions between the various groups. The need for all the parties engaged in the Community fisheries to be involved has been borne out.

The involvement of specialists from the relevant national administrations has been shown to be essential. The CFP can only be implemented if decisions taken at Community level are followed up by action at national level which, if it is to be effective, must earn the trust of all the Member States. The issue of enforcement has been discussed in some instances in greater depth, backed up by the fact that from 1998 it has been given a new impetus.

On the practical side, changes have been made to the arrangements for the meetings: discussions were concentrated in two half-days and the number of items on the agenda was reduced. These adjustments proved to be effective, above all the reduction in the number of topics on which the preparatory work had been done at an earlier workshop to avoid the sense that the same ground was being gone over once again.

B. Difficulties

Earlier difficulties not yet entirely resolved

The educational side of the exercise is clear but it was sometimes difficult, despite the meticulous care taken in preparing the workshops, to bring together experts with the necessary teaching skills.

The shortage of economists, even worse than in 1997, has to be mentioned in spite of the efforts made in advance to remedy it. Admittedly these specialists are highly sought after by the bodies involved in implementing the CFP such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF).

Difficulties arising from the repeat of the exercise

- Despite the efforts taken to avoid a repeat of a discussion, the second series of workshops covering the same fishery in some cases resulted in this happening, either because some of the participants were new, or because the situation or positions had not developed sufficiently in the intervening period.
- The spontaneity of the contributions during the first series of workshops could not be maintained during the second series with the danger that the positions adopted became too formalised.

- Because they were coherent and innovative, the first series inspired hope in the participants that they would have a more direct impact on the decision-making process. These hopes were eroded at the second meeting.
- On the other hand, a feeling of frustration was created because the participants understood that the meetings could not intrude on the decision-making process. A solution to this problem could be found in the future by establishing links between the workshops and the Advisory Committee, which is the forum where the process of consultation of the industry by the Commission assumes a more formal character.

The weakening effects of repetition can vary, however, according to topic. For instance, the workshops devoted to tropical tuna, fisheries that are undergoing rapid expansion, did not encounter any of the difficulties mentioned above.

2. Part II: proposed action

2-1. Requirements and available resources

A. The need for better communication

In spite of the progress that has been achieved in improving communication with the groups concerned there is still a pressing need for the CFP to be brought closer to all the actors involved. This narrowing of the gap could be achieved by:

- accurately measuring how the various management tools existing or planned by the CFP apply to the different fisheries;
- laying down clear rules for implementing a CFP that applies the *principle of proportionality*; the application of this principle must be universally understood and supported;
- the industry taking better account of the overall context of the CFP in order that, in addition to the legitimate defence of special interests, each group acknowledges the rights of other groups and the limitations of the natural environment;
- the industry making a fair appraisal of the advice of scientists but with scientists taking greater account of the views and objections of fishermen. Scientists must attempt to acquire a fuller understanding of the problems of all aspects of fisheries, including economic ones, and develop a multi-disciplinary approach.

B. Exploring ways of developing a framework for the CFP

The CFP is based on management principles arranged in a uniform grouping (TACs) which are implemented on a yearly pattern by a centralised decision-making process (TACs and price arrangements). This approach has proved its worth and continues to be effective as it is the predominant one but has shortcomings that have attracted censure. A response needs to be found to this criticism. For example, greater account could be taken of the individual characteristics of certain fisheries, particularly as the geographical scope of the CFP has been extended since 1983. It would be an

advantage, for example, as recommended already in the 1991 report on the CFP⁸, to adopt a multiannual framework for certain stock conservation decisions (TACs) on the model of what has been done for certain structural measures (MAGPs) so as to harmonise certain management measures. Alternatively, it is necessary also to be able to take emergency action using simplified procedures where circumstances demand (see, for example, opening and closure of fisheries in emergencies).

C. Links with the action plan on enforcement

The Commission reported in its 1998 communication⁹ on progress in enforcing the CFP and emphasised that the industry was pressing for the inspection arrangement to be applied fairly and transparently, stressing also the need for closer cooperation between the authorities concerned. These matters are at the core of the topics dealt with in the regional workshops on fisheries.

The communication was followed by a Council decision in November 1998 containing an action plan¹⁰ for the period 1998-2000. This provides for coordination meetings between the Member States to improve communication in a number of sensitive fisheries, including the tuna fisheries in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, the demersal fisheries in ICES regions VII and VIII, and the blue whiting fisheries. These contacts could be brought into line with those developed by the regional workshops although their goals are different. Both types of meetings have proved to be effective therefore and mutually reinforcing.

D. Taking advantage of the resources released by the reform of the Advisory Committee

The Commission recently adopted an array of measures which seek to strengthen dialogue with the actors involved in the CFP. The core of the measures as set out in an action plan¹¹ is the reform of the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture with a view to strengthening relations with the fishing industry and widening them to include associations concerned with the impact the policy is having on consumers, the environment and development.

