

Fisheries: EU Commission moves to better protect workers

Written by Martin Banks on 29 April 2016 in News
News

The Commission has adopted a proposal for a new directive which aims at improving the working conditions for workers in the fishing sector.



The move is designed to provide a higher level of protection for the 100,000 people in the EU who work in the fisheries industry.

Announcing the move on Friday, European Commissioner for employment, social affairs, skills and labour mobility, Marianne Thyssen, said that protecting our workers and their well-being is a priority for the Juncker Commission.

"Thousands work in the industry," she noted, "often under difficult circumstances at sea. The accident and injury rate can be 15 times higher compared to other sectors."

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The proposal, she said, will help to reduce the risks that fishermen face at work.

"It is based on an agreement of the European sectoral social partners and an excellent example of their ability to work together to improve working conditions."

Further comment comes from Commissioner for Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Karmenu Vella, who argued that the EU is leading the global fight against illegal fishing activities.

"IUU activity hurts the health and safety of fishermen," said the official.

"Today's proposal will improve the working conditions of fishermen at sea, reduce the incentive for illegal fishing and ensure a healthy and sustainable fishing industry that continues to attract skilled and qualified workers."

The move comes days after Swedish Greens MEP Linnea Engstrom told the Parliament Magazine that needs more to be done to tackle irregularities in the fishing sector.

Engstrom, a Vice Chair of the fisheries committee, said, "Global fish stocks are exploited or depleted to such an extent that without urgent measures we may be the last generation to catch food from the oceans."

"Today, 85 per cent of global fish stocks are over-exploited, depleted or fully exploited. Unless we act now, seafood may disappear by 2048."

The Greens member said, "The main leverage the EU has to promote sustainable fishing is to use market pressure. Everyone wants to export to the EU with its huge market. In 2014, the EU imported fish and seafood for a value of some €21bn."

"To stop fish stock depletion, she says it will not be enough for EU fishing vessels to behave responsibly."

"Other big fishing nations like China, Russia, Thailand and Taiwan will also have to improve their industries behaviour. What we need is a level playing field."

Since November 2012 the Commission has been in formal dialogue with several third countries which have been warned of the need to take strong action to fight IUU fishing. In case of significant progress, the Commission can end the dialogue.

Formal dialogue is being held with Curacao (since November 2013), the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (since December 2014), Thailand (since April 2015) and with Taiwan and the Comoros (since October 2015).

Fisheries products caught by vessels from Guinea and Cambodia are banned from being imported into the EU since November 2013.

About the author

Martin Banks is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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