



LONG DISTANT FLEET ADVISORY COUNCIL

DRAFT OPINION

LDAC REQUESTS THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ENSURE FAIR COMPETITION WITHIN THE EU SEAFOOD MARKET

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The European sea-industry scenario is of strategic importance for the supply of the European Union seafood market. It plays a key role in the social and economic development of, and in the maintenance and even in the creation of jobs in important coastal areas, since it has a multiplier effect on the economy of coastal municipalities upon which this activity is traditionally based in Europe.

The European Union market is the first market in the world in terms of seafood products, increasing its consumption levels year after year.

However, the Community production of seafood products has been affected in recent years by the significant increase of imports from third countries, which now account for over 60% of the seafood products marketed in the EU market.

Therefore, LDAC members agree on the need for the EU to develop effective policies that ensure feasibility, future competition and survival of Community operators, which are creating employment and wealth in the fisheries and seafood products processing field, and have behind them a great social dimension that is now to be preserved on a priority basis.

To achieve this goal it is essential that fair competition is ensured in the EU market, and this illustrates the pressing need for all operators, both within the EU and in third countries, to comply with the regulations - in terms of hygiene and health, food safety, working conditions - bearing in mind the framework established by the ILO conventions regarding occupational health and safety, the environment and respect for resources, traceability and labelling, among other. The European Commission is to ensure that enforcement of all these aspects is strictly controlled, adopting the relevant punitive measures in the event of failure to comply with the latter.

In this sense, it is necessary to have a stable legal framework in the long term brought about by the European Commission that ensures there is consistency among all Community policies since it is of great relevance in a globalised and increasingly international market.

The trade openness that the European Union has been developing in recent years has enabled the introduction of large volumes of products from third countries that ought to compete in a level playing field with the Community production.

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Nevertheless, the truth is that products processed in third countries are marketed in the EU, even though there are at least serious doubts about their compliance with Community regulations, due to a lack of effective control over all imports as a whole.

The clearest example of this situation can be found in the canned tuna field.

The European Union consumes 733,000 tonnes of canned tuna¹, annually, 350,000 tonnes of which are produced in the European Union² and 383.000 tonnes come from third countries³.

The growth of the European canning sector and the creation of employment in this industry could be a reality provided that fair competition is ensured within the EU market, thoroughly verifying total enforcement of EU regulations by tuna canning factories in third countries as they gain access to the Community market and rejecting deficient products, since according to surveys carried out by the sector, 85%⁴ of imported canned tuna marketed in the Community market fails to comply with some of the compulsory regulations to be marketed at points of sale. And therefore, 50%⁵ of these breaches could not be solved in less than 5 years.

To boost this process for verification and control of compliance with Community regulations regarding processed seafood products marketed in the EU market, it would be necessary to set up a Traceability Observatory at Community level to carry out said task.

¹ Figure calculated based on the production data on the PRODCOM and EUROSTAT database.

² PRODCOM and EUROSTAT database.

³ EUROSTAT database: Foreign Trade Data.

⁴ Surveys on the quality of canned tuna from South-East Asia marketed in the EU carried out in 2007 and 2011 (Surveys conducted by INTERATÚN) and Survey on the compliance of canned tuna from South-East Asia with physical, chemical and microbiological parameters in 2010 (Survey conducted by ANFACO – CECOPECA).

⁵ Depending on breaches derived from structural deficiencies of third countries relating to the tuna sector in terms of fisheries, customs, working conditions, human rights, health, etc. detected by different bodies: European Commission in its research work on IUU fishing (yellow cards to countries such as South Korea, Philippines, PNG, etc.) and imports under preferential tariff treatment (Warning for importers of tuna products in Thailand - 2013), USA Government in its "Trafficking in Persons Report 2013"; ILO in its report "Employment practices and working conditions in Thailand's fishing sector" (2014); Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) in its reports "Slavery at sea": The Continued Plight of Trafficked Migrants in Thailand's Fishing Industry" (2014) and "Sold to the Sea: Human Trafficking in Thailand's Fishing Industry" (2013); by the organisation Verité in its report on forced labour indicators in the tuna supply chain in the Philippines; by the FVO in its inspection reports.

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With this measure, therefore, it is not a question of granting any privileges to the Community sector, but just establishing a level playing field to be equally respected by all operators wishing to have a place in the EU market.

The first step towards promoting sustainable and responsible fisheries is to have a consistent trade policy ensuring a balanced supply for the Community market, establishing mandatory market access conditions for every product to be marketed, regardless of whether it comes from an EU country or a third country, so that a European market supply with quality products which are socially and environmentally friendly is ensured.

EU policies are to play a key role in enabling the development of a Community fishing, canning and seafood product processing sector that is competitive and feasible in the long term.

In order to achieve this goal, it would be convenient to allow for a debate with the participation of the Community sector, Member States and other stakeholders, enabling consultation with the sector for it to be able to contribute its opinions to the definition of Community policies.

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