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October Agriculture Council Meeting

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Report Highlights:

Highlights of the October Agriculture and Fisheries Council Meeting in Luxembourg included talks on Western Waters, Mediterranean Fishing, Olive Oil and Cotton, and Spanish National Aid in Nuts. Items approved without debate dealt with Forests, Act of Accession for Finland and Sweden, Organics and Community Fisheries Management.

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SUMMARY:

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FISHERIES**WESTERN WATERS**

The Council came to a majority agreement on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the management of the fishing effort relating to specified Community fishing areas and resources. This was a modification of a previous Regulation and was based on a draft Presidency compromise that was endorsed by the Commission. The Belgian delegation stated that it would abstain from the vote, whereas the Spanish and Irish delegations stated their intention to vote against the adoption of the proposal. The agreement has five main objectives:

1. To establish a biologically sensitive area to replace the current "Irish Box"
2. To establish a reference period for drawing up the list of vessels authorized to fish; to establish a 100-mile protection zone for the outermost regions
3. To establish a kilowatt-day system to calculate the fleet's fishing effort
4. To establish a minimum size for vessels covered by the regulation depending on the area.

The agreement also aims to fully integrate Spain and Portugal into the Common Fisheries Policy and avoid discrimination between Member States. Current fishing ceilings should also be revised, and limitations on access to waters in outermost regions will be considered.

MEDITERRANEAN FISHING

Commissioner Fischler proposed an amendment to existing Regulations on managing sustainable fishing practices in the Mediterranean. The proposal aims to update current technical measures such as restricting fishing gear and mesh size, and prohibiting certain equipment for non-commercial fishing. In light of recent reports on the significant depletion of stocks of Norway lobster, hake and shrimp, the proposal also aims to establish Community-wide management of the fishing effort. Powers should be delegated to the Member states to ensure that fishing activities in their territorial waters have no significant impact on the environment. Certain areas, species and habitats should be designated as protected, and the possibility of temporarily closing areas to certain fishing methods should be made possible in both Community and international waters.

AGRICULTURE**OLIVE OIL AND COTTON**

The Council discussed the cotton and olive oil sectors in detail and agreed to return to those subjects, along with the tobacco and sugar sectors, at its next meeting on the 17th and 18th of November.

SPANISH NATIONAL AID ON NUTS

The Council also agreed to postpone its discussion on Spain's request to provide national aid for the nut sector.

ITEMS APPROVED WITHOUT DEBATE

FORESTRIES AND ACT OF ACCESSION FOR FINLAND AND SWEDEN

The Council adopted the conclusions on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT). The aim of FLEGT is to combat illegal logging and control imports of illegally harvested timber and conflict timber. It also aims to give land access rights to rural, marginalized and indigenous peoples.

The Council adopted a Regulation that grants Finland and Sweden a transitional period relating to fat content in milk that extends until April 30, 2009. The two countries have fat contents in their milk (Finland: 1%; Sweden: 3%) that is below the Community norm of 3.5% for full cream milk. Finland and Sweden justify their regulations as a preventive measure for cardiovascular disease in their countries.

ORGANICS

The Council adopted a decision that authorizes the Commission to enter into negotiations with the United States on mutual recognition of organic production rules and inspection systems. Negotiation directives were the mainstay of the decision.

COMMUNITY FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Council adopted conclusions that approved funding for the improvement of scientific and technical advice for Community fisheries management. The Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) was named as the most appropriate resource from which to receive comprehensive advice on social, economic and biological aspects of Community fisheries. The allocation for the improvement in scientific advice is EUR 1 million for 2003 and EUR 4 million for 2004-2006.

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