Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 913 (1981)[1]

Future of European fisheries

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its traditional interest in fisheries, as manifested in particular in Recommendation 570 (1969) on fishery policies in Europe, Recommendation 798 (1977) on the conservation of the living resources of the sea, Resolution 659 (1977) on the conservation of the living resources in the Mediterranean, and Resolution 674 (1978) on the conservation of the living resources in the North-East Atlantic and the Mediterranean Sea ;

2. Considering the discontent with present conditions shown by fishermen in several member states in recent times, and aware that problems in the fishing industry may have traumatic consequences for a whole community or region largely dependent thereon ;

3. Considering that marine life constitutes a heritage which is common not only to Europe but the whole world and which therefore calls for a measure of joint management by member states ;

4. Commending the praiseworthy efforts being made to co-ordinate international fisheries policies - both at world level by, for instance FAO, and at European level by OECD and the European Communities - but noting that none of these attempts have so far resulted in anything like a comprehensive international approach ;

5. Concerned that many valuable fish species are being so heavily overfished that future replenishment of stocks may prove difficult, and convinced that this development is aggravated by the present lack of national and international co-operation ;

6. Considering that the introduction of exclusive economic zones over most of the world and the resulting restrictions of foreign fishing may, on the one hand, lead to less ruthless competition and greater responsibility on the part of individual coastal states, but may, on the other, have severe repercussions on whole regions in nearby countries in terms of unemployment, idle fishing vessels and the decline of dependent industries ;

7. Noting that, while pollution has not so far led to any significant reduction in total catches in member states, it nevertheless has serious effects on coastal and freshwater fishing in many areas, while presenting a danger to the consumers of the products concerned, and may have long-term cumulative effects on marine life and human health;

8. Concerned that the revenues of fishermen in most member states barely keep up with inflation, and that they are generally insufficient to cover rapidly increasing fuel prices, rising personnel costs and the replacement of ageing vessels and equipment,

9. Considers that the situation as described above requires concerted national and international action to secure for fishing communities a satisfactory fish production, assist the fishing industry in general and increase the yields of the marine environment ;

1. Assembly debate on 28 January 1981 (24th Sitting) (see Doc. 4655, report of the Committee on Agriculture). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 January 1981 (24th Sitting).

10. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers convey to their governments this recommendation and its appendix, stressing in particular the need :

10.1. to take a more active role in co-ordinating the operations of their fishing industry from production to marketing, and to help it, financially and otherwise, to reach higher efficiency and profitability, by rebuilding fish stocks and adapting fleets to the maximum, and economically viable, yield of these stocks ;

10.2. to take forceful measures to overcome the lack of progress observed in recent years in the struggle against sea and lake pollution ;

10.3. to encourage research and education on marine matters, in particular aquaculture and the management and economics of fisheries ;

10.4. to pursue more strongly their international co-operation in this field within the European Communities and international organisations such as OECD and FAO, in order to prevent discrimination against the countries concerned and ensure progressive implementation of the agreements ;

10.5. to do their utmost to ensure that international agreements on marine and fisheries matters are followed scrupulously by all Contracting Parties and respected by the international community as a whole ;

10.6. to take into consideration, when formulating their fisheries policies, the principles contained in the appended European Declaration on Fisheries.

Appendix APPENDIX - European Declaration on Fisheries

Role of governments

1. When governments formulate the major goals for their fishing industry (including production, processing, distribution and marketing of fish), the following should be included :

creating the conditions for an efficient and profitable fisheries industry, providing those employed with job security and sufficient income - all of which can best be accomplished if fish stocks are kept large and fleets are adapted to the size of these stocks ;

adjusting catches - within the limits posed by conservation measures - to market conditions in such a way as to allow stable and profitable sales and full employment in the coastal areas concerned ;

improving fishing methods and the processing, distribution and marketing of fish in such a way that those employed may enjoy a standard of living comparable to that in other industries ;

ensuring that consumers are offered a satisfactory product at reasonable prices.

2. Governments should draw up, in consultation with representatives of fishermen's organisations, spokesmen for the shipbuilding industry, experts on marine conservation and others :

continuous one-year plans to cater for short-term changes in catch opportunities and consumer demand ;

a three to five-year plan, revised annually, taking into account long-term developments. This plan should aim at ensuring production at the lowest possible cost and at levels compatible with the maximum sustainable yield of stocks.

3. To the extent that such measures do not distort fundamental mechanisms of supply and demand or result in inefficiencies, governments may consider introducing or extending a modest price support for fish products. Such support may vary according to species and could be paid only until a certain quantitative norm has been reached.

