

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

**Karmenu VELLA**

**Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries**

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission?**

**What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

I have been a member of the Maltese Parliament for nearly 40 years. During this time I have held several functions in government, including as Minister for Public Works, for Industry, and for Tourism. I have also held several directorships and senior management positions in the public and private business sectors, including with companies operating in the banking, hospitality and travel industries.

I have practical experience of work requiring strong political leadership, management and negotiation skills, and the ability to set and deliver targets. Most recently, as Minister for Tourism in Malta, I was responsible for the country's most important economic sector, a multifaceted industry that required me to engage and cooperate with the full range of stakeholders. My experience of the private sector has also given me a strong sense of the need for forward planning, efficiency, and to avoid excessive regulation and bureaucracy.

Blue growth and the green economy will be key building blocks of the competitive Europe of jobs, growth and fairness that President-elect Juncker has outlined to the Parliament, both because of the jobs that they will create and because of the potential for reducing Europe's dependence on imported resources. I believe that my national ministerial experience has prepared me for the challenges of working on this portfolio. I have been a minister in a government for whom sustainability and the protection of the environment is a key policy, and one that was absolutely essential for my ministerial portfolio of tourism. Fisheries have been a central policy area for my country for obvious reasons and the balancing of the interests of protection of the marine environment and the sustainability of the fishing industry is one that I fully understand. On the maritime side, all of my ministerial and private sector experience is relevant to the work of developing the blue economy and working with colleagues across the Commission to maximise the synergies with all relevant policy areas to achieve this goal.

I am a convinced European, having voted for my country's accession and, more recently, as a minister in a pro-European government led by a former member of the European Parliament. Throughout my political life I have been guided by the same values and principles, which I would consider fundamentally European: the principles of democracy, solidarity, of equality between men and woman, human dignity and non-discrimination, and the social market economy.

My experience has led me to understand that nothing is ever perfect and that there are always changes that can improve the way things are done. If confirmed, I hope to bring this perspective to my work as Commissioner, working with you to face the challenges ahead; finding solutions that will increase support from our citizens and strengthen the legitimacy of the EU in their eyes.

In order to do this, I believe it is essential for the Commission to fully play its role as the guardian of the treaties, With this perspective in mind, I commit myself to frame my decisions in the general interest of the Union and to act in an independent manner in line with the provisions of Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union, Article 245 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Code of Conduct for Commissioners. I shall neither seek nor take instructions from any Government or other institution, body, office or entity. I will be loyal to the Union, and moreover, to its citizens, which you represent.

I also commit to avoid any position or situation which could create a conflict of interests with the performance of my duties. I have duly completed my declaration of interest, which is publicly accessible and commit myself to update it immediately should there be any changes and to inform the President of the Commission if, at any time in the course of my duties, I become aware of any potential conflict of interest.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

**What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

The President-elect has made a bold commitment to renewing collegiality and team-work in the Commission and I look forward to putting this new approach into practice, with the aim of going beyond a silo mentality towards a new approach to the Commission's work geared to output and delivery. While concentrating in full on my own portfolio, I will also actively follow and participate in the decision-making process for policy initiatives put forward by my colleagues in the College. I look forward to building strong relationships and to work and cooperate closely with all of my Colleagues, including the Vice-Presidents and President Juncker.

My portfolio means by definition that I will develop a particularly close relationship with many of my colleagues whose portfolios relate closely to mine. I will have a particular relationship with Vice-Presidents Bratusek and Katainen, in helping them to deliver on their projects, but also with the High Representative and Vice President Mogherini and the external relations Commissioners, for the international dimension of my responsibilities and, in the case of maritime policy, I look forward to working particularly closely with Mr. Moedas and Mrs. Cretu.

My commitment to teamwork and cooperation will not stop with the Commission. In order to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, I believe that as a Commissioner I need to inform and closely involve the two decision-making institutions in my work and considerations. I consider input from Parliament to be a crucial aspect of the legislative process. Policies that emerge from cooperation and dialogue with Parliament will always be better. As a parliamentarian for nearly four decades, I appreciate the key role that the European Parliament plays in ensuring democracy, legitimacy, accountability and transparency. It would therefore be natural to my role as Commissioner to establish a strong working partnership with its Members.