On 14 July 1999 the Commission adopted a Decision renewing the Advisory Committee along the lines set out in the action plan.¹²

The operational arrangements and secretariat for this Committee have been improved to reflect the broadening of its activities envisaged under the reform.

The new structure and operational rules should mean that the Advisory Committee can incorporate the regional workshops in its new working groups, while at the same time maintaining the essential role played by the Member States' experts in organising the workshops.

⁸ 1991 Commission Report to the Council and Parliament on the Common Fisheries Policy (SEC(1991)2288 final).

⁹ COM(1998) 92 final.

¹⁰ SEC(1988) 499 final.

¹¹ Action plan for closer dialogue with the industry and groups affected by the common fisheries policy (XIV/859/99).

¹² Commission Decision of 14 July 1999 renewing the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture 1999/478/CE (OJ L 187/70).

The mechanism represented by the Advisory Committee and its working groups must be the priority tool for encouraging discussions at Community level between scientists and representatives of the industry. It must also enable a response to be given to questions put by other interest groups, such as consumers and environmentalists, concerning the impact of the CFP. This extended dialogue must base its findings on a rational approach founded on scientific analysis. The meetings of the working groups provided for as part of the reform will make it possible for discussions to take place based on an analysis of specific problems with the advice of the scientists being compared in each case with the experience of the industry.

The new organisational set-up of the Advisory Committee will also be a powerful tool for encouraging exchanges of views within the industry. It will foster the development of common positions within the European organisations by moving beyond the positions adopted within the individual groups, a drawback the previous committee was unable to avoid. The Community decision-making process will benefit from it, especially in so far as conservation is concerned.

The annual work programme for the meetings of the Advisory Committee and its working groups will have to be adopted before the end of 1999. It will have to take into consideration the planning of the future regional workshops.

2-2. Action to be taken in the period 2000-2001

Regional workshops involving the participation of experts from the national administrations will continue to be necessary in order to consider the situation of specific fisheries and the medium-term outlook for the management of those fisheries. These workshops will have to carry out and keep up to date full reviews (ranging from the biological to the socio-economic aspects) from a medium- or long-term perspective (quite separately from the annual decision-making machinery) bearing in mind the contribution implementation of the CFP has made to those fisheries as well as the difficulties that have been encountered. They are going to have to continue to provide an input to the debate on what the new approaches could provide, along the lines of the multiannual strategies, the precautionary approach or taking greater account of multispecies fisheries.

A. Workshops planned for 2000

The number of workshops which it will be possible to hold in 2000 will be limited by logistical considerations which means that we will have to be selective. For instance, it would not be advisable to discuss systematically again in 2000 those fisheries that have been dealt with already in previous years and in which less interest has now been shown. By contrast, new fisheries for which there is demand need to be tackled. It is still possible, lastly, to include in certain workshops the geographical areas that have not been considered hitherto either in order to include the whole of a fishing area of a stock or to cover all the fishing areas of specific fleets. The workshops planned for the year 2000 are as follows.

1. Continuation of work carried out at earlier workshops
 - Iberian Atlantic sardines (second workshop/first quarter): following a new appraisal of the stock by the Advisory Committee for Fisheries Management (ACFM) which is now more optimistic about its state and in view of the results of the study on the bio-economic impact of the management plan for this fishery (see above, point 2), a new workshop will enable the measures that need to be taken to be worked out.

- Tropical tuna (third workshop/second quarter). This workshop will tackle two important issues: (a) the possibility of redeploing the fleet in the Pacific, in particular the Central Western Pacific, which will require well-planned discussions at both bilateral and multilateral level; (b) the future of fish aggregating devices whose use is increasingly being questioned because of the vulnerability of juveniles to these devices.
- Baltic (third workshop/third quarter (if needed)).

The regional dimension of the Baltic is obvious and gave rise to fruitful discussions previously. A new workshop should concentrate on working out a medium- and long-term strategy for cod in compliance with the precautionary approach as formulated in the Baltic Agenda 21. This could lead to International Baltic Sea Fishery Commission decisions on:

- improving the selectivity of fishing gear to provide better protection for small cod juveniles, a topic that has not yet been resolved;
- the medium- and long-term management of herring and sprat stocks;
- harmonising technical measures in the Baltic with the arrangements in force in the North Sea from 2000, and with those planned for the Skagerrak-Kattegat area.

2. Prolonging and adapting earlier workshops

- Northern hake (second quarter)

This workshop would follow on from two meetings on demersal fisheries in the Celtic Sea. At those meetings the role of hake, which is the key species in the fisheries concerned, was explained. Widespread concern was expressed about the condition of the stock, which is found in an area considerably larger than the Celtic Sea (stretching from the Bay of Biscay to Western Scotland). Fishing for juveniles in the Bay of Biscay plays a key role in the development of the stock. Rather than organise a third meeting of the workshop on demersal fisheries in the Celtic Sea it was considered preferable to hold a geographically larger workshop covering all the relevant fisheries, but restricted to hake.

