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from: General Secretariat of the Council
to: Delegations
Subject : **Plenary Session of the European Parliament, 11 September 2012**
Joint debate, fisheries policy

Mr GALLAGHER (ALDE, EI), rapporteur on measures in relation to countries allowing non-sustainable fishing for the purpose of the conservation of fish stocks, considered in general that codecision in fisheries worked and that the trilogue had been a success. He added that the Regulation would allow the Union to enforce measures against countries or territories that blatantly disregarded the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. He recalled that the agreement included quantitative restrictions on fish imports from the stock of common interest and associated species into the EU from a country or territory engaged in unsustainable fishing practices.

Under the draft Regulation, restrictions would apply to the use of EU ports and to the sale of fishing vessels, fishing equipment and supplies to the country or territory deemed to be overfishing.

Mr STEVENSON (ECR, UK), rapporteur on the Common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products, welcomed what he qualified as a first good conclusion of a comprehensive reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). He particularly underlined the end of micromanagement from Brussels and its replacement with reasoned regionalism. Under such a system the Commission would set the framework for the CFP and devolve day-to-day management to the producer organisations (POs), which would be best placed to assist with the day-to-day organisation of effort limitation, quota management, by-catch avoidance and dealing with fish landed under the discards ban. In his view, the minimum number of members of producer organisations needed further discussion. As for labelling, he considered that the landing date should be mandatory and the catch date voluntary. He was in favour of full use of modern technologies. Concerning discards, he considered that discarded fish should be sold and not given to charities.

Mr TORVALDS (ALDE, FI), rapporteur on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources, recalled that one third of EU fish, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic sea, was overfished. He expressed the view that a clear definition of overcapacity needed to be introduced. He underlined the problem of discards and complained that too many MS did not provide reliable data on the fishing capacity of their fleets.

Mr SALAVRAKOS (EFD, EL), rapporteur on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, underlined the ecological and social nature of the fisheries reform. He underlined in particular that the EU represents 4.6 % of global fisheries and aquaculture production, but still imports 60 % of the fish it consumes. Notwithstanding the lack of scientific data, the Commission estimated that 75 % of EU fish stock is overexploited and 60 % of stocks in European waters are being fished beyond the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The EU was losing approximately EUR 1.8 billion per year in potential income as a result of its failure to manage fisheries sustainably.

On behalf of the Council, Mr MAVROYIANNIS, Cypriot Deputy Minister for European Affairs, delivered the speech in Annex I.

On behalf of the Commission, Ms DAMANAKI, Commissioner in charge of fisheries, delivered the speech in Annex II.

Mr BOULLAND (EPP, FR), for the DEVE committee, considered that also for the fishery sector the Commission should take into account the level of development of the relevant country, so as not to jeopardise the development strategy of that country. Ms LÖVIN (Greens, SE), also a member of the DEVE committee, warned against granting aid for the renewal and modernisation of fleets and announced an amendment to paragraph 58 of the SALAVRAKOS report. She spoke against an amendment tabled on the same report, aiming at deleting the term 'above' in its paragraph 9, and explained that indeed fish stocks needed to be protected *above* levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

Mr FERREIRA (GUE, PT), for the ENVI committee, considered that aid for the renewal and modernisation of fleets should not be excluded in principle, and therefore aid should be granted in view of the different situations of fleets at national level. Ms LÖVIN disagreed and considered that the taxpayer should not pay for fleets.

Mr TEIXEIRA (EPP, PT), for the REGI committee, listed a number of reasons that led to a yield crisis in the fishery sector, and mentioned in particular marketing strategies, the value added chain and budget support by MS. In his view, liberalisation and market were not the right answer, and he considered that proximity may be part of the solution.

Contributions on behalf of the political groups

Ms FRAGA ESTÉVEZ (EPP, ES) stated that the cooperation with rapporteurs had been excellent. She agreed in particular with the solution proposed by Mr STEVENSON concerning consumer information, and considered that the mandatory date should concern fish landing, while the catching date should remain voluntary. In her view, too much information would mislead the consumer.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (S&D, DK) stressed the importance of sustainability of fishing resources, for which he felt a global solution was needed, since it was a worldwide issue.

