
Commission under fire over Morocco fisheries agreement

By **ALEANDER BALZAN**

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A proposed fishing agreement between the EU and Morocco is causing controversy, with opponents to the agreement claiming that it will be both illegal as well as damaging to UN peace efforts in Western Sahara.

The Fish Elsewhere organisation, which includes various trade unions and NGOs from 19 different countries, insist that the agreement must be amended because it fails to specify the southern limit of Morocco.

This means that the agreement allows Morocco to issue fishing licenses to European vessels in water which it illegally holds, which is against international law.

Morocco and Mauritania invaded Western Sahara in 1975, driving the local Saharawi people from their homes by force. While Mauritania withdrew its claim to Western Sahara four years later, Morocco remained.

Fish Elsewhere said the agreement would "set back the 15-year peace process" managed by the UN.

Nick Dearden, from War on Want, a UK affiliate to Fish Elsewhere campaign insists "that the EU won't be able to claim at a later date that it didn't suspect the obvious

consequence of this agreement. They have the evidence and they must amend the agreement"

But EU fisheries commissioner Joe **Borg** has defended the agreement.

"Morocco is the de facto administrator of Western Sahara. So, the Commission proposal is in conformity with the legal opinion of the United Nations issued in January 2002," he said.

Mr **Borg** also pointed out that, on this issue, the new agreement is the same as the previous EU-Morocco deal.

The campaigners insist that the Saharawi people have a right to self-determination.

However, they are facing strong opposition from fishermen, who consider the proposed agreement a good opportunity.

"This agreement should be ratified without excluding Western Sahara as with such an agreement both the Saharawi people and the EU fishermen will benefit," said Henrik Svenberg from the Swedish fishermen's association.

He added that his association has received requests from Saharawi producers to increase their vessels in the area as this will improve the Western Sahara economy.

In the coming weeks both the European Parliament and member states fisheries ministers are expected to vote on this agreement.

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EU expected to endorse controversial fisheries deal

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