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## **The future of the Common Fisheries Policy is now**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Introductory remarks at the GLOBE World Oceans Day Forum

**London, 8 June 2011**

Your Royal Highness, Lord Deben, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to address a roomful of people who care about the future of our oceans. Not only do you care, you also want to do something about it. This is very encouraging for me – it means I am not alone in wanting to get this right. So being here is really an honour for me. It is really now or never and I need your help and support. The next six months will be very crucial in the decision making at European level.

First, let's take a moment to look at the situation we are facing right now.

In the EU too many stocks are overfished and catches are only a fraction of what they used to be in the nineties, and still dipping year after year.

Europe has to rely on imports for two-thirds of its fish. Several segments of the sector live on low profits and are too vulnerable to outside factors such as peaks in fuel prices.

Our fleet is "obese" – and our efforts to slim it down has not given us results.

In our centralised set up, Ministers and Members of the European Parliament have to deal with the nitty-gritty details of the policy every day, instead of focussing on guiding principles. The top-down approach leaves very little leeway for Member States to decide practical implementation, let alone for the industry to contribute to resource management or improve fishing practices.

So what happens if we don't act?

One doesn't need to be clairvoyant to see it. We will lose one fish stock after the other, with a possible chain reaction for the ecosystem that is hard to predict.

And our industry will face even more economic pressure. We will lose jobs, but not just in the fishing sector itself: also in the processing industry, in transport, in port infrastructure, at auctions and retailers, just like the store we are in now.

This is why I want to change things.

First, the commitment to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield or in short MSY in our seas by 2015, which we all undertook in Johannesburg in 2002, has to become a legal obligation.

MSY means that we can keep fishing. But we have to manage each fish stock in such a way that we can get maximum financial gains while still keeping the stock sustainable.

If I were a banker I would say our fish stocks are underperforming assets. Instead, I want a capital of healthier fish stocks giving rich interests, in the form of landings, to our fishing industry. I want to maximise the economic return to fishing communities.

The recent report published by the Prince of Wales's Charities – an excellent paper that I fully subscribe to – says we should 'harvest nature's income, not its capital'. I agree that is exactly what we need.

Second: I want to put an end to discarding. It is unethical, unacceptable and certainly not justifiable to consumers anymore; therefore all catches have to be landed.

To help reduce discards, we propose transferable user quotas: the idea is that Member States will allow vessel owners to trade these rights between them: so if a skipper, on his way to port, sees that he has more cod than his quota permits, he can ask who is willing to sell him part of their quota so that he can land all his catches.

This system would work at national level only, so as to avoid buy-out of a fleet by another MS. A number of countries have adopted this system, and it has helped

shrink the fleet: for instance in Denmark the demersal fleet was shrunk by 30% and the pelagic one by 50%. Wasting tax-payers money without results has to stop.

I also want to make some big changes in the decision-making.

At present, even the most detailed technical decisions - like: what mesh size can fishermen use for catching sole off the coast of Dover – are jointly taken at the highest political level in the European machinery: the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers.

By contrast to that, I am looking for regionalisation: let's say that Parliament and Council set a long-term plan for a fish stock in the Gulf de Gascogne and Atlantic area, and that this plan contains specific objectives, like keeping the fish stocks at a good level and so on.

My idea is that France, Spain, the UK and other States with an interest in the fish stock get together and agree on the specific measures needed to reach the objectives, for example closing an area to fishing, prescribing the use of specific nets, or limiting days at sea...

The choice of instrument is up to them; what counts for us is that they do achieve the objective, not how they achieve it. The EU would be the lighthouse, showing the way. But Member States, regions and industry would still be the ones steering the ship.

It is a form of management based on results rather than methods, and it goes to the advantage of Member States: because they have to deal with far less micro-management from Brussels; and most importantly, because they can devise new measures together with the industry!

This is a very important point for me: it is essential that regionalisation goes all the way down to the sector. Fishermen organisations should carry some responsibility. For example, they could manage how much fish their members take out of the sea, or control that they don't overshoot quotas; they should agree with other similar organisations which specific gear to adopt for the purpose of sustainability; and they also have a duty to sensitise their members on the importance of sustainable and responsible fishing. Moreover, a regionalised policy would be simpler to implement and cheaper for the European taxpayer.

I'm hoping the reform can bring about important changes for ordinary people too.

If we get it right, Europeans will have a more ample choice of fresh fish, both wild and farmed fish.

Because in parallel we are also fighting illegal fishing, creating a culture of compliance and promoting labelling and traceability, people would know that what they buy was fished sustainably and avoiding waste and discards.

Let us not forget that more fish available to consumers means higher intakes of essential fatty acids, which are necessary for good brain and heart functioning. Brain and heart-related diseases are blowing up our health care budgets and in the long run, fish consumption can contribute to reduce the pressure.

Finally, a quick word on what I plan to change at international level.

First of all, we are working toward a new generation of sustainable agreements with third countries and these will be centred on conservation. The Union will only enter into such an agreement with a third country if there is surplus stock that is not being used by the local industry or by any other foreign fleet. This should be a legal requirement.

An equally important aspect concerns the respect for Human Rights, the rule of law and democratic principles, which will become part and parcel of each Agreement.

There can be no compromise when it comes to the respect of these fundamental principles, and this is true for all policy areas.

Outside EU waters, the Union is set to play an enhanced role within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, where it will advocate setting sustainable fishing levels and improving control and compliance. We will also take the lead in joint operations to combat illegal fishing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In opening I said I was very encouraged by your presence here. Clearly, the reform is no longer the private business of the Commissioner, of Fisheries Ministers or the EP's Fisheries Committee.

You have understood that this reform concerns everybody: fishermen, coastal populations, retailers, consumers and taxpayers. It concerns us all and yet the US, Australia, New Zealand and Norway are already way ahead of us in adopting modern, sustainable policies that deliver good results for both the industry and the oceans.

Though we import 42% of the global trade in fish, Europe is a big fishing power. We simply cannot afford to be so far behind on sustainability.

Speaking to you here today is a great opportunity. Renewing the way we fish is not an easy task – nobody can do it alone. We are talking about monumental change in one of our most ancient and most essential sectors: foodstuff. But together, with meetings such as this and also with today's declaration, we make a step toward mobilising governments and people.

The proposals I will be presenting in the summer will be another step forward in our common campaign. After that, it will be up to national Parliaments, to the European Parliament and to the Fisheries Ministers of Europe to prove that they care too and that they have sufficient foresight to carry this through.

Help us push that door. Convince them not to give in to short-term economic interests but to go for the bigger picture instead – and for the common good.

With your help, I'm sure we can make the common fisheries policy fit for today's environmental and economic challenges.