Mr DAVIES (ALDE, UK) recalled that since overfishing had persisted for so long, levels of stock of harvested species had to be set *above* MSY. Mr ROMEVA I RUEDA (GREENS, ES) supported him.

Mr GRÓBARCZYK (ECR, PL) underlined the importance of fishing for MS and thanked Mr STEVENSON for his report.

Mr CLARK (EFD, UK) criticised the Common Fisheries Policy in place, since, in his view, it had destroyed the culture of care of traditional fishing. Mr DAVIES reminded him of the poor situation of UK stocks back in the sixties, before the UK acceded to the EU, and complained that Mr FARAGE, of his group, never attended FISH committee meetings.

Mr FERREIRA (GUE/NGL, PT) insisted on the importance of proximity, that could be put into place through decentralisation. In his view, this may be difficult to achieve, given that the Lisbon treaty had concentrated powers in this sector on the EU.

Mr LE PEN (NI, FR) considered that individual fishermen were being attacked from all sides and that the Commission policy paved the way for industrialisation of the sector.

Contributions by individual members

Most of the MEPs taking the floor aligned themselves with the opinions expressed by the representatives of the political groups. Ms GARCÍA-HIERRO CARABALLO (S&D, ES) insisted on the need for consumer protection, through appropriate labelling, and Mr ARSENIS (S&D, EL) added that labelling should provide information on where, when and how fish was caught. Ms MIRANDA (Greens, ES) asked that proper labelling be applied to shellfish, too. Mr HUDGHTON (Greens, UK), supported by Ms DODDS (NI, UK), highlighted the discard system and welcomed the end of the current scandalous waste of food. Mr BELDER (EFD, NL) considered that a complete discard ban was unworkable and that a compromise should be found.

Ms ROSBACH (ECR, DK) invited to find a balance between MSY with the need to maintain jobs in the fisheries sector. Ms IOTOVA (S&D, BG) considered that the proposals were not against fishermen and Ms PATRÃO NEVES (EPP, PT) insisted on the need for a deep reform.

In his closing remarks, Commissioner DAMANAKI highlighted the need for a deep reform of the sector and considered that the spirit should not be that of a power game between the EP and the Commission. Concerning the label information on the catch date, she stated that this was proposed by the Commission to sustain small fishermen, who mainly catch and land fish on the same day.

Mr MAVRAOYIANNIS stated that he had taken note of the key points raised and looked forward to engaging with the EP and to finding mutual agreements on the best way forward on all the important issues that lay ahead. Concerning label information, he explained the Council position and said that the catch date was difficult to establish and to trace on fishing trips going over several days or weeks. On those trips the fish was often immediately frozen on board, and therefore kept in perfect conditions. Mandatory information existed already concerning package date and "best before date", and this information should be extended by the qualitative information on whether the product was defrosted before selling.

Mr GALLAGHAN considered that a realistic solution was contained in the proposed report and looked forward to a positive solution next October. Mr STEVENSON insisted on the importance of the multiannual plans and supported the Commission proposal concerning them. He further called for a voluntary catch date on labels. Mr TORVALDS disagreed with him on the catch date and told Mr FERREIRA that reform could not wait for a level playing field between national fishing fleets. Mr SALAVRAKOS called for a proper and uniform implementation of rules, that should remain workable.

President, Honourable Members,

It is a great honour for me to be here today to present the Council's views on the very important topics that you plan to discuss, which include the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

I look forward to working very closely with you in the co-decision procedure as we advance a very important legislative agenda with a significant impact on EU citizens.

Therefore, I would like to stress my commitment to making our joint work successful and rewarding.

