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Breaking the circle: introducing a new Common Fisheries Policy

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

Press Conference on the Common Fisheries Policy reform
package

Brussels, 13 July 2011

Ladies and gentlemen,

I bring you news that today the Commission has adopted its set of proposals for a reformed Common Fisheries Policy.

Later this afternoon I will be presenting the package in detail to the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee. But I know there is a lot of interest - in the sector but also in public opinion - on our plans for recovery. So I am particularly happy to give you the main highlights of the reform – and explain the rationale behind our proposals.

First, let's look at the situation we are facing right now.

Our current system is not working in favour of sustainability. 75% of EU stocks are still overfished and a third of them are in a worrying state.

The system does not work for the EU market either: Europe has to rely on imports for two-thirds of its fish.

Too many fleet segments live on low profits, depend on subsidies for survival.

'Business as usual' is not an option. According to our modelling exercise, if no reform takes place, only 8 stocks out of 136 will be at sustainable levels in 2022. In other words, if we don't make structural changes to the way we do business now, we will lose one fish stock after the other.

I want to break this vicious circle.

This is why today I am presenting a comprehensive overhaul of the policy: an articulate package including a Communication explaining the contents of the reform; a new Basic Regulation for fisheries; a new Common Market Regulation; and a Communication on the international aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Each of these is entirely new and equally important. But the three key concepts underpinning them all are: Sustainability, Efficiency and Coherence.

Maximum Sustainable Yield – MSY - means that we can keep fishing. But we have to manage each fish stock in such a way that we can get maximum fish production while still keeping the stock sustainable. With the reform, the effort to reach MSY by 2015 becomes a legal obligation in all our acts.

A second thing we need to do for sustainability is stop waste: discards, can amount to 60% of catches in some fisheries. So I propose to change the system so that all catches are landed and counted against quotas.

A third element is giving an alternative to overfishing. So we underline the crucial role of seawater and freshwater aquaculture for our markets and communities. This activity has the potential to bring smart, inclusive and innovative growth to both coastal and inland areas and it deserves a prominent place in our legislation.

About Efficiency:

Today, by virtue of the new co-decision procedure, even the most detailed technical decisions - like: what mesh size can fishermen use for their nets to fish prawns in the Golf de Gascogne? – have to be taken at the highest political level in the European machinery.

By contrast to that, I want to decentralize. For example, let's say that Parliament and Council set a long-term plan for a fish stock in the Golf de Gascogne – a plan containing specific objectives to keep the fish stocks at MSY level.

The choice of instrument, or instruments' mix, is up to Member States, cooperating at regional level; what counts for us is that they do achieve the objective, not how they achieve it. The EU has to be the lighthouse, if you will, showing the way. Member States, regions and industry have to steer the ship - and avoid the rocks.

It is a more flexible form of management based on results rather than methods. It goes to the advantage of Member States and regions, who can better coordinate measures with the industry or, optimally, devise them together with the industry!

One way that contributes to giving responsibility back to the industry as well as to sustainability is a more market-based system of access to fleets.

Tradable concessions have been introduced in many countries and proved effective in tackling overcapacity: for instance in Denmark the demersal fleet was slimmed down by 30% in 4 years and the pelagic one by 50%. Norway, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand also show success with this approach.

We propose tradability at national level only, and we propose safeguards to protect legitimate public policy concerns like preventing too many fisheries interests to be concentrated in the hands of a few. And the small-scale fleet will be exempt, to prevent it from being absorbed by bigger operators.

So we have regionalisation, result-based management and intelligent rights-based management to make us more effective. The third pillar, Coherence, simply means that all other instruments, from market organisation to financial support, must be aligned to the first two.

Proper labelling, for instance, is an essential aspect of this reform: I want consumers to make informed purchasing choices. I want to help them make sustainable choices. Consumers are part of this reform too, just like the sector, we can all play a part in making coherent choices for the future.

So we are improving both compulsory and voluntary labelling provisions to give much more precise information on product origin. All products, including canned and processed ones, will be subject to stricter rules.

Coherence also means that our actions at international level must match our domestic goals and commitments. We have to ensure a level playing field between our fishermen and the fishermen from other countries which export fish to us. Also we have to go for a new generation of sustainable fisheries agreements with other countries where our fleet goes to fish.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One final point I want to make is that this reform also contains many elements which do not constitute legal requirements but which are still important novelties: We want to set in motion a process that will change people's mindsets and behaviours.

This is set to be a behavioural revolution as well as a legal revolution.

The reform of the CFP that we are starting today is no longer the exclusive prerogative of Fisheries Ministers or MEPs. It concerns fishermen, coastal populations, retailers, consumers and ultimately taxpayers.

Some countries are already ahead of us in adopting modern, sustainable policies that deliver good results for both the industry and the oceans. We can't afford to be left behind.

Today's proposals are a sound step forward. I sincerely hope that this is the birthday of a new, flexible and intelligent fisheries policy that is fit for today's environmental and economic challenges.

Europe needs more fish, more wealth and more jobs. We won't have that without profound change. These proposals can deliver that change.