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MISSION REPORT

following the visit to the island of Réunion, France, from 1 to 5 November 2015

Committee on Fisheries

Members of the mission:

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(S&D) (Leader of the mission)

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(ALDE)

Accompanying Member:

Younous Omarjee

(GUE/NGL)

Introduction

A delegation of the European Parliament's Committee on Fisheries visited the island of Réunion from 2 to 4 November.

The delegation was headed by Ms Ulrike Rodust, coordinator of the S&D Group in the Committee on Fisheries.

The other official Members were Ms Isabelle Thomas of the S&D Group and Ms Izaskun Bilbao of the ALDE Group. M Younus Omarjee, of the GUE group and Vice-Chair of the REGIO Committee, accompanied the mission as a Member representing the region in question.

The programme was organised by the Chair of the Committee on Fisheries, Alain Cadec, who unfortunately had to withdraw for health reasons.

The purpose of the mission was to analyse the requirements of this outermost region as regards inshore fishing, deep sea fishing, aquaculture and the processing industry.

On-site meetings with other representatives of the French Overseas Departments enabled MEPs to form a better understanding of the challenges facing these areas which are very remote from mainland France.

The fisheries sector accounts for some 1 200 jobs in Réunion in what are basically three types of fisheries: artisanal coastal fishing whose catch is entirely marketed locally, long-line fishing, about 50% of whose production is exported, and deep sea fishing which is almost entirely export-oriented. The aquaculture sector is also growing as the island has three aquaculture farms whose entire production is sold on the local market.

Réunion has an innovative inter-professional structure: the *Association Réunionnaise Interprofessionnelle de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture Marins* (ARIPA), which brings together all fisheries stakeholders and regulates the market in fisheries and aquaculture products. Its purpose is to ensure regular market supplies, but also to ensure a satisfactory income for producers and reasonable prices for consumers. The fishing industry also has a *Comité national des pêches maritimes et des élevages marins* (CRPMEM): this is a body established under French private law charged with public service missions and endowed with legal personality and is composed of representatives of the fishing industry, trade unions, producers' organisations and maritime cooperatives covering all types of fishing activity.

Summary report of meetings

The delegation held a series of meetings:

- Meeting with the President of the CRPMEM, Jean René Enilorac, and the President of ARIPA, Fabrice Minatchy, who presented an overview of the fisheries and aquaculture sector and drew attention to its strategic position.

Sea fishing at Réunion consisted of artisanal fishing by vessels operating during daytime within 20 miles of the shore. The main problem encountered was the ageing fleet. Deep sea long-line fishing caught a total of about 2 600 tonnes a year of large pelagic species. There was also inshore fishing for demersal species and fishing in southern waters. According to the latest data from 2013, it was worth a total of EUR 85 million annually and accounted for 920 jobs.

- Visiting the ‘Grand port maritime de La Réunion’ (GPMDLR)

The president of the Port, Olivier Hoarau, recalled that 2014 had witnessed the beginning of the ‘Grand port maritime de La Réunion’ with the 2014-2018 strategic plan aimed at improving infrastructure and equipment to develop container traffic. The aim was to adapt better to the challenges of international maritime transport by encouraging the creation of added value and promoting a social and environmental model. The port accounted for over 99% of transport needs in Réunion.

The fisheries sector consisted primarily of southern waters fishing activities, which were pursued in the French southern and Antarctic waters and targeted toothfish and lobsters; six vessels were involved in this type of fishing which was subject to annual catch quotas.

It also consisted of inshore and offshore fishing, the latter involving pelagic species: a fleet of 27 vessels of between 13 and 25 metres in length pursued these two types of fishing.

- **Meeting at the regional prefecture**

After presenting his services, the director of the Southern Indian Ocean sea area, Denis Menhert, raised the problem of the fight against piracy and illegal trafficking in an exclusive economic zone.

He stressed the importance of blue growth and the Integrated Maritime Policy, while evoking the heritage of the marine reserves around the island: a very extensive one to the west and another smaller one to the south. There were two maritime training schools in the region (one in Saint Denis de la Réunion and the other on the island of Mayotte). These were excellent schools recognised for the quality of their training and were supported by the European Development Fund. The prefect Dominique Sorain meanwhile recalled the importance of the *centre régional opérationnel de surveillance et sauvetage* (CROSS) which provided security for ships travelling in French waters. He also recalled the Juncker plan to release funds for more far-reaching maritime policy projects. Other topics addressed were the Atalanta mission against piracy in the Western Indian Ocean and the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In this regard, increasingly frequent controls for vessels from each flag state was desirable.

- Cruise on *Le Grand Bleu*

This trip allowed the delegation to inspect an anchored fish aggregating device and witness a demonstration fishing technique and innovations under way. Fishermen spoke of the constraints of small-scale artisanal fishing: they had to contend with an ageing fleet and keen competition from neighbouring countries with lower living standards and a cheaper work force. The only option for Réunion fishermen was to focus on quality.