Concerning the CFP reform, the Council launched its debate horizontally in July last year. That debate took into account the Commission Communications on which the honourable members Mr Haglund and Mr Salavrakos have prepared reports. Since then, Council has focussed on the Common Market Organisation and the Regulation on the Common Fisheries Policy, reaching a "general approach" in June of this year. In addition, Council agreed on Conclusions for the external fisheries policy in March of this year.

The Council's position on the Common Market Organisation enlarges the role and responsibility of Producer Organisations towards promoting more sustainable fishing activities, taking on tasks related to fisheries management, and on handling unwanted catches that fishermen will have to land after the implementation of the discard ban. On public market interventions, Council agrees with the Commission that these interventions should be scaled down. "Storage aid" should be the only remaining intervention, and Member States are not yet in agreement on whether this should be completely phased out over time. On consumer information, Council agrees with the Commission that product labels should have to report on whether the fish has been defrosted before marketing; but Council disagrees with the Commission's proposal that the date of catch should be mandatory as well.

On the reform in general, Council's position can be summarised as follows: Management of fish stocks needs to achieve MSY ["Maximum Sustainable Yield"] by 2015 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest. New multiannual plans should better reflect the interdependence of fish stocks and fisheries, and apply the MSY policy to all stocks which are significant in the area of the multiannual plan. Discard reduction should be at the forefront of the fisheries reform, accompanied by a landing obligation which will be phased in according to a time table.

I would like to welcome the EP's support for a more regionalised Common Fisheries Policy, with better involvement of stakeholders and reinforced advisory councils. Council agrees with this pillar of the reform, and its general approach contains procedures for putting regionalisation into practice as well as reinforcing the role of advisory councils.

With regard to transferable fishing concessions, many Member States are cautious concerning their effectiveness in fighting overcapacity, and are concerned about possible unintended consequences. The general approach therefore foresees the introduction of transferable fishing concessions on a voluntary basis, while improving the existing mechanism to report on overcapacity and to take measures for fleet capacity adjustment.

The link between fleet capacity and EMFF will be further explored by Ministers during their September meeting in two weeks time, preparing for a partial general approach at the October Council. I don't need to stress that the EMFF's role in the reform will now be the focus of our discussions, in particular its importance for growth, for boosting aquaculture, for creating more jobs, and for helping to implement the new CFP.

With the new Council Conclusions on the external dimension, the Council has set a more detailed framework for bilateral fisheries agreements, based on sustainability, and gave policy directions for the Unions work in regional and multilateral fisheries organisations.

And, last but not the least, as a testimony to the success we can achieve together, I would like to thank the honourable member Mr. Gallagher, for his outstanding work on the trade measures file, which is expected to be adopted by our two institutions by the end of this month. This is a far-reaching piece of legislation, which will enable the EU to adopt effective measures against third countries allowing non-sustainable fishing. Of course, the most recent such case that comes to our mind is the situation of the North-East Atlantic mackerel stock. We all know that unfortunately the latest attempt to find a solution acceptable to all did not succeed last week in London. I would like to recall the July Council's desire to find a suitable compromise for this very unfortunate situation, but not at any price! Thanks to this legislation we now have an additional instrument to use against such non-sustainable management practices.

Mr President, since my time is limited, I would like to focus on certain issues. I hope that you will forgive me for not referring to all the issues that the rapporteurs have already mentioned.

I would like to thank everybody – Mr Gallagher, Mr Stevenson, Mr Torvalds and of course Mr Haglund, who is a former member of this House, and Mr Salavrakos for their work. I am pleased and I think that the Commission can be pleased because all the reports point in the same direction. This is a very important direction for us. It means more sustainable fishing inside and outside the EU. This is the main message of our proposal referring to the reform and I am happy to see this message in all the reports.

I would like to comment on some issues now, beginning with Mr Salavrakos's report. I would like to welcome the call from this House to restore and maintain stocks above the maximum sustainable yield. This is a very important message for us all and I hope that Parliament will uphold this message until the end of the debate and the negotiations. We would like to have the maximum sustainable yield introduced in our final text. It will be very important to have this as part of our new fisheries policy.