4. A special fund to extend loans and grants to the fishing industry should be created - where this has not already been done and provided it does not lead to over-investment or over-production in the sector. The following specific measures should be considered :

4.1. the purchase of new, safer and more versatile vessels, better suited for new conservation measures and production methods, and allowing a renewal of ageing fleets ;

4.2. the acquisition of improved fishing equipment, such as stronger engines, better machinery to operate trawls, assort and skin fish, etc., and modern instrumentation to search for fish-shoals ;

4.3. the speedy replacement of lost or damaged nets or other equipment ;

4.4. investments in improved safety equipment such as rafts, echo-sounding and fire-protection equipment, radar and radio-telephone ;

4.5. aid in the case of fishing restrictions, resulting from the banning of certain fishing, the fulfilment of quotas, etc. ;

4.6. assistance in favour of the consolidation of fisheries, taking the form of, for example, a transformation of short-term loans into long-term loans, or the covering of part of the operating costs in peak fishing periods ;

4.7. improvements of harbours and storage facilities, such as an extension of the capacity for cold-storage.

5. Governments should shape regional policies in such a way as to further the interests of fishing communities by, for instance :

5.1. encouraging a larger part of the fish processing industry to locate their facilities in the fishing regions themselves ;

5.2. making these regions less exclusively dependent on fishing, through the establishment of other types of industry - preferably with seasonal variations of activity different from those in the fishing industry.

6. Consideration should also be given to excluding small-scale, close-to-shore fishing from certain catch restrictions, since the catches made in this type of activity are so modest that they have no significant influence on the depletion of stocks.

7. With a view to improving conservation, governments should not hesitate to introduce minimum mesh sizes, ban fishing on spawning grounds in periods of reproduction for certain overfished species and reduce that proportion of fish production which is intended for industrial, non-human use.

The role of the fisheries industry

1. The fishing industry should be encouraged to achieve greater co-ordination between operating units, in particular through the following measures :

a. Co-operation in production, for example through the formation of producers' co-operatives, which may help pool information on fishing conditions in various areas, further systematic harvesting of fish, and prevent an exaggerated competition that depresses prices and endangers stocks ;

b. Co-ordination of sales to middlemen and individual food shops ;

c. The creation, as the case may be, of a national producers' association, through which the actions of individual producers' co-operatives can be co-ordinated, in particular as regards :

1. the transport of fish, in seeking cheaper rates in negotiations with railroads, truck companies, etc. ;
2. the balancing of sudden surpluses or shortages in various fishing regions and consumer areas ;
3. the sharing out of major orders from the processing industry or from abroad, among the different producers' co-operatives ;
4. the co-ordination of exports ;
5. the planning of marketing activities on behalf of the fishing industry as a whole, aiming, in particular, at increasing the consumption of fish among the general public ;
6. the adaption of production and processing to changing consumer preferences, as regards species or different modes of preparation of fish products.

The role of the research community

1. Governments of member states should :

a. promote and streamline research on the marine environment, in particular as concerns interdependencies between species, changes in climate or water composition having an effect on marine life, the identification of hitherto under-utilised species, aquaculture, etc. ;

b. make maximum use of the "human factor" in fishing, by furthering the professional development of fishermen and by expanding higher education in such subjects as economic theories on fishing, fish biochemistry, industrial fish processing, management of fishing vessels, marine engineering, etc. ;

c. encourage more intense co-operation at national level between researchers, government authorities, professional organisations and individual fishermen ;

d. intensify international co-operation in education and research, and, in particular, envisage the creation of a European network of centres for fisheries studies - co-operating closely in the exchange of information, lecturers, teaching equipment, etc., and thus contributing to the formation of a more "global" approach to the existing problems.

The role of the international community

1. Governments of member states should intensify international co-operation in fisheries matters, and in particular :

a. act in the spirit of Assembly Recommendation 861 (1979) on the role of the Council of Europe in the intensification of co-operation between the countries of Northern and Southern Europe - in particular through the co-ordination of national fisheries policies and through the setting up of technical co-operation programmes, involving the supply of experts and the provision of training for managerial personnel ;

b. work in favour of the conclusion of a comprehensive anti-pollution treaty for the Mediterranean as suggested by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ;

c. improve the exchange of statistical data within bodies such as OECD, the European Communities and the North-East and North-West Atlantic Commissions, in particular as regards catches ;

d. draw more fully on the experience in fisheries matters acquired within OECD, by going beyond purely technical consultations, and taking steps to evolve a joint approach to fisheries matters for the whole OECD area ;

e. expand and further liberate international trade in fish products, bearing in mind that the expansion of the market is in the best interest of the fishermen themselves ;

f. encourage the work at present carried out by various non-governmental organisations in matters relating to the marine environment.

2. It is particularly important for the governments of the member states as well as for the institutions of the European Communities :

a. to strengthen their efforts at reaching agreement on a joint structural fisheries policy within the Community, thus meeting the pledge made by the Council of Ministers that such a policy be introduced by January 1981 ;

b. to increase the assistance given to the fishing industry for its structural adjustment, and to coastal regions facing particular difficulties, especially through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) ;

c. to take into special consideration the problems and interests of those member states of the Council of Europe which are not members of the European Communities, and to negotiate appropriate fisheries agreements with them.