Closing remarks Minister Gabriela Matecna

Colleagues, Distinguished Participants,

I am honoured to be with you today at this important event. The Slovak Presidency is literally round the corner and our preparations are in full swing. The Common Fisheries Policy is at an important turning point as we are now dealing with crucial legislative proposals that will transform the Union's ambitious goals into practice. Attaining healthy fish stocks, to support a thriving EU sector, is our ultimate goal as we balance social, ecological and economic considerations.

The aquaculture sector has an important role to play and has great potential to facilitate the Union's walk toward sustainability.

The picture outlined today is encouraging. There is a growing demand for aquaculture products and we seem to be all convinced that aquaculture can provide a steady, secure and sustainable supply of fish and employment in many family owned firms across Europe.

Europe has talented and ambitious producers who are showing real potential with high value niche products. This value is not only being appreciated within the Union but also has potential for global export. Our sector is supported by cutting edge research and today's event also highlighted how the aquaculture industry can meet growing consumer demands for both quality and sustainability.

It is also comforting that the Union makes plenty of funding available for the sector, both from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and also through the Horizon 2020. So we should all be encouraged to make use of these funding vehicles.

Funding is not the only answer. The sustainable development of this sector also depends on a number of interlinked factors, and as stakeholders we must all play our respective roles. The sector depends on the work and efforts of administrations, producers, NGOs, consumers, retailers, and importantly researchers who have the keys to the future.

I am sure Member States are determine to bring their aquaculture plans to life and it is very positive that the Commission has confirmed once again that it will continue to support Member States in this regard. The Aquaculture Advisory Council has also important functions to fulfil and this especially relate to the involvement and empowerment of all stakeholders.

We all need to play our part. Slovakia's aquaculture sector is small in comparison with some Member States, but it has great potential. As administration we do our best to facilitate progress. For instance, I am happy to say that the waiting on certain operative aspects of the licensing procedures is very short with applicants receiving a response within 30 days. Our procedures will also be described tomorrow at related meeting. We appreciate the value of inter-Member State exchanges and the way this is being facilitated by the Commission.

The EU has the potential to supply a far greater amount of fish from aquaculture. Nearly 60% of the farmed fish we consume presently originates from third countries. We need to work relentlessly towards sustainably growing the EU aquaculture sector. This would facilitate the implementation for the CFP reform, supply more fish domestically and boost growth and jobs through our Blue economy.

Thank you once again for all your valuable contributions and let us together follow through with the ambition presented here today.