- Flatfish (third quarter, September (if needed)).

The goal this time, based on two earlier meetings of the workshop on flatfish in the North Sea, would be to widen the area covered to include all the flatfish fisheries important for the specialist fleets operating in the North Sea, which fish for part of the year for other stocks (Channel, Celtic Sea, Irish Sea, Bay of Biscay).

3. New workshops on specific fisheries

- Demersal fisheries in the North Sea and Western Scotland (October 2000).
- Pelagic fisheries in the Mediterranean (covering one species or a group of species to be determined).

B. Indicative programme for 2001

Continuation of earlier workshops

Resumption of workshops not held in 2000

- Small pelagic fisheries in the North East Atlantic
- Baltic fisheries if a meeting does not take place in 2000

Continuation of workshops held in 2000

- Tropical tuna
- Small pelagic fisheries in region III (expansion of the meetings on Atlantic Iberian sardines to include other species, and if necessary the Bay of Biscay)

New workshops

- English Channel fisheries
- Demersal fisheries in the Mediterranean (targeting species to be determined)

C. The organisation of meetings

1. Topics

The documents on the topics discussed will be retained. Closer attention will be paid to:

- Monitoring and inspection, in order to take full advantage of the presence of members of the industry and experts from the national administrations and to improve synergies with the action plan on enforcement;
- "realistic measures that can be monitored" for the management of multi-species fisheries and reducing discards at sea;
- the precautionary approach and multiannual management strategies;
- the synergies between resource management and market management.

2. Organisation

The earlier arrangements have proved their worth and will be retained therefore. The timetable for the workshops setting the precise dates will be prepared in late 1999 in association with the work programme for the Advisory Committee. The workshops will be spread over two days, starting in the afternoon of the first day and finishing at the end of the morning on the second day. Shorter meetings may prove to be sufficient (e.g. tropical tuna). The Commission will make every effort to ensure that the summary and educational documents are ready for distribution to the participants, if possible before the meetings.

The Commission would like the Member States to forward their suggestions about the organisation of the planned workshops and to assist it in identifying participants who are

likely to make a worthwhile contribution to the meetings, and to see to it that they attend. Experts, in particular specialists in fisheries economics, should be present. Although the discussions will be informal they must be followed by a communication from the Commission on the action that has been taken as a result of the earlier workshops.

3. Part III - Conclusion: the regional workshops in the context of the overall dialogue

The dialogue between the administrations and the industry on improving the management of fishing activities takes many forms. Among the initiatives adopted by the Commission the pre-eminent forum for ongoing debate is, of course, the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture. Others exist, however, which are superimposed on the latter as circumstances or particular needs demand. They focus on particular events, e.g. the regional meetings on the CFP after 2002, or specific measures such as the action plan on enforcement, or are linked to regulatory arrangements for exchanges of experience between those involved in the industry such as the transregional or thematic meetings under the PESCA initiative. These forums, within which the regional workshops take place, are Commission initiatives and improve dialogue with the groups affected by the CFP.

Alongside these Community initiatives, other forums¹³ have been established by non-EU organisations. They include initiatives by fisheries and regional organisations which, experiencing a particular need to discuss issues of more local relevance, set up round tables on the more sensitive CFP topics, especially on issues relating to stocks and markets.

These are excellent initiatives as they bring the citizen closer to the CFP, the industry and associations and groups of scientists. They may be given encouragement in so far as they allow problems of local relevance to be resolved provided they comply with the decision-making process. The staff of the Directorate-General for Fisheries have attended several of these meetings. The proliferation of initiatives of this type may present drawbacks also, as they generally attract the same participants on topics that may have been dealt with previously and thus create a sense of weariness.

The Commission would like to be kept informed about these initiatives and indeed to encourage them. However, the participation of officials as observers or contributors and the potential financial aid can be very selective only, given the regulatory limitations and the staff and funding resources available. It will be necessary also to ensure that any participation in the discussions or financial support from the Community towards such initiatives takes place with the assurance that they apply genuinely to all those who are entitled to benefit from it.

It is necessary to consider today therefore all the initiatives that would encourage dialogue with the groups affected by the CFP. The Commission for its part would like to contribute in the context of a broader debate on the CFP after 2002.

¹³ For example, the North Sea Conference, the geographical committees of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR), the Greenwich Forum, the Baltic Fishermen's Association, etc.

This debate will have to draw the preliminary lessons from the implementation of the reform of the Advisory Committee once it has been operating for a year or two, from the regional workshops announced for the period 2000-2001, from the initial results of the coordination measures between the national administrations and the Commission concerning the action plan on enforcement, from the analyses of the opportunities for implementing measures for opening/closing sensitive zones in real time in close collaboration with the Member States, and from the progress achieved by fishermen in adopting rules to make working side by side in the fishing grounds easier.