If I am confirmed in the post of Commissioner, I shall take full political responsibility for my work and actions, and the activities of the services which fall within my field of competence, without prejudice to the principle of collegiality.

My overarching objective is to contribute to bring Europe closer to its citizens. I believe that full cooperation with the European Parliament, which is the EU Institution in which our citizens are directly represented, is necessary to achieve this. In this context, I will fully respect the Framework Agreement on Relations between the European Parliament and the Commission. Concerning the follow-up to European Parliament's positions and requests, I will apply the provisions of the Framework Agreement and, in my areas of responsibility, make sure that the Commission responds to parliamentary resolutions or requests made on the basis of Article 225 TFEU, within 3 months after their adoption. In this context, I support and fully endorse the commitment made by President-elect Juncker that the future Commission will be particularly attentive to legislative initiative reports

I pledge to establish an open and transparent relationship with the Members of Parliament, based on mutual trust and regular and comprehensive exchanges of information in order for the Parliament and its committees to be able to exercise its legislative and scrutiny roles. My door will always be open to Members of the Parliament. In

this context, I reiterate my commitment to consult extensively with Parliament from the very early stages of the legislative procedure and to make myself available for regular meetings with coordinators, rapporteurs and committee members. As a parliamentarian myself, this is not an added extra, it is fundamental to the success of what I will try to achieve as Commissioner

In addition, I commit myself to keep the European Parliament, both in committees and plenary, informed on the same level as the Council. I consider this imperative because the European Parliament and the Council are co-legislators. It is also a fundamental principle of how our Union is structured, as a Union of member states and of peoples. For what we do in the Union, we need to respect equally these two pillars that give its work legitimacy. Finally, it is necessary if we are to fulfil President-elect Juncker's pledge to reinvigorate the Community method.

## **Questions from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety**

### **3. Commissioner's priorities**

**What will be the Commissioner's top priorities to ensure sustainable development, a high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment in the Union? What specific legislative and non-legislative measures do you intend to put forward to support these priorities at EU and Member State levels and according to what timetable?**

My main responsibility will be to further develop the green growth approach to environment policy to improve environmental protection, safeguard human health and contribute to economic growth with least regulatory burden, in accordance with the need for Regulatory Fitness (REFIT). Protecting the environment and maintaining our competitiveness go hand in hand and will make growth and investment more sustainable in the future than in the past. In this respect, the General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 (7th EAP) provides a relevant framework as it sets out a roadmap to achieving an inclusive green economy, while protecting our natural capital and the health of our citizens.

To help the EU on the path to green and sustainable growth, I will be fully engaged in taking the resource efficiency agenda forward. This will include assessing the state of play of the Circular Economy Package to ensure it is consistent with our jobs and growth agenda and our broader environmental objectives.

The key objective of protecting our natural capital and the ecosystems services it provides will require action at all levels. I will therefore pay due attention to the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. Much has already been achieved, and I plan to present a solid mid-term assessment of progress in achieving our 2020 objectives, including at the international level. The Habitats and Birds Directives are at the core of our EU Biodiversity policy. I am committed to ensuring that the on-going Fitness Check in this area provides a thorough, transparent and evidence based evaluation, which will allow us to assess the potential for merging them into a more modern piece of legislation.

Implementing the Water Blueprint will help achieve the good status which our freshwaters, coastal and marine ecosystems should enjoy but which is still far from being a reality across the Union. Towards the end of my mandate evaluations of the Water Framework Directive and an evaluation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive will show if any changes are needed to fully achieve our agreed policy objectives. Resource use and ecosystem health contributes to the realisation of the full potential of Green and Blue Growth, and I intend to exploit possible synergies given I will also be responsible for fisheries and maritime issues.

