Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1170 (1998)[1]

Sustainable exploitation of living marine resources

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly recalls:

1.1. its Resolutions 1091 (1996), 1012 (1993), 972 (1991), 929 (1989) and Order No. 522 (1996), all of which address problems related to the sustainable exploitation of living marine resources. It stresses the importance of those resources, whose exploitation provides food and employment for large sections of the population;

1.2. the Parliamentary Conference on the Oceans which it organised in Paris on 19 March 1998 and the parliamentary meetings on the oceans, held in Lisbon on 31 August and 1 September 1998, which inter alia looked at the sustainable exploitation of living marine resources;

1.3. the important work carried out by the European Union (in particular the European Parliament), by other international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its Fisheries Committee, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and its Committee on Fisheries, and by the Independent World Commission on the Oceans.

2. In addition, the Assembly welcomes the fact that the United Nations has declared 1998 International Year of the Ocean and that the Lisbon World Exhibition (Expo '98) has also chosen the oceans as its theme. This is proof of worldwide awareness of the oceans' importance and the attention being paid to them for the purposes of preserving a global balance and ensuring the survival of humankind.

3. The primary aim of fish resources management at a time when many species are currently being over-exploited must be sustainable exploitation of fish stocks. This presupposes a better understanding and effective control of the fishing effort as it really is. However, any measure of compulsory reduction of the fishing effort should be coupled with social support measures for fishermen and, if necessary, compensation for ship-owners.

4. Accordingly, the specific features of each fishing zone and the relations between species must be borne in mind, measures must be adapted to the wide range of biogeographical and fisheries production conditions and an effort must be made to promote a balanced form of exploitation, involving not only the most commercially profitable species but also other less valued ones.

5. The Assembly acknowledges that coastal fishing is of strategic importance because of its role in the supply of fresh fish, its economical use of resources and its contribution to ensuring viable, settled fishing communities and also because of the jobs that depend on it.

6. The Assembly acknowledges the major importance of offshore fishing, given the size of the catches it accounts for, the industrial and economic development it makes viable and the jobs that are generated by it.

1. Assembly debate on 24 September 1998 (31st Sitting) (see Doc. 8165, report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, rapporteur: Mr Carvalho; and Doc. 8184, opinion of the Committee on Science and Technology, rapporteur: Mr Olrich). Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 September 1998 (31st Sitting)

7. It further points out that any regulations on access to exploitation of resources must comply with the principles already accepted by the international community, including:

7.1. management based on fisheries research to secure a responsible and sustainable development of fishing communities;

7.2. the introduction of differentiated rules on access to exploitation depending on whether the resources are in territorial waters, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone or international and third country waters;

7.3. the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (FAO 1995), and in particular the precautionary approach, must also be implemented in fish stock management.

8. The Assembly also considers that, given the excessive fishing effort, any fleet modernisation programme must take account of predictable stock levels, the specific situation of the fishing sector and fishing communities in each country, in particular by taking into consideration the size of the fishing fleets in relation to the size of stocks. It is opposed to all management systems based solely on policies of dismantling vessels.

9. The Assembly believes moreover that it is essential:

9.1. to preserve the concept of territorial waters and the sovereignty of coastal states over their territorial waters;

9.2. to grant coastal states preferential fishing rights in the contiguous zone and allow some of these states, depending on their specific geographical features, the possibility of extending these preferential fishing rights beyond twenty-four nautical miles, if appropriate, taking into account the principles set forth in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and respecting the rights of neighbouring countries;

9.3. to preserve the concept of the exclusive economic zone (200 nautical miles) as a zone in which the coastal state has sovereign rights and exercises its jurisdiction for the purposes of supply, conservation and management of natural resources.

10. The Assembly believes that scientific research, in particular the biological assessment of potential resources, the biological and economic effects of marine exploition and changes in natural environmental factors, must be the foundation for fisheries policy and for the sustainable exploitation of living marine resources as part of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach. It is also essential to develop scientific co-operation between states and European research institutes, in conjunction with fishing communities, ship-owners and the fishing industry.

11. The Assembly encourages fisheries managers and scientists, in cases where adequate biological and economic knowledge exists, to develop catch rules incorporating long-term harvesting strategies. In formulating such catch rules, a precautionary approach shall be applied towards the objectives of sustainable biological management and maximum long-term economic yield.

