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Co-management of fisheries in the EU

European Parliament resolution of 9 May 2023 on co-management of fisheries in the EU and the contribution of the fisheries sector for the implementation of management measures (2022/2003(INI))

(C/2023/1060)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union,
 - having regard to Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 25 July 2001 entitled ‘European governance — A white paper’ (COM(2001)0428),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640),
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations (EC) No 1954/2003 and (EC) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations (EC) No 2371/2002 and (EC) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea and amending Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on nature restoration (COM(2022)0304),
 - having regard to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Guidebook for evaluating fisheries co-management effectiveness,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Fisheries (A9-0119/2023),
- A. whereas the common fisheries policy (CFP) should ensure that fishing activities contribute to long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability and contribute to increased productivity and a fair standard of living for the fisheries sector;
- B. whereas Goal 14 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals sets out to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; whereas this includes giving small-scale artisanal fishers access to marine resources and markets;
- C. whereas Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy states in recital 14 that ‘it is important for the management of the CFP to be guided by principles of good governance’; whereas those principles are detailed further in the regulation, in particular in Article 3, which highlights decision-making based on best available scientific advice, placing special emphasis on the role of the Advisory Council, broad stakeholder involvement and a long-term perspective;
- D. whereas co-management can only work if the principle of subsidiarity is respected; whereas the European Union could play a facilitating role to make co-management possible;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 22.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 172, 26.6.2019, p. 1.

- E. whereas the European Green Deal and the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy include specific commitments and actions, among which is the establishment of a wider network of protected areas on land and at sea across the EU, with the expansion of Natura 2000 areas; whereas the proposed EU nature restoration law proposes to apply legally binding targets for nature restoration to all Member States for at least 20 % of the EU's land and marine areas by 2030, ultimately covering all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050;
- F. whereas there are numerous cases of successful implementation of fisheries co-management within Member States, including in Spain (Galicia, Catalonia and Andalusia), Portugal (Algarve and Peniche-Nazaré), Sweden (Kosterhavets), the Netherlands, Italy (Torre Guaceto), France (Île de Sein and the CoGeCo project) and Croatia (Telašćica and Lastovo);
- G. whereas there are also numerous success stories in EU candidate countries such as Türkiye (the EU SMAP III project, completed in 2009 in Gökova Bay, and the next project SAD-Rubicon), and in third countries, such as Senegal, with co-management of octopus and green lobster fisheries, and Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka;
- H. whereas the outermost regions contribute enormously to the EU's maritime dimension, with their vast exclusive economic zones accounting for over half of the EU's exclusive economic zone ⁽³⁾;
- I. whereas almost 80 % of the EU's biodiversity currently resides in its outermost regions and overseas countries and territories ⁽⁴⁾;
- J. whereas it is necessary to take into account the specific characteristics of the small-scale fishing sector in some European regions, in particular in the outermost regions, given that it uses selective fishing gear with a lower environmental impact; whereas the sector is important for ensuring employment in coastal areas and guaranteeing a fair standard of living for local communities ⁽⁵⁾;
- K. whereas the general principle of fisheries co-management can be facilitated through support and guidelines at both European and national level;
- L. whereas certain Member States and regions have a legal framework for co-management; whereas to date, however, there is no legislation at European level and only a few tools facilitating the implementation of co-management mechanisms, even if co-management is being used to manage some fisheries in many EU Member States, applying rules that fit in perfectly with the current CFP;
- M. whereas, in some cases, traditional management has had diverging success rates as regards improving stocks and maintaining employment;
- N. whereas fisheries management cannot be separated from other aspects associated with the marine environment and coastal populations, such as economic, cultural and social aspects, as set out in Article 2 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, which lays down the objectives of the CFP, and as referred to throughout that regulation;
- O. whereas it is difficult to obtain and collect data and information on marine environments and fisheries; whereas the participation of the fisheries sector itself in this work, through the direct involvement of those engaged in this activity, is important for all public and private research bodies at European level, as laid down in Article 25 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy;
- P. whereas, in all the cases of co-management mentioned above, the change in the role of fishers — from passive subjects who comply with the rules to protagonists in fisheries management who comply with the agreed rules — is fundamental to the success of the initiatives adopted, as they will contribute to a better understanding of them, defend them and monitor compliance with them, and manage their fishing methods in an ecosystem-based approach, understanding the importance of their fisheries in the ecosystems; whereas the role of fishers as 'guardians of the sea' is underlined through their contribution to targeted policymaking, the reduction of marine litter and the collection of plastic at sea, for example;

⁽³⁾ Commission communication of 3 May 2022 entitled 'Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions' (COM(2022)0198).