The 7th EAP aims to safeguard our citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health. The Air Package, if implemented, could avoid nearly 60,000 premature deaths and provide about €3 billion in direct economic benefits to society. Making sure that European citizens will be able to enjoy these benefits will be one of my immediate priorities. For this reason, I will take stock of the state of play in the negotiations on air strategy, as I want to be sure that we are addressing the right sources of air pollution with the right instruments. This assessment will guide the next steps in the negotiations.

With as much as 80% of Europe's population estimated to be living in or near urban areas by 2020, cities will remain environmental hotspots. As they often share common sets of environmental problems, I intend to consider which initiatives could be most effective to support innovation and best practice sharing amongst cities.

The Rio+20 Conference confirmed that environmental challenges are increasingly interlinked. Therefore I will continue to contribute to global efforts to shape the Sustainable Development Goals and to strengthening the architecture of international environment and ocean governance.

#### **4. Quality, transparency and implementation of legislative proposals**

**How will you personally ensure the good quality of legislative proposals, full transparency of lobbying activities directed at you and your services and consistent and balanced consultation of all stakeholders? How will you ensure that implementation of EU legislation is done in the same rigorous manner in all Member States, including an effective use of EU financial means as well as the application of the 'polluter pays' principle? How will you ensure that environmental considerations are integrated in all policy areas both at EU and Member State levels?**

If confirmed in the post of Commissioner, I will ensure that any new proposal that is put before the Commission for adoption has been developed in line with the principles of better regulation, and in particular that it has undergone a full evaluation, a rigorous assessment of economic, social and environmental impacts, with due regard to subsidiarity and proportionality. Broad consultation of stakeholders and the public, and the subsequent publication of results, will be an integral part of my approach to policy development. Our already solid knowledge base will be further developed to ensure that we have strong and convincing evidence for the actions we take.

President-elect Juncker's Political Guidelines include a new commitment to transparency. I fully support this new commitment to transparency. In keeping with these guidelines I commit to making public on the web all the contacts and meetings I hold with professional organisations or self-employed individuals on any matter relating to EU policy-making and implementation.

Environmental policy is strongly represented in the current REFIT agenda, and fitness checks in a number of important areas, notably water and waste, have already been completed. I will carry on this work with the ongoing evaluations and fitness checks for a number of pieces of environmental legislation, seeking always to ensure broad consultation and presenting sound data to support the conclusions. I will actively manage the assessment of performance of all legislation in my portfolio, to ensure that it is fit for purpose, delivering on its objectives at minimum cost and regulatory burden.

The continued challenge we face is to ensure that standards developed over three decades of EU environmental policy are effectively transposed and applied correctly in all Member States thus benefitting society at large. Ensuring the most efficient, consistent, transparent, and cross-cutting implementation of the environmental acquis will receive my fullest attention. I will use the twin approach of promoting compliance in partnership with Member States while developing new approaches to co-operation and further tools. However, I will not hesitate to make full use of the Commission legal enforcement instruments to ensure compliance including with the polluter-pays principle. The latter will also be addressed in an evaluation carried out under REFIT to assess the performance of the Environmental Liability Directive which I intend to present in the first half of my mandate.

Integrating environmental concerns in other policy domains is a Treaty requirement and is essential, inter alia, for the transformation to a Green Economy. Contributing to the Europe 2020 Strategy and to the European Semester, in addition to integrating environmental objectives into Union funding instruments will be a focus of my work and for which I will work closely with my fellow Commissioners. The already agreed environment-related ex-ante conditionality in other policy areas, in particular in cohesion and agricultural policies and specifically in their implementation, will help ensure that funds are spent more effectively and sustainably and that environmental legislation is complied with.

