

Maria Damanaki

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

What about fish waste?

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

Roundtable on Food at Green Week

Brussels 24 May 2011

Fish is universally acclaimed as a healthy component of our diet. It is not only rich in protein but also ridden of specific nutrients which are good for both brain and heart.

We are eating more and more fish. Moreover, our planet's population is projected to reach 9 billion. For all these people to have as good a diet as ourselves, we will need to maintain or even increase the contribution of fish. At the very least we must prevent the waste of perfectly good fish.

Fish mostly comes from wild resources. But in the EU, and also elsewhere, such catches have been on a downward trend for years now.

Why?

The problem is that we have been fishing too much. Today only 22% of assessed stocks in European waters are being fished at sustainable yield level, while an alarming 43% are already outside safe biological limits.

But we know that stocks could produce more if fished at sustainable levels. We have some positive examples already: Cod in Baltic, anchovy in Bay of Biscay. So if we make the effort for some time at a global level, we can expect that, in the medium term, the fish populations will rebound. This effort towards sustainability is what the reform of the common fisheries policy is all about.

In the meantime, the other thing we can do is prevent waste. Today we have spoken a lot about waste. Well let me tell you we have our own form of food waste in the fisheries policy. We don't just throw away food, because it has gone beyond the sell by date, no it is even worse: our rules force fishermen to throw away perfectly good and fresh fish, way before it gets to the supermarket and into our fridge. This is unacceptable and I am determined to end it.

Moreover we have a huge contradiction in our own policy, because we attempt to save some fish and limit their catches, but then big amounts of perfectly good fish are thrown back to the sea, dead, because they have been fished unintentionally as a by-catch. I don't think it is a paradox that we can live with any longer.

We must find solutions for this within the revamped Common Fisheries Policy. We must work with our international partners to correct it, just as we have started to do in the domains of control, enforcement and the fight against illegal fishing.

I am convinced that people who fish responsibly with the right certificates will also tend to abide more strictly by health standards. Legal fishing thus goes hand in hand with fresh and healthy fish products in our plates. To that extent, the policy developed in the fisheries area, is in line with the objectives pursued by my fellow Commissioners, present here.

There are some good examples of efficient anti-discard policies, for example in Australia, Canada or Norway; in some European countries the fishermen themselves have made the effort and changed, for instance, their fishing gear, thereby drastically reducing their discards.

This is not good enough. This is why I have asked Ministers, the fishing industry and Members of the European Parliament to support decisive measures in the reform, with a clear phase-out timetable.

I know that public opinion is in, on this. Hundreds of thousands have signed a petition against discards in the UK alone, and millions of consumers are asking for seafood from sustainably-managed, low-impact and low-waste fisheries. And they are right.

Just three weeks ago, I invited the fishing sector to a big meeting here in Brussels, where some fishermen presented a few of those promising initiatives I was talking about; I must say I found a lot of support from stakeholders, but at the same time there are also negative reactions from a part of the fishing industry. We need to work more.

I equally expect some further opposition to my proposals - both from parts of the fishing industry and from the political levels - and that's why I need your support! Please convince your Members of the European Parliament and Ministers to go for the bigger picture instead – and for the common good.

In this reform people will hold us all accountable for achieving sustainable fish stocks. And they will be right. This is why putting an end to wasteful practices is the least we can do.