⁽⁴⁾ European Parliament resolution of 9 June 2021 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives (OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25).

⁽⁵⁾ European Parliament resolution of 12 April 2016 on innovation and diversification of small-scale coastal fishing in fisheries-dependent regions (OJ C 58, 15.2.2018, p. 82).

- Q. whereas the fisheries sector, in particular small-scale artisanal fisheries, plays a vital role in monitoring the marine environment and fish stocks, providing extremely useful and relevant data for decision-making purposes;
- R. whereas scientific work that produces regular and up-to-date data is needed to advise on the measures to be taken to ensure responsible use of common resources, as laid down in Articles 26 and 27 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy;
- S. whereas a system that is productive and sustainable over time must be biologically sound and balanced in order to ensure an equilibrium between species, allowing stocks to be maintained now and in the future; whereas the best existing resource management system — adapted to each case — must be used for this purpose, the success of co-management systems having been demonstrated in the cases mentioned above;
- T. whereas in 2017, it was estimated that at least 9 million people were engaged in marine recreational fishing activities in Europe and that the marine recreational fisheries sector supported almost 100 000 full-time equivalent jobs, with a total annual economic impact amounting to EUR 10,5 billion; whereas recreational fishers are users of the sea and its resources; whereas the recreational fisheries sector provides economic opportunities for coastal communities;
- U. whereas the white paper on the governance of the European Union states that policies should no longer be decided at the top, that the legitimacy of the EU lies with the participation of its citizens, that the system of functioning of the Union needs to be made more transparent since participation depends on people being able to take part in public debate and that for this to happen, the general public needs to be more actively informed about European issues; whereas the white paper also proposes the involvement of local-government associations in policy development and greater flexibility in the implementation of certain Community policies with a strong territorial impact; whereas the revised CFP introduced the concept of regionalisation and expanded the range of Advisory Councils for stakeholder consultation;
- V. whereas Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea already provides in Article 9(10) that 'in accordance with the principles of good governance established in Article 3 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013, Member States may promote participative management systems at local level in order to achieve the objectives of the plan', co-management being a form of participatory management;
- W. whereas co-management, being a participatory and co-responsibility model, is more transparent and proactive and is equally democratic, and helps to generate educational synergies regarding the management of common resources and a culture of responsibility, establishing networks of trust and contributing to reducing conflict and overcoming reticence in order to implement innovations in fisheries management;
- X. whereas fishers' organisations, such as *cofradías*, *comités des pêches* or *prud'homies de pêcheurs*, could have an important role to play in the development and implementation of co-management systems; whereas *cofradías* are longstanding organisations representing producers in some Member States, and their societal role in sustaining coastal communities is fundamental; whereas despite this, they are not yet recognised as entities eligible for support from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF);
- Y. whereas fishers, being the principal stakeholders, and producers' organisations play a pivotal role in meeting the CFP key objectives in terms of food security, maximum sustainable yield, quota management, marketing and technical conservation measures; whereas, furthermore, they provide a good example of fisheries management in the EU by setting up management measures through fishers' joint resolutions, organising fishing activities in line with market requirements and collaborating with multiple stakeholders to implement management measures at local level;
- Z. whereas the lack of women's representation and inclusion in fisheries management hinders sustainability and development;

Contribution of co-management to the objectives of the common fisheries policy

1. Draws attention to the fact that fisheries co-management systems embrace both the sharing criteria of the CFP, integrating collective knowledge and encompassing any actor benefiting from a collective resource, and the management principles of the CFP, contributing to the achievement of the objectives set out in Articles 2 and 3 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013;