#### **Questions from the Committee on Fisheries**

**The Committee on Fisheries would like to obtain from the Commissioner-designate with responsibility for the Common Fisheries Policy, Mr Kamenu VELLA, clear and explicit answers to the following questions relating to the implementation of the CFP:**

#### **5. Interinstitutional aspects**

**As a consequence of the changes introduced by the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, some conflicts arose between the EP and the Council (particularly in the case of Multiannual Plans for the recovery**

**and/or management of fish stocks), and between the Council and the Commission (over the delegation of powers to or the conferral of implementing powers on the Commission).**

**How, following the conclusions of the Interinstitutional Task Force on MAPs, does the Commissioner-designate intend to proactively facilitate a resolution of the dispute between Parliament and Council through, for example, the tabling of revised or new multiannual plans in the near future?**

All institutions have a role to play to ensure constructive cooperation, and I will make this a key priority throughout my mandate. On the work of the Task Force on MAPs, I would like to underline one very positive lesson: continuous and open dialogue between the institutions is the best way forward and it produces results. I will make sure that work on the proposals for multiannual plans is stepped up and follows the agreement reached by the Task Force. My aim will be to keep the plans simple and result-oriented. Consultation with stakeholders and Member States is essential, as is getting the most up-to-date scientific advice. The first plan to be proposed very soon is for the Baltic fisheries; other new plans, such as a MAP for the North Sea fisheries, are also under preparation. .

**With a view to determining a workable demarcation between Delegated and Implementing Acts, is the Commissioner-designate ready, together with the Council to engage in further negotiations with the EP, in order to find a common understanding on the interpretation, use of, and follow-up to Articles 290 and 291 TFEU?**

If confirmed by the EP, it will be Vice-President Timmermans who will lead the interinstitutional discussions on the interpretation of Articles 290 and 291 TFEU. Within the College, I shall endeavour to positively contribute to this work and facilitate a common understanding on this matter.

**Will the Commissioner-designate commit himself to work for a more faithful implementation of Article 218(10) concerning the obligation to keep the EP 'immediately and fully informed at all stages of the procedure'?**

The full implementation of article 218 (10) will be a priority throughout my mandate, and I will instruct the services under my responsibility to strictly apply our obligations in this respect. I fully subscribe to the commitment of the President-elect to filling the special partnership with the Parliament "with new life". Parliament will continue to receive all documents it should, simultaneously with the Council. I promise to come to the Committee regularly, including as regards international negotiations. Any suggestions on your part to improve our dialogue even further are also most welcome.

## **6. Reform of the CFP**

**Among the main issues related to the implementation of the reformed CFP, Parliament has highlighted amongst other issues Technical Measures, Regionalisation and the need for better information for consumers of fisheries products, the fight against the IUU Fishing and the FPAs, as key priorities.**

**How does the Commissioner-designate intend to introduce simplification and flexibility into the rules and regulations on Technical Measures? Does the Commissioner-designate intend to propose one common framework, or different frameworks for different sea basins?**

The review of the existing Technical Measures confirms that the current rules are overly complex, detailed, and difficult to implement and enforce. The consultation confirms that we need more regionalisation, more results-based approaches, simplification and removal of unnecessary burden for the fishermen. The adoption of the proposal on new Technical Measures is one of my most immediate priorities. This proposal should set the tone of the new approach to law-making in the CFP.

The new co-decided CFP is a very solid basis for ensuring sustainability. It puts emphasis on healthy stocks, and on fishing that is responsible, without waste, and that respects the marine ecosystem. I intend to make the new Technical Measures frameworks one of the main tools to help deal with the challenges related to fishing.

Mesh sizes, fisheries closures, or measures to protect sensitive habitats will need to be specified according to the objective the co-legislators have set: to reach MSY for all stocks by 2015, and where this is not possible, by 2020 at the latest.

Regionalisation is a new governance tool that will develop and improve with the experiences. We will ensure the consistency and effectiveness of the measures within the sub-regions. We will enhance our understanding of the fish population dynamics and will put every effort to encourage cooperation among the countries that are sharing stocks. At the same time, while we discuss the new rules, I will ensure that the implementation of the current ones remains a priority, as technical measures are fundamental elements to achieve our objective of sustainable fishing. This will apply not only within the EU, but also to any third country vessels in EU waters.

**Will the Commissioner-designate undertake to promote the introduction of specific EU eco-labelling for fishery products? On which criteria would this European eco-labelling be based and what would be its principal characteristics?**

The Commission has committed to run a feasibility study on eco-labelling after consultations with stakeholders, covering both fishery and aquaculture products. This work has started, and a first stakeholder conference is being organised on 15th October, to which the EP has also been invited. I look forward to the results of the consultation and of the study so that we can have an informed debate on this crucial issue for European consumers and I commit to having that debate during next year.

