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Fisheries and science: potentially perfect partners

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

Symposium on "Improved Fisheries and Science Partnerships as Policy Drivers"

Ostend (Belgium), 9 November 2010

Dear Minister Peeters, dear Ms. Fraga, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be at this important event. I can only congratulate the Belgian Presidency for bringing fishermen, policymakers, NGOs and scientists together today.

The theme of this symposium, namely an improved partnership between fisheries and science, is the key to the future, it is the key to a successful fisheries management.

Just a couple of months ago we held a seminar on the state of fish stocks with that very aim, and I was pleased to see the fruitful discussions it produced. This symposium today gives us an excellent opportunity to find ways on how we can improve the collaboration between all players.

As I have repeatedly said, our decisions in fisheries must be based on sound science. This is the only way to be credible. And in order to have sound science we need to encourage the discussion between fishermen, policymakers, NGOs and scientists. The aim here is to create a climate of transparency and trust. We really need to move beyond the mistrust that we still find here and there.

For example it is important that scientists have full and accurate data so that they can make full and accurate assessments. If they don't get the info they need, this will reflect badly on the industry. So it is very much in the industry's interest to remedy this. In return, with the fisheries sector's involvement in scientific research and monitoring we can look forward for better science. Better science will result in better advice and this will result in better decision-making and resource management. In this kind of scenario, we are all winners.

This kind of scenario will fit with the greater regional emphasis we hope to see from the CFP reform. In fact, we already have many good examples of fishermen and scientists joining forces, although we don't mention them. Marie Curie once said: "We never notice what has been done already, we only see what remains to be done". So, I want to give you some concrete examples of what has been done already. One such example is "Project 50%". There the UK research institute CEFAS, the fisheries department in London and fishermen working on 11 beam trawlers have worked together to test a new fishing gear. This gear cuts the discard rate down by half in the flatfish fisheries. There are many other examples, where scientists and fishermen worked hand in hand in the UK, in Sweden and in France to make trawls more selective for example in the Nephrops and whitefish fisheries of the North Sea and in Brittany. Finally I would also like to mention the example where scientists from the French institute Ifremer and producer organisations in Brittany have joined forces to collect data on deep-sea fisheries.

These concrete initiatives show that the will to work more closely together is there. These initiatives also bring direct benefits to the fishing communities. Take Project 50%, for instance. Here, the knowledge of fishermen and scientists together is helping to get fishermen the best possible value out of their products. It also gives fish a sustainable image among consumers. And last but not least Project 50% makes beamtrawl fishing less wasteful in terms of discards.

My view is that we need to look again at how the whole fisheries science network – from research to the scientific advisory process – is structured. In order to tackle the medium- and long-term challenges facing the fishing sector now. I am sure that this symposium will give us the opportunity to do just that.

Whatever conclusions emerge from this symposium, two lines of action already seem necessary to me. The first line of action is about improving stakeholder involvement in all the steps which make up the scientific advisory process. This

could be done by allowing for greater participation by the RACs in this scientific advisory process. The second line of action is about enhancing the excellence of scientific research and the expertise of the research community working in fields related to fisheries management.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The very fact that we are meeting here today shows that there is a collective will to make fisheries and science partnerships work. Now we need to translate that collective will into concrete steps to move forward.

Thank you.