2. Considers that in all cases of co-management that have been analysed, there is a clear potential for improvement in the sustainability of resources at environmental level, maintaining the economic and social benefits of the activity, as social and economic actors are directly involved in decision-making in co-management; notes that such co-governance systems have been found to be more resilient to shocks such as COVID-19 and to reduce conflicts and improve fluidity in decision-making on fisheries management, fostering democratisation, transparency, trust and compliance with regulations;
3. Points out that co-management has been proven to favour consensual decision-making between the administration, relevant stakeholders and research bodies, which should always act in accordance with the principles of the CFP and other relevant regulations, applying the precautionary approach in all cases to ensure that resources are exploited in a manner that is fully sustainable on the basis of the maximum sustainable yield of the target species; underlines that this type of management and decision-making has been an important factor in rolling out successful conservation measures, such as marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures;
4. Underlines that the recreational fisheries sector should also be included in co-management systems, encompassing both users and economic actors who contribute to generating socio-economic benefits for communities; notes that implementing co-management in the CFP is also an opportunity for a better recognition and management of recreational fisheries in this policy;
5. Emphasises the fact that co-management systems are fisheries-based, but can also function in cross-border situations and cover different geographical areas, and take into account the environment in which they operate, thus applying a holistic approach; notes, in this regard, that co-management arrangements could also provide mechanisms for quota-swap arrangements;
6. Notes that there is a continuum of possible co-management arrangements, covering various partnership arrangements and degrees of power-sharing;
7. Stresses that, as research bodies are directly involved in co-management systems, improved scientific data collection is ensured; underlines that this system makes it possible to generate data and knowledge that can otherwise be difficult to obtain given the close relationship between all the parties involved (administration, industry and researchers — the so-called triple helix), thus developing the capacity of all of them to use this information to generate rapid and effective responses to any issues that may affect fisheries; notes, in this regard, the important role that EU funds can play in financing research and data-gathering and urges the Member States to ensure the inclusion of funding possibilities in their national implementation of EU funds;
8. Stresses that co-management also helps to create conditions for the fisheries sector to be economically viable and competitive, to ensure an adequate standard of living for those who depend on fishing activities and to ensure that the interests both of consumers and producers are taken into account;
9. Stresses that producers' organisations, *cofradías* and other organisations such as *comités des pêches* can and should be utilised as key drivers of co-management; highlights that the fundamental role played by such organisations in fisheries management should be recognised and strengthened, including through EMFAF support;
10. Emphasises the fact that co-management contributes to the elimination of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices, as industry and administrations are involved and it is easier to identify and understand malpractices and to combat them, including by having appropriate and effective control measures and practices in place;
11. Highlights the crucial role played by the outermost regions in fighting both illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and ocean pollution, given their dispersion and their privileged location in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans; notes that they must be provided with greater capacity for enforcement and monitoring programmes;
12. Stresses the importance of fully implementing Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy to support co-management models, whereby Member States must use transparent and objective criteria, including those of an environmental, social and economic nature, when allocating the fishing opportunities available to them; whereas these criteria may include the impact of fishing on the environment, the history of compliance, the contribution to the local economy and historical catch levels;

13. Acknowledges that co-management can be a useful tool for improving the collection of environmental data and ensuring that management measures are adapted to the specific characteristics of individual fisheries, leading to greater acceptance and compliance by fishers; stresses the need to use it to improve the availability of data and measures to minimise the impacts of bycatch on sensitive species;

14. Stresses that co-management approaches should include all stakeholders' voices, including those of trade union representatives of third-country nationals employed in EU fisheries, with important consequences for working conditions and labour rights;

15. Draws attention to the fact that there is no unified assessment of the instances where co-management has been implemented in the EU and elsewhere in the world that identifies the system's main drivers; calls on the Commission to assess the examples of fisheries co-management in the Union in order to identify best practices, in particular where these concern effectively involving the relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process, and to endorse phasing in co-management within other fisheries and in the regional fisheries bodies in which it participates;

Main obstacles to co-management in the Union and possible solutions

16. Stresses that the lack of specific EU legislation, tools and instruments for facilitating the implementation of fisheries co-management systems has been highlighted as an obstacle preventing some Member States from using this fisheries management method, as such legislation, tools and instruments depend solely and exclusively on the specific commitment of the competent authorities; highlights the importance of providing flexibility in any new EU legislation so that current practices and traditions can be maintained and new tools and instruments are provided, such as the exchange of best practices between Member States and involved stakeholders, which is an important step in expanding the use of co-management systems;

