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## **Lifting the cover of the Ocean**

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

European Parliament - Greens/EFA Group  
Hearing *"How much fish can be safely caught?"*

**Brussels, 3 May 2011**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me here today. I must say the focus of this hearing is spot on. Because let's face it: as we have become aware, too much fishing kills fishing. If we lift the cover of the Ocean to see what we have been doing there over the past decades it will send shivers down our spine. Stocks that have produced 200 000 tons of quotas every year are today producing a meagre 25 000 tons.

It really is rather simple. Whatever we do, we have to make sure that the fish stocks in our seas are healthy and productive. I am mentioning this time and again almost at any event where I participate. But too often I then hear the argument that sustainability has three facets:

- First there is ecological sustainability
- Second there is economic sustainability and
- Third there is social sustainability

Well I can only say, yes of course it has three facets. But it is not a question of an armwrestle between ecological on the one hand and economic and social sustainability on the other hand. After all fish is the economic base of our industry and without it the whole fishing sector is in peril. Fishing sustainably must therefore be our prime objective, underpinning all others. So, we should use the tool of long-term plans to manage all important fisheries as the best way to reach and maintain healthy stocks. And we must live up to our commitment of reaching Maximum Sustainable Yield by 2015.

This is a commitment we have subscribed to, both at Member State and at EU level, with the Johannesburg objectives.

There is only one way to do this and that is to base ourselves on science. A science based decision is a long term one. A decision based on when the next election date is, is a short sighted one.

But I can also think of another reason why scientific advice is even more important today than maybe 20 years ago. The thing is, we have just become too good at fishing. No single fish has a chance of escaping modern vessels with sonar, infrared and spotter planes to find the shoals of fish. So if we set a quota I has to be spot on. I cannot be just that little bit higher than scientists advise.

At the same time, it is equally clear that, if we don't know what really goes on in our waters, or if we have the science but don't have the political courage to follow through, we can have as many regulations as we want: things will only get worse.

In recent years we have come a long way in getting reliable data and improving scientific assessment, but for too many fisheries we are still short of what we need.

Yet any efficient management system has to be a dynamic process that needs to be constantly fed with reliable, comparable and up-to-date data.

Member States have an obligation in this respect and I have made it a point to insist they take it seriously. Just last month I wrote to some Member States to remind them of this. At the same time, EU funds can help bear some of the costs of data collection.

We need to take an ecosystem approach to fisheries management: one that is based on best available science and takes uncertainties sufficiently into account. And when we have insufficient data, we need to follow a precautionary approach. I have made it very clear to Member States that I am not available for this alibi game of asking for a better scientific advice before taking decisions. I have also made it clear that I am not available for this carpet trading of ever higher quotas, because the ones that will pay the bill are the fishermen and their families. I have asked the

Council to shoulder its responsibility and to take tough but necessary decisions. There is simply no alternative.

But ladies and gentlemen,

An insufficient scientific basis is not the only reason why our current policy is malfunctioning or delivering poorly.

We also struggle with a decision-making set up that is too prescriptive and Brussels-centred; that does not sufficiently involve or empower operators; and that too often favours short-term interests. We need a policy that provides a real backbone to the industry and not one that only puts ever more rules on their shoulders without delivering the necessary results.

In the CFP reform we should give producers and operators more responsibility to manage fish stocks sustainably and to eliminate discards.

I am going to meet stakeholders this afternoon for a discussion on how we can eliminate discards. I am mentioning this here, because discards in some fisheries jeopardise the very scientific basis for management decisions: too many unaccounted removals of fish make it difficult for our scientists to make reliable estimates. And at the same time we can no longer tolerate let alone justify such wasteful practices, especially vis-à-vis a more and more informed public which at the same time is our consumers.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

Today's economic and environmental challenges cannot be tackled with half-measures or soothing expedients: we need fundamental changes.

In a few months we will make public our proposals for a common fisheries policy fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the first time, the European Parliament will be able to fully participate in shaping this policy, and I count on its members and their constructive support and input to achieve the fundamental changes needed.

Our priorities are clear. We want a secure future for the fishing industry, this is only possible with healthy stock. I am convinced that our seas can produce food, support jobs, safeguard our climate and provide refuge for countless species, many of which are not even known to mankind.

We just need to let them.

Thank you.