I would also like to thank Mr Salavrakos because he has made a very good basis for the further discussion of our proposal for a discard ban. I know that this is a very difficult exercise. We have discussed this in this House on other occasions with many of you. The Commission would like to cooperate with the Council and I welcome the presence of the Council here. If we are going to find a step by step approach or an approach that is gradual for the timeline, we need a clear and binding solution for discard and this is the way we are going to negotiate and discuss and cooperate with everybody around this very important issue.

Let me now move onto Mr Torvalds's and Mr Haglund's report. I fully agree that long-term management plans should be the basis of our policy because uncertainty is our enemy. We have to tackle this problem through long-termism instead of going for micro-management and a short-termist approach.

But you know that there is a problem here. There is a deadlock between the Council and Parliament. The Commission is here to facilitate, but you must discuss this between you. I am very happy to have you both here and I would like to be completely open. We can do everything but we need really progress, and progress can only be achieved by compromise. If the Council stays in the same position and Parliament stays in the same position, there will be no progress.

Nevertheless, this deadlock underlines the situation and the fact that we cannot say that the discard ban is only going to be implemented if we have long-term management plans in place. This very deadlock provides the real answer to how the discard ban will then be taken hostage by this situation. So I would like to urge you to support removing the link between the discard ban and the long-term management plans in this report. We cannot proceed this way. The long-term management plans – and it is not our problem – will take many years to be a reality for all fish stocks. The discard ban is very urgent as Mr Salavrakos and others have already underlined.

And now for Mr Stevenson's report. I am really satisfied that the report maintains the drive of our proposal. However, I would like to stress the issue of labelling once more and I would like to underline that I think that we are here to protect the interests of our citizens – not only of our fishermen but also of our consumers – and we have to keep the right balance between these approaches. That is why I think that the consumers have the right to have clear and very comprehensive information about the fish they buy. We have several ways of doing that but I would like to focus mainly on two.

Firstly, in our opinion, the date of catch is absolutely essential, for consumers. It is absolutely essential for our fishermen, for the small-scale fisheries and also for the fishermen that are in the coastal areas. Why? Because the date of catch will be a great weapon in their hands.

So we are talking here a lot about small-scale fisheries. Can we ignore their interests? Because this is what is happening. If we are going to remove the date of catch, the fact that information is added in one way or another is not a matter of indifference. The date of catch is very important.

Let me give you another example. In France, for example, or in Spain we have this French or Spanish law about the category of fishermen that return to port within 24 hours. A lot of them are not small-scale but they are coastal fisheries and these will use this date of catch to their advantage. I would like to urge you to go for this information for consumers. I would like also to call on the Council to reconsider this approach.

Secondly, I think that prepared and preserved products should show the fish name, origin and production method. I really do not see why the processed products have to miss that information out. Why? I think that the consumer has to know. He has to know and he has to make his own decisions.

So one last point about eco-labelling. I know that many of you have proposed an eco-labelling approach, so what I can promise is that by 1 January 2015 the Commission will make a report. We will come to you with our proposals and then we can decide together if we are going for an eco-labelling approach.

Lastly, on the trade instrument, I think we have to congratulate Mr Gallagher because he has done a lot of work and we have succeeded in having this instrument in place as soon as possible. Time matters here and I am really grateful that we have gone into this exercise so swiftly. I think that this is a very important proposal by the Commission, and I hope that Parliament and the Council can work together on this. Why? Because it can contribute a lot to creating a level playing field between our fishermen and the fishermen of other countries, non-EU Member States with whom we share the same stocks. We have discussed level playing fields a lot so we have to introduce this trade instrument and I hope that we can do it as soon as possible. I also think that this will reignite confidence in our policy, in the Commission services, in the way we treat our fishermen. It is really very important.

The Commission, of course, is disappointed because we have not reached an agreement with other coastal areas about mackerel stocks. I would just like to say that I am preparing to have everything in order if you vote for this instrument. I have to underline that there are many legal procedures that have to be taken account of.