

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER AT THE ASSEMBLY ESTABLISHING THE LONG DISTANCE RAC

It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to participate in this General Assembly aiming at constituting the Long Distance Regional Advisory Council, representing the interests of the Community fleet operating in third-country waters and international waters.

Due to the large number of geographical areas it covers, the wide range of fisheries it represents and the countless political, economic, social and environmental challenges to be faced in these areas, this Long Distance Regional Advisory Council is a forum of great importance for the channelling of the positions agreed by consensus before the Commission and the fisheries Administrations of the member States regarding the best programmes that will benefit the Community fisheries sector represented in the RAC itself.

As you all know, in its original proposal the Commission envisaged the creation of 6 Regional Advisory Councils, all of them relating to Community waters, and it was the Spanish delegation who expressly requested the existence of a long distance fleet Regional Advisory Council, which would deal with issues regarding the fishing activity in third-country and international waters.

I am aware that, for the creation of this Long Distance Regional Advisory Council, a large number of meetings were necessary, where long discussions were conducted until a final agreement was reached concerning its operational rules. Many of these meetings were held in Spain, showing this way the great interest in its constitution not only of the Spanish fisheries sector, since it is active in almost all international fishing grounds, but also of the Spanish Administration itself.

Thanks to this joint interest and to the support of the rest of member States, I am also very glad to learn that the headquarters of this Long Distance Regional Advisory Council are located in Spain, and more precisely in Madrid.

It should be borne in mind that this Regional Advisory Council enjoys great singularity since there is a total of 72 organisations which are initially interested in participating in it, which belong to 12 member States, and because it covers very wide fishing areas representing characteristics of very different nature for which the best solutions need to be found on a case by case basis. A clear example of the multiple aspects to be faced by this RAC is the existence of 5 working groups and the vast and wide range of subjects to be addressed by each of them.

I would also like to highlight the difficulties faced in the preparation of the rules of procedure, as well as in the processing before the Commission, in both cases caused by the singularity of this Long Distance Regional Advisory Council that made it difficult for it to adapt to the operational structure established for RACs in the Community rules, and particularly, by the need to have at least one member of the fisheries sector of each member State in the Executive Committee, and for all interests of the fisheries sectors to be represented within this RAC.

I therefore believe it is necessary for the Commission to complete the evaluation of the principles that were initially established for the creation of Regional Advisory Councils, in view of the experience gained, and based on the functioning of those RACs which were already constituted, so that, under certain circumstances, there might be more flexibility regarding the number of members of their governing bodies, and this way take into account the operational characteristics of each case.

In this context, I appeal to the common sense of all the members of the Long Distance Regional Advisory Council for the existence of the necessary flexibility that will enable to join normative obligations with the convenience of fishing interests being correctly represented within the decision-making bodies.

I am aware of the need for this Regional Advisory Council to be operational as soon as possible, and aiming at its functioning being the least burdensome possible for its participants, my Department will undergo an important effort to make a financial contribution to its maintenance, so that economic issues will not constitute an obstacle to achieve the management objectives of the fishing activity it pursues.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate all of you, and especially the interim Secretariat of this Regional Advisory Council, for the work carried out throughout this period of almost two years, which has reached its fulfilment today. I also urge you to continue working for the Long Distance Regional Advisory Council to succeed in responding to the European Commission and the fisheries Administrations of the member States, in view of the numerous problems that the Community fleet has in third-country waters and in international waters, hoping that the aspects which are still to be solved, on which you will focus today, will enable you to reach the necessary agreements so that the fishing interests will be duly represented within the decision-making bodies of this Regional Advisory Council.

Thank you very much.