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The three S: Sourcing - Sustainable - Seafood

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

INTERFISH Business Forum

Moscow (Russia), 28 October 2010

Dear Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be visiting the Russian Federation and the beautiful city of Moscow. Before leaving, I did my homework and was very impressed, because I discovered once again that Russia has to offer a great number of scientists, writers, famous musicians and a great history. But beyond that, and turning to my area of responsibilities in the European Commission, it has a huge market to offer for fisheries products; and so the idea of re-launching Interfish last year came just at the right time. Although only in its second year, Interfish already promises to be an important date in the calendar for businesses across the world wishing to showcase their activities and develop cooperation.

Cooperation is one of the two main messages I bring with me today. The European Union and Russia are no strangers to cooperation: indeed, our strategic cooperation goes back a long way. We now face a number of international challenges which we can only meet successfully if we work together. We need each other to reach our objectives. We enjoy extensive political dialogue on global and more "local" issues. Likewise, our economic relations are very important for both parties. The EU and Russia are close neighbours and interdependent in many ways – not least in terms of trade and investment, where the potential for growth is great.

This potential will surely be realised as we improve our framework for cooperation. The Partnership for Modernisation we launched recently will, we hope, give extra momentum to our ongoing cooperation. Furthermore, a new EU-Russia Agreement is currently under negotiation. We are seeking an agreement that will provide a solid legal basis for closer bilateral relations. It must be a comprehensive agreement covering all areas of our relations – from the economy and energy, via science and education, to security policy and human rights. We attach great importance to the inclusion of solid provisions on trade, investments and energy.

The other message I have for you today concerns sustainability. In fisheries, cooperation is fundamental to the sustainable management that the European Union and the Russian Federation champion. And this sustainable management will in turn benefit you, who trade in fisheries products; it will benefit the fishermen who supply the raw materials; it will benefit the marine resources they harvest; and it will benefit the consumers who buy fish and seafood every day.

These benefits extend across sectors, because the various policy aspects are linked. Let me take market, conservation and consumer policies as an example. Organisations such as yours can play a key role in helping fishermen fully grasp the market dimension of their activity. What do I mean when I say market dimension? I mean for example that fishermen should only catch fish that has a strong chance of finding a buyer – the golden rule being that fish unlikely to be sold should remain in the water. Likewise, you understand consumer needs more than anyone. In a short space of time we have seen consumer needs change considerably. Many consumers now expect more information about the fish they buy. Is the fish fresh or defrosted? Where exactly was it fished or produced? Has the fish that ends up on my dinner plate been fished sustainably or traded fairly? We have to take these questions seriously and this shift in consumer demands has to be a wake-up call for us to make sure that both fishing and market adjust to the new situation. These links show how cooperation and understanding between sectors can ultimately benefit all concerned.

We have a duty to inform consumers of the many benefits of fish to their health. Fish is a low-fat source of good-quality protein, vitamins and a minerals. It can help prevent Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis and, by lowering blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes. It is a good choice for weight loss and helps diabetics regulate their blood sugar. Eating fish can provide an excellent source of Omega-3 fatty acids, which benefit general health in many ways.

Moreover, fish is easy and quick to cook. I like to think of it as the original "fast food"!

There are few foodstuffs in the world that could claim to have as many health benefits. All of these are not only excellent selling points – they are also important facts that consumers have every right to know, especially in the light of today's worrying trends in public health.

Cooperation is the name of the game here, for three very good reasons. First, because buying from sustainable sources starts with the decision-makers taking responsible decisions at national level, but also at international level. Second, because we share stocks. Fish do not respect national borders. So if we really want the best for our fisheries resources and those who make a living from them, we need to join forces. And third, because as parties to key regional organisations Russia and the EU have a responsibility to work together and with other partners to guarantee the sustainability of fish stocks world wide be it in the Commission on the Antarctic or in the South Pacific.

The healthy cooperation we already enjoy on many issues should encourage us to be bolder. This is why I am convinced that Russia and the EU should strengthen existing ties and establish new ones.

Talking about establishing new ties brings me to the Black Sea, which is an ideal area where Russia and the EU can establish a real cooperation on fisheries management and scientific analysis in order to rebuild stocks to sustainable levels. There are many options here and I look forward to exploring them with Russia. Whatever forms of cooperation emerge, I think we should start looking at increasing our scientific collaboration in the Black Sea – for instance through joint surveys and data analysis. Actually we don't need to re-invent the wheel, but all we need to do is to transport the positive bilateral partnership of Russia and the EU from the Baltic Sea about 1000 miles southwards to the Black Sea.

Moving north to the Arctic Ocean, here too we need solid international cooperation to address the challenges that this sensitive area is faced with today. One of the challenges is that Arctic waters become more and more accessible to fishing and therefore also more vulnerable. This is why we must strive to bring sustainable management of fish stocks also to the Arctic Ocean. The easiest way of doing this is to simply extend the convention area of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission to cover the entire Arctic.

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know the EU is about to change its fisheries policy to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century. But what does that mean?

Clearly, with a significant number of stocks overfished, our current policy has not delivered sufficiently to ensure a sustainable mode of resource exploitation. We need a substantial change and full commitment by the Member States and the Parliament of the EU to deliver. For me it means making the CFP simpler and greener, and bringing it closer to the people it affects. It means that the fishing industry needs to take responsibility and be more involved in decision-making and implementation. It means eliminating overcapacity by using market mechanisms that will contribute to achieve viable businesses and offer a correct way out for those who want to change their activity. It means eliminating discards. It means putting the fish stocks and ecosystem first, and letting economic and social considerations follow from that. It means integrating the policy into the wider perspective of maritime policy. It means carefully tailoring it to the needs of each region and of each different sea basin. It means convincing everyone, from fishermen to

consumers, that we'd better all make an effort to save the resources, or one day soon there will be nothing to save. In short, it means making our policy truly sustainable for the years and decades to come. The reform of the market policy is part of this endeavour, and we need to better align fishing activities to markets' needs and to manage product marketing. We will also look at how to support market stability and how to improve information to consumers, through a reliable labelling system.

Now, I'm aware that everybody seems to talk about sustainability today, but for many it seems hard to do something about it in daily practice, especially when it hits our wallets. And the EU's past record is not impeccable either.

We are, however, firm believers in sustainability. For us this is a vital pre-condition for a viable and profitable fishing industry and that is why we extend this belief also to free-trade agreements. We attach great importance to our trading partners' attitudes to global governance and we expect all our trading partners to fight together with us the scourge of illegal fishing. To make this a global reality we have included sustainable fisheries commitments in all EU free-trade agreements.

At this moment in time, sustainable fisheries may seem both a distant and a complex aim. Yet there is no denying that it provides our only hope and is also a win-win solution. Let's be honest: it is the only real solution. And to get to this solution we need to work together to produce tangible and beneficial results.

And when I say "work together", I mean at all levels. The Russian Federation and the EU can do a lot to establish a framework for cooperation. Cooperation is key, but using it to reap rewards on the ground will be up to you, the businesses. That is why I am so keen to see Interfish and events like it today play their part. For it is at forums such as yours that we can forge real working partnerships that will create prosperity and guarantee sustainability for the future.

One of Russia's great writers, Anton Chekhov, once said: "Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice". He was right. We know cooperation makes sense. We know sustainability is the only way forward. Now it is time for us to turn our words into deeds.

Thank you.