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## **The Marine Food Chain: better management for new challenges**

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Dear Chairwoman, Dear Chairman, Honourable Members,

I am really pleased that you have invited me here today to discuss with you the challenges to the marine food chain.

I guess we can all agree that the marine ecosystem and particularly the food web is a very sensitive system that needs to be protected by all means. Changes to the food chain by diminishing or removing one key factor will damage the whole structure.

Later this afternoon, I believe, we will hear from scientists about the essential factors of the food web and the reasons for marine imbalances. It is known today, that besides the big problem of overfishing, also other factors like climate change, environmental or economic causes can influence the balance. In this regard our scientists have to have full and accurate data so that they can make full and accurate assessments. Moreover, they need to take all impacts on the food chain into account. Scientists are working on this and I encourage their work. Better science will result in better advice and this will result in better decision-making and resource management.

As Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and in charge of the Common Fisheries Reform, however, let me address today preliminary the issue of overfishing. This is the most urgent problem I am facing in my mandate in the Commission.

Today's marine management, as it stands, cannot face the overcapacity in our fleet or an old fashioned top-down approach that does not give sufficient responsibility and ownership to the industry.

What is the result? That 88% of our fish stocks are over exploited. No wonder our marine resources are in bad shape!

As I have already said on many occasions, in this House and elsewhere, this situation simply will not do. Nor will changing a few screws here and there and calling it a reform. We need to modernise the Common Fisheries Policy from the roots! The reform must bring about a new way of fishing that delivers sustainability to our plates. In other words, the reform must bring about an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. I believe that, if we get it right, this will mark a substantial step forward in preserving the marine food chain.

In this context, ladies and gentlemen, it is important to point out that there is the way we fish, and then there is the way we buy. The consumption habits and consumer behaviour are inevitably linked to the marine food chain. Let me therefore today to focus as well on the way we buy. On the way the fishing industry and the retailers co-operate and on the choices made by us, the consumers.

The EU is the first market for fish products as our consumers spend 55 billion € every year in buying fish. This shows that there is a fundamental market dimension to sustainability - and this market dimension, which involves producers, but also operators and above all consumers, can complement our conservation efforts.

Therefore we are looking at a new market policy as an important part of the new reformed CFP. This new market policy will support fishermen in selling sustainable products. The golden rule here is clear: The fish which cannot be sold at a fair price is best left in the sea.

This new market policy will also help the fishing sector organise itself more efficiently. We need to help the fishing industry and the aquaculture industry to organise production in an efficient manner. To take a real role in the 'day to day' implementation of a reformed common fisheries policy. We need to give them more say in how to manage fishing activities and in when best to put their products on the market. We also need to help fishermen get organised better, so that they have a

better economic standing vis-à-vis the retailers and can get fair prices for their products. And, finally, helping them to support marketing actions for their products is another concrete action we should take.

I was very pleased to see, in this regard, what initiatives are already taken in the different Member States. For example, I would like to mention the Institute for Baltic Sea Fisheries in Germany, which feeds information on the state of different fish stocks to a website. This information is not commented but helps the consumers, trading companies and processing businesses to inform themselves. It helps them to adapt their buying policy on the basis of exact scientific information. I believe there are similar ventures in the UK and in France. Here, we find the creation of a useful linkage between the fishermen, the processors, the retailers and the consumers.

As for consumers, the new market policy should provide them with additional tools to make an informed choice. Today citizens are more and more aware of the challenges the marine resources are facing and they want to know: "Is this fish fresh or defrosted? Where exactly was it fished or produced? Was it fished or produced sustainably or traded fairly?" These are questions, people legitimately ask. Good labelling initiatives are the answers to these questions.

Each purchase can contribute to sustainable consumption. People are entitled to that information. It is our duty to make this information accurate and exhaustive, so that, consumers become the main driving force of sustainability.

Actually, this is already a trend in some countries. There major processors and retailers, such as big supermarket chains are more and more buying their products from sustainable sources. The UK retailer Sainsbury's now sells more than 50 fish products from sustainable sources. But also for Germany's Edeka sustainability is high on the agenda. They have pledged that by 2012 all fish in their supermarkets will be from sustainable sources. This phenomenon has also spread to France where Carrefour is promoting sustainable fish on its shelves.

This kind of market development could change the supply choices of EU operators for good. We will do our part to promote it all over Europe by supporting dialogue and cooperation between the fishing industry and the retailers.

But when talking about sustainable fish, I believe it is only a question of time before consumers want to know how much fish was thrown dead back into the sea to catch the fish that ends up on their dinner plates. Therefore, we must also find a way of ending this wasteful practice of discarding fish.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I tried to outline how a new market policy can contribute to conservation and how the proper market mechanisms can multiply our efforts.

The shift toward sustainability requires a shift in attitude and the right choices from the consumers. Fish stocks constitute a shared resource for which we all share a collective responsibility. We must convince everyone, from fishermen to consumers, that we'd better all make an effort to save this resource. Fish is the bread and butter of a resilient fishing sector and thriving coastal communities.

So, I understand that there is more to an imbalanced marine food chain than overfishing and I support the scientific work to get us exact and workable data. Nevertheless, let me stress again that overfishing is my biggest challenge as a Commissioner at the moment. The reform has to do something about it.

Thank you for your attention.