

Brussels, 23 January 2001

Dutch fishermen allowed to land and auction catches in foreign ports following Commission action

At the initiative of the European Commission, eight quota management groups of Dutch fishermen have changed their internal rules with regard to the management of fishing quotas to bring them in line with competition rules. The internal rules initially limited the number of landings of catches in non-Dutch harbours. They also prescribed that the fishermen sell all catches to be auctioned through Dutch fish auctions only.

The eight groups are private associations which represent the great majority of fishermen in the Netherlands. They were established to ensure compliance with the EU fisheries quotas – a characteristic of the common organisation of the European fisheries market -- and to facilitate quota-swapping between the members of the groups.

The Commission warned all eight groups in November 1999 that their original internal rules contained provisions incompatible with article 81 of the EU treaty, as they deprived fishermen of the opportunity to freely choose the harbour they want to land their catches in and to freely choose the auction where they want to sell those catches. As a consequence, harbours, auctions and other service providers (transport etc.) located in other Member States were also excluded from competing for Dutch fish catches.

Following the Commission's own initiative investigation, the groups have committed themselves to amend their rules by allowing their members an unlimited number of landings in non-Dutch harbours and by putting in place a non-discriminatory and objective recognition scheme for fish auctions. **The recognition is necessary to ensure that non-Dutch auctions also inform the groups of sales of Dutch catches so that the groups can effectively ensure compliance with the EU quota requirements.** The groups have undertaken to act in accordance with the foreseen amendments preceding the formal entry into force of these amendments.

The Commission's services have accepted the groups' proposals since they remove the above mentioned anti-competitive restrictions. They have therefore closed the file.

The names of the eight groups are: Groepscontingent Nieuwe Diep, Contingentgroep Delta Zuid, Groep van de P.O. Oost, Groep van de P.O. Wieringen, Groep Nederlandse Vissersbond I, Groep Nederlandse Vissersbond II, Groep Nederlandse Vissersbond III and Groep Texel.