17. Stresses the lack of proper tools, such as forums, for exchanging on and developing co-management models and regulatory measures facilitating their implementation; notes that this makes it more difficult to implement the proper models in different Member States, despite the interest that the sector and administrations may show in applying them in a given area;

18. Asks the Commission for a non-binding voluntary regulatory framework on fisheries co-management, which should provide the necessary flexibility for current practices and traditions to be maintained, in addition to an assessment on how these practices could be encouraged and facilitated, taking into account the principle of subsidiarity and building on existing successful examples in Member States and third countries;

19. Asks the Commission to take into account the Member States with outermost regions, and in particular the species that are of crucial importance for each of these regions, when proposing the annual regulations on total allowable catches and quotas; points out that any management framework should promote better management of fishing quotas between the outermost regions and their Member States, taking into account the specific characteristics of each of these regions; underlines, given the importance of the fisheries sector in the outermost regions, the need for Member States to provide timely information on the evolution of quota consumption so that these regions can keep the sector informed and better manage their fleets;

20. Stresses that in order to ensure better co-management systems, there is a need for clear rules facilitating all the specific aspects required for co-management to work well, such as the setting up of co-management committees, and a need to speed up the process of implementing measures, as there are concerns that the legislative framework in some regions is not sufficiently clear at present, which means that the requisite timeframe for creation and implementation is in the long term, whereas solutions are needed in the short to medium term;

21. Points out that the absence of clear long-term tools and legal provisions might jeopardise the successful co-management of fisheries projects, as it involves medium- and long-term processes and a committed leadership, which is why European support for this system is essential;

22. Highlights the specific role of Advisory Councils in ensuring stakeholder involvement in the EU decision-making process; encourages the Commission to further engage with the Advisory Councils and to ensure proper feedback on their recommendations; asks the Commission to consider an annual report on how Advisory Councils' recommendations have been taken into account; highlights the importance of the participation of all stakeholders in Advisory Councils and their contribution to the respective recommendations;

23. Highlights the importance of the work of the Advisory Councils in the fisheries management decision-making process; calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase participation in Advisory Council meetings and better communicate on the value of their advice; considers that the role of Advisory Councils must be further developed;
24. Notes that small-scale fishers often lack the resources and means available to industrial fisheries to successfully engage in the legislative process, which has historically led to significant inequities in national fisheries policy frameworks;
25. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote, within the rules of the EMFAF, a commitment to co-management models for fisheries, with adequate funding to cover their operating expenditure;
26. Highlights that producers' organisations are also important for the success of fisheries management, since they have a bottom-up approach that emphasises community participation and grassroots movements;
27. Notes that the development of a Union framework for co-management is possible under the current CFP, but that no such framework has yet been developed;

Fisheries co-management — inclusion in the future revision of the common fisheries policy

