Presentation by Giuseppe Prioli – President of EMPA (European Mollusc Producers Association)

Good morning to everyone: (Commissioner) Mr. Vella, (Minister) Mr Van Dam, (Member of Parliament) Ms Engstrom, Colleagues

First of all I would like to thank DGMARE for having organized this meeting, from which, I am sure we will all leave even more convinced with regard to the relevance and the future potential of aquaculture within the European Union.

Aquaculture, like agriculture or fishing is a generic term, which represents various experiences, different among themselves due to the nature of the site where breeding takes place, the reared species, the technologies used, the organization and size of the business, the social conditions in which operations are carried out. Each of us knows a few of these aspects and we interpret them in relation to our own cultural education, our experience and interests. Forming an opinion that is too often impenetrable to other people's ideas.

I am making this statement because I believe that the future of aquaculture, to which this day is dedicated to, independently of technical and economic aspects, depends very much on the ability and will of the various people involved, above all, those in a governmental position, who will have to understand the complexities of the system, the points of view and motivation of the various people and the various situations along the way.

Shortly the long awaited Aquaculture Advisory Council will become operational, where, a place has been meticulously assigned to each member depending on their role. I consider this to be a fundamental tool for the future of aquaculture, not only because of the possibility of gathering co-shared information, but also to better understand each other's knowledge and remove the prejudices that often accompany us. I think that with time we will understand that the position between the producers, environmentalists and consumer groups will become far less distant, because we all clearly have the wellbeing of the environment in which we operate and the health of the consumer at heart.

Shellfish farming has a long history, a large part of farms has found over time its place, while for certain species or types of breeding, such as long line mussels, for example, it is still possible to explore new offshore areas, also for the other activities tied strictly to the coast, like clam farming, oyster farming or sea-bed mussel farming, this area is now well defined with limited possibility of expansion. These areas are often characterised by a well-defined landscape and environment, susceptible to the often negative influence, of all those other related human activities, such as agriculture or industry, taking place in the background. Firstly, then, we must not forget to safeguard these environment by implementing EU Directives regarding this aspect. Too often the Member States pay too much attention to evaluating any environmental effects of shellfish farms, imposing strict rules on farmers, while not applying the same firmness to other sectors which have greater consequences.

Commissioner Vella, just one year ago, in Milan, with my predecessor Richie Flyn, presented in a very friendly but effective way all the qualities that characterize the shellfish industry, amongst which the services that this kind of industry can offer to the environment, such as the removal of nitrogen and phosphorus or the repairing of CO2 in valves. We are convinced that these actions are

to be valued, encouraged and protected, especially in the environmentally sensitive areas more prone to the eutrophication phenomena.

The new financial instrument for fisheries, aquaculture and maritime activities, provides for the application of compensatory measures for those performing environmental services, but the fear is that such measures are not implemented by the Member States, for lack of reliable indication on how to assess and quantify the economic value of the compensation. From a technical standpoint there are parameters that allow you to quantify the value of nutrient salts and CO2 taken from the environment and this could be used to define a common policy to be adopted by the various Member States in relation to the different environmental characteristics.

Irrespective of the acknowledged economic value, the implementation of this measure would be a strong signal and a tangible recognition of the value of the shellfish industry and of the work carried out by the thousands of shellfish farmers every day.

Shellfish farming is mostly an activity carried out by micro, small and medium enterprises, although with some existing differences in the various Member States. In general these enterprises do not have a large amount of capital investment, they operate within modest economic margins, are strongly dependent on weather and climatic events, the environment and the looming weight of bureaucracy, yet in spite of these conditions, in 2013 they achieved a production of about 600,000 T, worth about 1.3 billion euro. Besides directly giving work to about 45,000 people, in addition to about 50,000 employees in related industries.

Let me just say that perhaps these results would not be possible if these companies weren't supported and represented by associations that, from local to the European level, assist them in their activities. The role of associations is essential for both the growth and development of the industry, as recognized on various occasions by the GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean), as they play an important role in facilitating the aggregation and implementation of collective actions, encouraging the participation of farmers in the decision making process, improving market competitiveness and technical capabilities. Their role should therefore be supported, especially in this area which, as I said earlier, cannot count on others but only on their own strengths. A weakening of representative associations is not beneficial to farmers and to the economy or the well-being of our community. For example, one of the risks is, that companies fail to manage the many EU and local rules, that govern the sector, and tired of leading lonely battles, abandon their activity or act on the edge or outside the law, at the expense of quality and the wholesomeness of products.

What I have stated above may seem the exasperation of a problem, but the weight of bureaucracy has reached an unsustainable level in some countries, suffice to say that, a breeder in order to do his job must comply with environmental standards, hygiene and sanitation, maritime, administrative and State property. The weight of bureaucracy is not just limited to the time needed to obtain licenses for new equipment, which should admittedly be shortened, but instead continually increases along the life of the enterprise. My hope is that both at EU level and in the different Member States, we may reach and define a uniformity of direction, led by those who have the greatest governmental responsibility in the sector, which are also responsible for ensuring that all operators are playing by the same rules in every corner of the European Union. Considering the commitment that this General Management spends on the healthy development of fisheries and

aquaculture, I am confident that this role at European level will be taken on by DGMARE and that this can be a stimulus for member countries.