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Subject: Gabon: Preparation for the first round of negotiations

Delegations will find attached the declassified version of the above document.

The text of this document is identical to the previous version.

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RESTREINT

PECHE 120

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

of: Working Party on External Fisheries Policy

dated: 19 and 20 March 1998

N° prev. doc.: 5347/98 PECHE 20

Subject: Gabon : Preparation for the first round of negotiations

INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission representative informed delegations about the state of play in the negotiations for a new fisheries agreement with Gabon. He indicated that the requests for fishing opportunities so far received by the Commission were as follows:
 - 19 of the 41 freezer tuna seiners licences for France and 22 for Spain;
 - 5 of the 33 surface long-liners licences for Portugal and 28 for Spain.

1. The Commission representative reported that the Gabon authorities were considering offering fishing possibilities for pole-and-line tuna vessels, and asked Member States to indicate if they were interested in this kind of fishing.

1. With respect to the reference tonnage, he informed the Group that the Gabon authorities had requested 14.000 t. in the technical discussions which had taken place last October, a quantity which, in the Commission's view, was out of the question; the aim would be to strike a balance within the budget for the agreement with Gabon, in the region of 1 million Ecu per annum and to direct at least 50% of the financial compensation to actions designed to develop the Gabon fisheries sector; it was the Commission's intention to increase this percentage if possible.

1. The Commission intended to take advantage of the fact that this was a new agreement with Gabon to introduce certain changes in the normal model of tuna agreements, in the light of the Conclusions of the Council of October 1997 on Third Countries Agreements. It would endeavour to increase the advance payments made by vessel owners, as had been done in Madagascar; it would also attempt to achieve a rebalancing of the distribution of costs to vessel owners and to the Community per tonne of tuna caught (at present 20% and 80% respectively) with a view to the vessel owners bearing a heavier charge.

1. The Portuguese delegation confirmed its request for surface longlines. It would investigate the possibilities of fishing with pole-and-line. The Spanish delegation indicated that Spanish fishermen would be interested in exploring the possibilities of fishing with pole-and-line.

6. There was general agreement that the discussion of specific figures on the reference tonnage and corresponding financial provisions was best carried out on the spot in Libreville. Delegations nevertheless indicated their general positions.

7. The German, French, Netherlands, Swedish and United Kingdom delegations were in favour of the principle of rebalancing. The French delegation insisted however on the

importance of maintaining proportionality so that the Community budget would not suffer; if the vessel owners' share were to be increased, the Community share should be reduced proportionally.

8. The Spanish delegation could agree to an increase in the advance payments, but considered it premature to address the question of rebalancing the other costs; this could take place when the Council Conclusions of October 1997 had been analysed in full.

CONCLUSIONS

9. Whilst taking note of the Spanish delegation's position, the President concluded that a significant number of Member States had argued in favour of the principle of rebalancing the 80%/20% distribution of costs, although concerned Member states had reservations as to what the precise figures should be.
10. The Working Party noted that all aspects of the Council Conclusions of October 1997 would be the subject of discussion at a meeting of the Working Party to be held in April 1998.