28. Advocates ensuring that co-management is properly included in future revisions of the CFP, co-management being defined by the FAO as 'a partnership arrangement in which the community of local resource users (fishers) and government, with support and assistance as needed from other stakeholders (boat owners, fish traders, fish processors, boat builders, business people, etc.) and external agents (non-governmental organisation, academic and research institutions), share the responsibility and authority for the management of the fishery'; points out that this must be done in a way that respects the principle of subsidiarity, taking care not to undermine the different co-management models that are already in place, and ensures that all relevant stakeholders, such as fishers, authorities and the scientific community, are properly consulted and involved in the decision-making process;
29. Calls on the Member States to support the development of fisheries co-management systems through the immediate implementation of national and legal frameworks, building on best practices observed in other Member States and with the support of the Commission;
30. Notes that in many countries worldwide, fisheries management is mainly based on a top-down state-centred approach, focused on industrial or large-scale fisheries, economic efficiency and environmental sustainability; considers that this approach is not always appropriate given the differences between regions and the specific characteristics of fleet segments such as small-scale fisheries, which would greatly benefit from the involvement of the fishing community in fisheries management tools, and that it has not been the best approach with regard to semi-industrial and industrial fisheries either;
31. Stresses that the inclusion of scientific research in marine social science is critical in guiding the development of more inclusive and equitable fisheries management approaches and practices;
32. Stresses that the choice of instrument used in the management of fisheries resources is largely up to governments, although experience around the world shows that various forms of partnership between government, industry and fishers strengthen management and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the areas concerned; points out that the 1987 report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, 'Our Common Future', commonly known as the Brundtland Report, already concluded that in order to achieve sustainable development and therefore also sustainable management of natural resources, communities should have greater access to and participation in the decision-making process affecting common resources, including increased responsibility, always in cooperation with the relevant administrations and organisations; highlights, in this regard, the importance of applying the principle of subsidiarity to guarantee that decisions are taken at the correct administrative level, thus ensuring the proper involvement of the relevant stakeholders;
33. Reiterates that fisheries co-management already exists and has been successful in many of the known cases; notes that these are based on different legal frameworks, both at local level, such as in Galicia, Catalonia and Andalusia in Spain, and at state level, such as in Portugal, Italy, France, Sweden, Croatia and the Netherlands; stresses that the lack of experience and good examples at European level prevents this system from being applied in other regions and countries;

34. Highlights the need to also develop cross-border co-management tools for certain regions, with the support and participation of the Commission; points out, in this regard, the example of the arrangement that was set up between France, the UK and the Channel Islands for management of fisheries in the region, which has been more centralised since Brexit; reiterates its call for the Partnership Council under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the UK to consider different arrangements for cooperation in the waters of the Crown Dependencies; highlights, in this regard, that previous arrangements under the Granville Bay Treaty could provide a basis for future adaptations of the rules by the Partnership Council;

35. Regrets that stakeholders are not sufficiently involved in fisheries management with third countries, be it for quota allocation, total allowable catch or technical measures; insists that the Commission embrace its role as the EU's representative in dealings with third countries in order to propose enhanced participatory management models and co-management in cross-border situations with third countries;

36. Emphasises that, with regard to the European Union, co-management and similar concepts such as co-governance or participatory management are mentioned in the preambles to various EU legal instruments, but there are no fully developed provisions on the matter; highlights the need for a greater debate in order to promote the specific measures needed for this fisheries management system, so as to profit from the benefits that co-management already has provided in different regions and in different cases;

37. Emphasises that the European Union could facilitate the implementation of co-management; emphasises that EU measures for co-management should focus on enabling initiatives at local, regional and national level and on the exchange of best practices;

38. Stresses that the success of co-management is determined by the existence of participatory structures and a multidisciplinary committee with a minimum of stakeholders representing all interested parties in the management of a fishery, and where equity, representation and environmental concerns are taken into account and marginalised communities are included;

39. Stresses that, in the light of the examples studied, co-management of fisheries is more resilient and more adaptive than many other fisheries management systems and has in many cases led to greater social cohesion, greater equity, improved stocks and improved profitability;

40. Stresses that co-management allows the knowledge and empirical data that fishers gather from their environment to be better taken into account, and that in this respect, the development of participatory sciences must allow for transfer of this data and empirical knowledge to aid the work of researchers; encourages the Commission to launch calls for tenders to improve the inclusion of this empirical knowledge in scientific work at all levels;

41. Points out that at European level too, fisheries management should improve dialogue between the Commission and the fisheries sector, for example by investing more in the Advisory Councils in order to make the best use of the advice they provide at European level and make fisheries management more effective;

42. Calls on the Commission and the Member States, in order to create a level playing field in EU fisheries, to ensure adequate support for all fisheries-related organisations, in particular small-scale fishers, small-scale producers' organisations and cooperatives engaged in co-management processes;

43. Insists on the need to fully implement the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters; points out that this convention creates the international obligation to involve the populations affected by the decisions to be taken in the decision-making process;

44. Stresses that the support of coastal fleets and the preservation of coastal ecosystems are among the CFP's priorities; considers it necessary, in this regard, to have fisheries management as close to the local level as possible; notes that Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, which creates restrictions on the 'access to waters' principle, is no longer sufficient to preserve these fleets; considers that co-management should be the norm for coastal zone fisheries management;

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45. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.