**Having regard to Article 15 of the Basic Regulation, what measures will the Commissioner-designate propose in the Mediterranean to prevent the emergence of a parallel market for juvenile fish?**

Juveniles are the future of the stock, and they should be protected in the Mediterranean as much as in any other region in Europe. The key is to ensure that they are not caught in the first place and this we can achieve through greater selectivity. The landing obligation is clearly a strong driver to move away from non-selective fishing.

The rules are clear: undersized fish (below the so-called minimum conservation reference size) are not to enter the market for direct human consumption precisely to avoid the creation of incentives to fish for juvenile fish.

Making sure that the undersized fish that must be landed do not enter the market for direct human consumption is of course a matter of compliance with the rules. But it is also a matter of using the support offered by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to develop alternative uses of the small fish that will still be residually caught after selectivity improvements. This is a primary responsibility of the Member States and I intend to support them as much as I can in these efforts.

**How does the Commissioner-designate intend to improve, in the context of FPAs, the coordination of the EU's fisheries, trade and development policies? In relation to the financial contribution that is paid for almost all FPAs, has the Commissioner-designate the intention of proposing a new format for the part set aside for the development of these countries?**

Fisheries Partnership Agreements form a legal framework that aims to ensure that fishing activities of EU fleets are respectful of stock status, of the environment and ecosystems and do not compete with local fishermen. The EU is leading by example and no other fleet in the world has set the same standards of transparency and good governance in third countries' waters.

The recent reform of SFPAs has put emphasis on enhanced consistency with external relations objectives (notably with the inclusion of a human rights clause) and with development goals (leading for example to more specific targeting of sectoral support). My intention is to ensure that these principles are fully respected in all the forthcoming negotiations. We need to work more with third countries so that they use SFPAs as a tool for better governance of their own fisheries, putting emphasis on monitoring, control and surveillance and the fight against IUU. Synergies with development instruments could certainly be reinforced and I will work closely with Mr Mimica to that end.

**What will be the strategy of the Commissioner-designate in the case of countries (especially those in the Central-Western Pacific) with which the EU has signed trade agreements, but which are currently on the list of non-cooperating countries in the fight against IUU fishing?**

Due to global weaknesses in enforcement and control of fishing activities in the Pacific, the EU must ensure the traceability and legality of imported fishery products from these countries. One of the purposes of the IUU Regulation (besides the fight against illegal fishing) is to facilitate legal trade and prevent it from facing unfair competition from illegal products. In this context, it is compatible with deepening legitimate trade relations with the countries concerned. The EU's IUU policy is a useful tool in the global governance of oceans. Its successful

implementation up to now has made the EU a frontrunner within the international community and it has helped third countries to conduct structural changes in their fisheries management policies. I will report to the EP and Council very shortly on the implementation of the IUU regulation, including an assessment of consistency with other EU policies.

**Could the Commissioner-designate explain why the fishing opportunities relative to joint stocks and other management aspects are decided through yearly negotiations and set out in agreed records which are not subject to the Consent Procedure?**

According to the Treaty, annual fishing opportunities on joint stocks are decided by means of Council decisions on the basis of Article 43(3) of the Treaty. Such decisions are sometimes preceded by consultations which do not result in common measures having a legal effect on the parties. In the case of Norway, for instance, under the 1980 Fisheries Agreement the conduct of these consultations and the results thereof are, therefore, contained in non-binding Agreed Records which do not constitute international agreements or decisions in the sense of Article 218 of the Treaty. For this reason, the Agreed Records are neither concluded by the Council, nor do they require the consent of the European Parliament. In actual fact, the Agreed Records are used by both sides to recommend to their respective authorities the adoption of internal measures resulting from the conclusions of the consultations. The ensuing annual Council decisions on the fixing of the corresponding fishing opportunities thus remain autonomous Union acts.