

**Maria Damanaki**

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

## **Securing the future through reform**

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

European Parliament - S&D Group  
Hearing "*Ways of securing the future of our fisheries resources*"

**Brussels, 4 May 2011**

Ladies and gentlemen,

How can we secure a future for our fishery resources and for our sector?

I'm happy to have the opportunity of presenting my views, on the ways and directions to take, in the near future.

There are a number of key actions to take.

First of all, we want to make sure that the fish stocks in our seas are healthy and productive. Otherwise the very *raison d'être* of the whole fishing sector is in peril.

Too much fishing kills fishing. Fishing sustainably must therefore be our prime objective, underpinning all others. We need to embrace an ecosystem approach to fisheries management: one that is adaptive, takes account of scientific knowledge and uncertainties and considers multiple external influences. This is action one.

But the lack of sustainable fishing 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. How am I to explain to the people on the street that politicians have to decide on what mesh size to use for fishing sole off the coast of Dover? Is this really a decision that needs to be taken between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers? Furthermore our system does not involve or let empower operators enough.

We need to simplify decision making and move away from top-down and micro-management in Brussels. Instead, Member States need to be empowered and better involved. But regionalisation does not stop with the Member States. To the contrary, I believe it can only work if we move further in the chain and involve producers. They need to be given real management responsibilities. For example for managing the quota rights or for managing the quota uptake. Or for agreeing with other fishermen what technical measures should best be used to fish sustainably and eliminate discards. This, ladies and gentlemen, is action two.

But let's continue. Our system too often favours a short-term perspective which jeopardises both the biological well being of resources and the economic wellbeing of the sector in the long term. So, third: We need to use more long-term plans, on a fishery-by-fishery basis, as the best way to reach and maintain healthy stocks and live up to our commitment of Maximum Sustainable Yield by 2015. This is action number three.

This is a commitment we have subscribed to, both at EU and national level at the World Summit on sustainable development in 2002.

With MSY reached, we can allow fishermen to fish as much as possible, and we will still have healthy stocks. That is the beauty of MSY and it will help us to secure jobs and guarantee a balanced development of coastal regions.

Action number four: For people outside our circle, this is easy to overlook, but the "Common Fisheries Policy" is not just about fishing and fishermen.

There is also the processing industry; the transport industry; the net and gear manufacturers; the shipyards that build, maintain and repair boats; the harbours; the auctions, the retailers... And many more that create value and jobs. So we have to harmonise our actions for all the different folds of the sector.

All these folds have one thing in common: they work with seafood, and in so doing, they enable us to pick it up at the shop and serve it for dinner. They work with seafood, and in so doing, they knit the tight economic fabric that keeps coastal communities alive.

On discards: yesterday I discussed with stakeholders how we can eliminate discards from our fisheries in a step by step approach with an ambitious timetable. I explained that I want to do this with the participation of the industry so that they devise specific measures to end discarding. This is action number five.

We are talking about a lot of changes here, and we know how much people resist to change. For all these nice ideas to bear fruit, we need an aid system that incentivises change: we want to change behaviours and change mindsets. We want people to want to fish and consume responsibly.

Financial aid must enable the sector itself to get fully involved in the new, decentralized policy and bring about that change.

Support needs to be given to innovative projects with green credentials, that contribute to smart and inclusive growth. It needs to be granted only under strict conditions of compliance and responsible fishing on the part of the beneficiaries. And full coherence with other funding sources in the region must be sought at all times.

The new fisheries fund must also help reinvigorate coastal communities, ease the transition to low-impact fisheries, boost aquaculture and address the social consequences of the sector's restructuring.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

Today's environmental, economic and social challenges cannot be tackled with half-measures or soothing expedients: we need radical change.

We need action to bring fish stocks and ecosystems back to sustainable and productive levels. We need to empower the fishing sector, unleash its creativity and innovation power and improve its resilience. We need to mainstream the fisheries policy into the EU 2020 agenda for growth and jobs. And we need a common fisheries policy that is greener, leaner, more modern and consistent with the international standards we have signed up to.

In a few months the Commission is going to make public its proposals for a new common fisheries policy. And I know you may have heard me say this before, but at the risk of sounding like a broken record: this time the role of the European Parliament is going to be much bigger than with previous ones.

Historically, this will be the first time a directly elected European institution will shape the future of a common fisheries policy. And it was long overdue.

I count on your constructive input; and I hope you will give it, the support it deserves.

Thank you