They were considering the creation of a quality/origin label.

- Visit of the Réunipêche fish-landing and processing plant

Sebastien Camus, President of *Réunimer* and François-Xavier, President of *Réunipêche*, as representatives of the processing industry, spoke of the importance of deep water species fishing, in particular toothfish, for Réunion's southern fleet and the possibility of the rapid marketing of catches at competitive prices. This was creating a new outlook for the regional fishing industry, creating new local jobs and leading to the upgrading and processing of fishery products. The plant concentrated on the use and primary processing of swordfish and tuna in particular.

The delegation's visit coincided with the inauguration of a small secondary processing workshop, which would provide greater value added to goods being marketed and might well create more jobs. That this project had been possible was due to European Union - Réunion Region co-funding.

- Visit to l'étang de Saint Paul

MEPs met with representatives of the inter-professional fishing industry for a picnic lunch on the banks of the lake. This more informal setting allowed fishermen to meet MPs face to face and tell them their wishes and fears about the future of this sector which was of vital importance for Réunion.

- Meeting on the specifics of the fisheries sectors of the other French Overseas Departments (DOMs)

Representatives of the DOMs Guadeloupe, Guyana and Mayotte joined the mission for talks with MEPs and their counterparts from Réunion.

The President of the CRPMEM Guadeloupe, Jean Claude Yoyotte, the Vice-President of CRPMEM Guyane, Léonard Ragnauth, and the President of Mayotte's marine park, Régis Masseaux, discussed the specific problems facing their fisheries sectors: fishing in the DOMs remained generally very artisanal and the fleet needed to be developed and modernised in order to bring it into line with EU standards and allow the transition to more appropriate fishing techniques which were more respectful of natural resources. Mayotte had just joined the outermost regions and gained access to the Structural Funds. The island had a very small-scale fishing sector which still had very limited access to credit. Its exclusive economic zone was a nature reserve, so fishing had to comply with very high environmental standards and preserve marine life and protect the reefs and lagoons. The main challenge was access to vessels, the problem on the island being that very often the fishermen failed to register their vessels which encouraged the existence of an informal market. In Guyana, the bulk of fishing was for shrimps, snappers and whitefish that were largely exported to Europe.

Everyone mentioned the problems caused by remoteness and poor access to information, the general lack of collective organisation, the competitive market which threatened the profitability of the fishing activities and the extreme difficulty in accessing credit and private investment. All the DOM representatives present at the end of the meeting called on the EP to draw up an own-initiative report providing guidelines to enable these regions to better use

their resources.

- Visit to the launching ramp of l'Etang-salé

Claude Jean Lacouture, Mayor of l'Etang-salé, spoke of sustainable small-scale local fishing. This was an environmentally friendly form of fishing which created jobs. In the lagoon, they fished for lobsters and monkfish with gear such as trammel nets to avoid catching turtles by accident. Fish Aggregating Devices were located inside the lagoon to ensure more selective fishing. Traditional recreational fishing had to compete with professional fishing. The fishermen present asked that the Common Fisheries Policy be applied flexibly in order to take into account local specificities.

The Hydrô Réunion aquaculture farm practised aquaculture and was a very innovative project: aquaponics, a merger of aquaculture and hydroponics, allowed the optimisation of the entire fish production chain and the use of effluent water for fruit and vegetable production. The farm promoted the study, recovery and sustainable management of tropical aquatic resources.

Since 2000, the Study and Research Pole (CED-ER) of the Freshwater Centre had been conducting R & D in tropical hydrobiology (biological indicator design, assessment of the state of tropical island aquatic ecosystems ...) in order to develop local expertise and technical support for the sustainable management of aquatic ecosystems. One of the innovations of excellence produced on the farm was spirulina algae with a high protein-energy concentration, which was marketed as a dietary supplement.

At the end of proceedings, the delegation visited a stall selling fresh fish in a local supermarket where the manager focused on products from the local Réunion fisheries.

Conclusions

The visit was very well organised and allowed members to grasp the complexity of the fishing industry on the island of Réunion. The sector was very important for the local economy as a source of employment for a region affected by a high unemployment rate.

All participants recalled the importance of analysing the implications for Réunion of fisheries agreements with neighbouring countries. Article 349 of the Treaty recognises the outermost regions and their specific characteristics due to their socio-economic and geographical position. The importance of the regional dimension was emphasised while respecting local needs and the characteristics of the fishing areas in this region of the Indian Ocean.

They underlined the need to modernise the inshore fleet, introduce more flexibility to encourage investment and renew the fleet and improve infrastructure.

In conclusion, the delegation formed the impression that the fisheries resources were generally in good shape and had the potential to generate jobs in an island where the unemployment rate among young people was at about 60%; they had the potential therefore to contribute to the overall development of the island.

Annexes: Programme
List of participants