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European fisheries sector crisis due to the rise in oil prices

Greens/EFA motion for a resolution

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Commission Communication (2008)453 on promoting the adaptation of the European Union fishing fleets to the economic consequences of high fuel prices,

– having regard to Commission Regulation (EC) No 875/2007 of 24 July 2007,

– having regard to the Commission's Green Paper on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy COM(2009)163,

– having regard to Rules 115(5) and 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas all sectors in the EU dependent on fossil oil are equally affected by the increased oil prices, except those such as aviation and shipping (including fisheries) since they are excluded from energy taxes on fuel (Council Directive 2003/96/EC of 27 October 2003) and therefore are proportionally already much less affected by an increase in fuel prices than other sectors,

B. whereas more than 70% of European fish stocks are overfished,

C. whereas fuel subsidies, including exemption from fuel taxes, are well known to contribute to, and can be the economical catalyst for overfishing, since low operating costs allow fishing to continue on overfished or depleted stocks,

D. whereas an increase in fuel prices, according to the Commission Communication (2008)453, is hitting those with the largest energy consumption most, i.e. beamtrawlers, with fuel costs in some cases corresponding to 60% of value of the landed fish, while coastal vessels fishing with passive gear are far less affected, with fuel costs corresponding to only between 5 and 20 % of value of landed fish,

E. whereas the situation is exacerbated by the inability of many fishermen to pass on the costs of their activities in their sale price, owing to the current market structure and the dominance of corporate intermediaries,

F. whereas the global fishing fleet has been estimated to account for at least 1,2% of global oil

consumption,

G. whereas the de-minimis state aid to the fisheries sector (Commission Regulation (EC) No 875/2007 of 24 July 2007) was already increased tenfold in 2007 from €3000 to €30 000,

H. whereas the EU has recognised the IPCC conclusions that industrialised countries need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 25-40% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels and the European Council has decided on an EU objective to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80-95% by 2050,

I. whereas the European Parliament called for the EU to shift to a 30% greenhouse gas reduction target for 2020 in its resolution adopted 25 November 2010,

J. whereas EU Member States, at the Biodiversity summit in Nagoya in October 2010, committed to eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies by 2020 at the latest,

K. whereas G-20 Leaders committed in 2009 to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies over the medium term,

L. whereas in many Member States, the available EU subsidies have too often been used to support the development of large-scale, energy-intensive, environmentally destructive fishing fleets, on the assumption that energy would remain inexpensive,

M. whereas high energy costs are not a temporary phenomenon, but rather structural and permanent in nature, and whereas the sector must adapt accordingly,

N. whereas certain Member States have initiated schemes aimed at reducing fuel consumption by their fleets and whereas such innovations are to be supported,

O. whereas the discussions in WTO in the context of the Doha round are focussed on how to eliminate distorting fisheries subsidies,

1. Concludes that there is an urgent need for the European fishing fleets to restructure so as to move away from energy-intensive, environmentally destructive fishing vessels and gear and to adopt more benign practices that require less energy and are more sustainable in the long term, environmentally, socially and economically;

2. Calls upon the Commission to launch a study of the effects of removing the Member States' obligation to exempt marine fuel from taxation, introducing a minimum level of energy tax on marine fuel and including the maritime transport sector in the EU emissions trading system;

3. Considers that granting more public money to the fisheries sector because of increased fuel prices would send the wrong signal during the reform of the CFP and provide an incentive for vessel owners to use more powerful and fuel-consuming engines;

4. Considers that fuel subsidies, including foregone tax, result in reduced costs that restore profitability and create incentives for continued fishing in the face of declining catches, leading to overfishing, fleet overcapitalization, reduced economic efficiency of the sector, and lost resource rent;

5. Believes that an increase in de-minimis from €30 000 to compensate for an increase in fuel prices would hinder adaptation of the fishing industry to the inevitable continued increase in fuel prices that affects all sectors dependent on fossil fuels, bearing in mind that the fishing sector is less vulnerable than other sectors due to the tax exemption;

6. Believes that increasing fuel subsidies, at the time of general cutbacks in government spending, and following pledges by the G-20 leaders to phase out fuel subsidies and agreement by WTO members to bring fisheries subsidies within WTO disciplines, is likely to undermine EU's leadership in ongoing negotiation processes, sending a signal that would encourage other countries to also increase subsidies and contributing to a vicious circle that has already made operations costs of destructive fishing techniques on the worlds oceans much too low, thus contributing to disastrous overfishing;

7. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Governments of the Member States and the representatives of the European fisheries sector organisations.

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Opinion

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