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## **Communication on Fishing Opportunities**

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Fisheries Council

**Luxembourg, 28 June 2011**

Dear President, dear Ministers,

I am pleased to introduce to you the Commission's "Communication on Fishing Opportunities".

There are two clear points I want to make today.

The first is that in order to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield, we have to do more.

The second is that it can no longer be acceptable to fish in ignorance: the exploitation of fisheries in data-poor circumstances is not responsible and we should no longer tolerate it as part of our policy.

In our Communication, the state of our stocks is reviewed according to scientific advice received in 2010. Although it shows that there have been some improvements in the past years, there is still a very serious deficit: too many stocks are still overfished, and too many stocks are being fished in ignorance of their biological state. Let me show you some detailed results of the Common Fisheries Policy implementation.

First of all, more stocks are known not to be overfished – the number of stocks in good state has climbed from 2 in 2004 to 13 now.

Secondly, the number of stocks where scientists advice there should be no fishing or reduction to the lowest possible level, has fallen from 24 in 2003 to 11 now.

However, by and large overfishing remains endemic in European fisheries. Worse still, for around two-thirds of TAC decisions data are so lacking that scientists cannot even advise us about the state of the stocks nor how to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) conditions. I really want us to change this together. We have to become better at giving data to the scientists.

Let's face it: Today we land a tiny portion compared to a 100 years ago. Somewhere we have gone wrong. There is no other way to put it. In line with the poor biological situation, the economic analysis shows that around 30% to 40% of fishing fleets are not making enough money to keep going in the long term.

Our Communication sets out the decision making methodology for applying concrete decisions per fish stock during the October, November and December Fisheries Councils. You, the Ministers, play a special role here. I would like to acknowledge your role expressly and I believe it is of tremendous importance that we discuss our points of views as early as possible. That is what lies behind my Communication and that is why I have sought to have our exchange of views today.

This year, the Communication presents a new and more simplified approach than in past years. I want us to show renewed efforts to reach MSY by 2015.

There are two major differences. I am setting out a simpler methodology linking decisions more closely to scientific advice, where that advice can tell us how to reach MSY by 2015. Where there is no advice available we should be more careful in setting TACs and effort. We should try at least to reduce the fishing mortality to the level at which stocks can rebuild to MSY. Both, moving to MSY, and collecting fisheries data, are very urgent issues. Data collection is, of course, in your hands. Setting TACs consistent with MSY is in the hands of the Council on the basis of the Commission's proposal.

Why do we need these changes?

First of all, we have to eliminate overfishing. This means managing stocks so that they can rebuild and provide the highest long-term average catches. This is the "maximum sustainable yield" objective that Member States decided should be reached in 2015. We have made some progress towards this objective. But our progress is too slow. I really want to see us reach the objectives we have set.

Second, it will contribute to our effort to bring fishing fleets back into profitability. It will reduce costs by reducing overfishing: this is an urgent issue now that fuel prices are so high.

Third, it will help reduce discards. While I am preparing other initiatives to reduce discarding, simply phasing out overfishing will be a big help in reducing discarding.

What does this mean for setting TACs ?

The scientists are now telling us in detail how to reach MSY. I believe we should follow that advice and set the quotas accordingly.

However, where Member States have not provided the information for scientists to do their work, we don't have a lot of choice:

First, we should reduce quotas by at least 25% until we know what catches are sustainable. Other parts of the world take an even harsher approach of zero tolerance, that means no data, no fishing. I am not proposing that. I am just asking that we are careful and reduce fishing by 25%, until we have the missing data.

Second, Member States have urgently to collect the necessary data and the scientists have to analyse it. I would like to offer you my help here. As you know we co-fund your data collection with EU money. I would be interested to hear what we can do to help you and whether an increase in the funding or the co-financing may be a way forward?

Here again your role is tremendously important for us and I would be very interested to hear your views on how we should go forward in data poor situations.

As for the next steps, I am setting out these ideas for a wide consultation. As well as discussing these topics with the fishing sectors concerned, we are inviting European citizens to visit the consultation on the Commission's website.

But I am also asking you as the Ministers who will decide on fishing opportunities later in the year to start a dialogue with us in the Commission. My services will be happy to meet with yours to better understand your positions and to find a common way forward.

Concerning the process, I want to draw your attention to two issues.

Firstly, in the past years we have greatly improved the way we work. For example we propose the Baltic Sea proposals earlier, because we get the scientific advice for them earlier. We decide on these in the October Council and we give certainty to fishermen, to plan their activities for the following year.

I want to move further in this direction and split the December proposal into two proposals. The first one would be on exclusive EU stocks and the second one would be on shared stocks with Norway and other coastal states. This means we can concentrate on exclusive EU stocks in the November Council and get those decisions out of the way. In the December Council we can then focus on the decisions for shared stocks with Norway and other third countries. I think this would make our lives so much easier, because we can devote more time and focus better on the proposals at each Council.

Secondly, your administrations come up with questions every year on how to implement effort management. I propose that your administrations look into these issues now and inform my services on them by 1<sup>st</sup> September. This will allow us appropriate time to resolving these effort management issues.

Before I come to the end let me say a word about cod and pelagic stocks in the Baltic. The scientists now understand better the interaction between cod and pelagic stocks in the Baltic Sea and that they can give MSY objectives for both species. This is really good news for us, because it could enable us to come forward with a multi species long term plan which covers both cod and the pelagic species. I am seriously considering doing this, but it would of course mean a delay as we would present such a common plan in summer 2012. I would appreciate to hear your views on this.

Dear President, dear Ministers, I really want us to work together. I understand when you say that we have to be measured in our decisions. I understand when you say that we have to reach MSY gradually. But I would like to plead with you to understand my dilemma, actually it is our dilemma. We have those MSY 2015 commitment from Johannesburg and the citizens know about it. They also know that we are moving too slowly. They know about it, because NGOs are doing their homework, but also because more and more supermarkets are informing their consumers. Not a day goes by where we don't read in the papers, that more and more supermarkets and big processors are changing their buying policy to move towards sustainable stocks. Processors like Iglu or Frozen Fish prefer to buy Pollock from Alaska, rather than cod from the North Sea. They are even sourcing from New Zealand. So many third countries are doing so much better than we are. I believe that if we work together, we can change things for the better for European stocks. We can build them up to higher levels and we can offer our consumers fish from Europe as an additional choice. In the age of global warming, consuming locally produced fish makes even more sense than before.

I think that together, you and I, can make this happen. We just need to remember that we work together and that we have the same objectives. I am convinced that we can bring Europe back into the league of world leaders on fishing. I look forward to a frank and open exchange of views with you on these topics.

Thank you for your attention.