

More transparency and accountability for EU vessels fishing outside the Union

The new rules proposal to extend the authorisation system of EU external fishing fleets to include private agreements between EU companies and third countries, to introduce common eligibility criteria for EU vessels' authorisations and to make part of an EU fishing authorisation register accessible to the public was backed by the Fisheries Committee on Monday.

“The EU is one of the major players in the fisheries world and must lead by example. We must use our influence to improve standards and transparency in international fisheries and this regulation is an important step stone in a raise to the top towards sustainable global fishing”, said the rapporteur Linnéa ENGSTRÖM (Greens/EFA, SV).

Authorisation procedures

An EU vessel fishing would need to obtain an authorisation by its flag member state to fish outside EU waters. This authorisation would be requested for all fishing vessels with fishing activities in the framework of a Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) or under a direct authorisation issued by a third country through a private agreement. It would also cover fishing activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction under the auspices of a regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) or on the high seas outside such arrangements.

Eligibility criteria

The authorisation would be based on a set of common eligibility criteria which the flag member state would need to check thoroughly. This set of criteria would include:

- the administrative information on the vessel and the master

- a unique vessel identification number by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), where this is required by Union legislation
- a valid fishing license
- checking that the vessel is not included in an illegal fishing (IUU) vessel list adopted by a regional fisheries management organisation and/or by the Union

Public register

An EU electronic fishing authorisation register would be set up and a large part of it would be accessible to the public. It would contain data on the IMO number, the details of the company and beneficial owner and the type of authorisation and fishing opportunities.

Reflagging operations

Vessels that during the two years prior to the application for an authorisation have left the Union register and been reflagged in a third country and subsequently returned to the EU register would only receive the authorisation by the flag state if the state has verified the vessel did not engage in IUU activities nor it operated in a non-cooperating country or a third country identified as allowing non-sustainable fishing.

Next steps

The draft resolution- adopted by 22 votes to 1 against- will be put to the plenary vote in February. The proposal would replace the current 'Fishing Authorisations Regulation' 1006/2008, and would apply to all EU vessels fishing outside EU waters, and to third-country vessels fishing in EU waters.

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