12. It draws attention to the close interaction between activities in coastal areas (agriculture, fishing, tourism, town planning, etc.) and the environment, whence the need for integrated management of the coast and coastal development based on the interdependence between coastal ecosystems and water-based activities, and aimed at reducing sources of pollution and limiting the urbanisation of coastal areas.

13. Consequently, the Assembly calls upon member states and, where appropriate, the European Union, the OECD, the FAO and other competent international organisations to encourage, implement or strengthen policies for the management of living marine resources based on sustainable exploitation, support for fishing communities and the preservation of an economically sound fishing sector, and to this end:

13.1. to carry out an assessment of the application, advantages and disadvantages of the various systems for managing fish resources in the light of the individual characteristics of the fisheries and countries concerned;

13.2. to undertake a study of the actual fishing effort in respect of fisheries, fleets and waters under their jurisdiction and introduce an effective fisheries monitoring system;

13.3. to involve fishermen and ship-owners' organisations and other relevant bodies as well as those in scientific quarters in drawing up and implementing fishing policies, in particular with regard to the measures to be taken to ensure sustainable and responsible management of resources;

13.4. to adopt practical measures, as appropriate, such as: fixing TACs (total allowable catches) and quotas, setting limits to the minimum admissible biomass, protecting juvenile stock, limiting catches per zone and restricting the number of days ships are allowed to spend at sea, reducing by-catches and discards, working towards a ban on drift-nets exceeding 2.5 kilometres in length, monitoring the operations of large fishing vessels, and extending satellite monitoring of fishing boats more than fifteen metres in length to cover the whole of Europe, controlling the number of fishing licences and the authorised duration of fishing, and developing co-operation with and between marine research institutes in order to increase European scientific and technological potential. Such co-operation should be based on strategic thinking and jointly undertaken projects, in particular in the framework of networks comprising public institutions and commercial undertakings;

13.5. to protect the rights of fishermen and other fishing industry workers and provide them, through environmentally and economically sound management of fish stocks, with fair living standards and with preferential access to traditional fishing grounds and to resources in the waters under their jurisdiction;

13.6. to avoid incorporating or allowing, particularly in fishery management, incentives to wasteful fishing practices;

13.7. to sign and ratify the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the associated agreements, in particular the 1995 Agreement relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks;

13.8. to accede to the agreement to promote compliance with international conservation and management measures by fishing vessels on the high seas (FAO, 1993);

13.9. to extend the Council of the European Union Regulation (EC) No. 1239/98 of 8 June 1998 on a total ban on drift-net fishing in the Atlantic and Mediterranean from 1 January 2002 to the member states of the Council of Europe as well;

13.10. to secure and destroy drift-nets which are no longer required and to prohibit their transfer to third parties;

13.11. to introduce import bans on fish and fish products from countries which violate the international treaties and legal regulations prohibiting drift-net fishing;

13.12. to bring influence to bear on the fishing industry and companies to ensure that they do not process or sell fish or fish products obtained through drift-net fishing;

13.13. to take appropriate measures to promote consumer awareness of the origins of fish and fish products, fishing methods and dangers to certain species; and to work actively to promote the labelling of fish and fish products obtained from sustainable sources in line with international regulations on the protection of species;

13.14. to implement Resolution 52/29, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 26 November 1997, on large-scale pelagic drift-net fishing: unauthorised fishing in zones of national jurisdiction and on the high seas, fisheries by-catch and discards;

13.15. to implement international conventions relating to the protection of the marine environment, undertake regular assessments of the environmental conditions of coastal areas, develop and jointly use means of detecting sources of pollution and end the release of radioactive materials into the ocean;

13.16. to strengthen a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to fisheries management problems, by encouraging and supporting the development of appropriate interdisciplinary university education in the field of fisheries sciences;

13.17. to engage in consultations with a view to creating a European Maritime Agency to help develop a coherent vision of European maritime policy, especially on the sustainable exploitation of living marine resources and to improve the co-ordination and use of European expertise and experience in marine ecosystems, particularly fisheries. An agency of this kind would function in co-operation with other existing institutions such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES);

13.18. to draw on the ocean-related events of 1998 to launch a European public awareness campaign on the importance of the oceans and make a joint effort to define objectives, identify priorities, devise methodology and assemble the human and material resources needed to progress towards improved knowledge and sustainable exploitation of the oceans and their resources.