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Ombudsman: Commission releases internal documents on Common Fisheries Policy

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The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has welcomed the European Commission's decision to release internal documents concerning its proposal for a new regulation on the Common Fisheries Policy. This follows a complaint from a German researcher whose request to access the documents was initially refused.

Emily O'Reilly explained: "The European Commission plays a crucial role in drafting legislation. The information it relies on should be publicly available during the legislative process. That would enable the European Parliament to play its role as legislator more effectively and enhance public trust."

For citizens to trust EU decision-making it needs to be transparent

In 2011, a German academic asked the Commission for access to various documents, including draft versions of inter-service consultations and proposals for amendments concerning a new regulation on the Common Fisheries Policy. The Commission only granted partial access, arguing that full disclosure would undermine its decision-making process.

The researcher turned to the Ombudsman who inspected the documents and concluded that the Commission's arguments for refusing disclosure were not convincing. According to the Ombudsman, the EU's transparency rules foresee the widest possible access when EU institutions act in their legislative capacity. Furthermore, she did not share the Commission's concerns that disclosure would undermine its internal deliberations. She noted, to the contrary, that in a democratic system different and even conflicting opinions should be openly discussed.

The Commission followed the Ombudsman's recommendation to release the documents, but only after an agreement on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy had been reached in May 2013. She welcomed this outcome but made clear that in future cases, she expects the Commission to give access to similar documents immediately.

The Ombudsman's full decision is available here: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/decision.faces/en/54453/html.bookmark>