EUROPEAN MARITIME AFFAIRS & FISHERIES

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WEB REFERENCES

Website of Maria Damanaki, European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/damanaki/index_en.htm

Maritime Affairs and Fisheries site
ec.europa.eu/dgs/maritimeaffairs_fisheries/index_en.htm

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Towards the end of the year, my mandate as European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries will come to an end. It will mark the end of a five-year period – a period marked by an unprecedented crisis in Europe. Thousands of companies went out of business, leaving millions of people jobless. A big dent was carved into every country’s standard of living, and market confidence took a plunge. Europe had not experienced anything like this since the war.

This meant that all of the EU’s policies should be put to work to counter the crisis. Fisheries and maritime, an important lever for economic recovery, was no exception.

So I got to work. It was clear to me that we had to tap into the economic potential of our seas and oceans without letting sustainability, both environmental and social, out of sight. We had to relinquish old models and go for new and long-lasting solutions in fisheries, as in ocean affairs in general.

Today, obtaining energy from wind, tides and waves is within reach, as is ocean harvesting for pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. But for these solutions to take shape we had to prepare the ground for ‘blue growth’. We committed to funding research, linking it with industry and supporting smart and innovative enterprises. We created the first pan-European set of rules for maritime activities to be properly planned and managed, and we also took steps to make the maritime environment more safe and secure.

At the same time, we modernised our fishing, putting scientific advice above short-term economic interests. We went from five stocks being fished sustainably in 2010 to 27 today – and counting. We are going from throwing away 1.7 million tons of fish each year to using all the catches as food, feed or raw material by 2019. We put an end to the gruesome practice of shark finning too.

Internationally, we have been pushing for sustainability with all our partners; when we fish outside the EU, we make sure it is with no detriment to fish stocks and local communities. We have helped the recovery of the Eastern Atlantic bluefin tuna stock and overcome dragging disputes with neighbours. Our strict course of action against illegal fishing has led to banning imports from certain countries. I think we can fairly say that on the sustainability front the European Union has been leading by example.

The reality is that change is not easy and its positive effects will take time to impact on people’s everyday lives. It will take time for recovering stocks to grow by 15 million more tons, for a career in fishing to become attractive again or for operators to trust the new Blue Growth opportunities and create the 1.6 million new jobs that we are hoping to see by 2020. But if we continue to build on the strong foundations set during these five years, I am confident that Europe will recover and prosper with more fish, more wealth and more jobs.

Maria Damanaki
Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Innovation in the Blue Economy

In times of economic crisis every opportunity for growth and job creation should be grasped. Europe’s seas and oceans not only provide these in abundance but in the face of a scarcity of resources and a growing world population, they will also be increasingly drawn upon for our food, medicine and energy needs. From the production of clean energy to the development of new, sustainable industries in fields as diverse as bio-tech and aquaculture, innovation in Europe’s maritime economy will therefore be crucial to Europe’s recovery and future.

Therefore it was no surprise that “Blue Innovation” was the theme of this year’s European Maritime Day (EMD) conference held in Bremen in May. Politicians, civil servants and industry from across Europe came together to discuss how to turn this potential into reality whilst making sure that environmental sustainability is prioritised.

Much of the discussion centred on how best to overcome the hurdles to innovation which range from under-investment in knowledge to poor access to finance, skill shortages, and the duplication and lack of coordination of research efforts.

Nowhere is the skills gap more acute than in engineering and other technical areas. Wind energy alone currently faces a shortage of 7,000 engineers and other highly skilled workers. Without appropriate and effective vocational training and education at EU level that figure could double by 2030.

That’s why the Commission’s recent action plan on blue innovation encourages the development of a marine Sector Skills Alliance between the bodies that deliver educational programmes and industrial actors to help foster cooperation and provide the industry with the skills they need to grow.

And that growth potential is real. In the off-shore wind energy sector alone there are currently 58,000 people employed, generating 10% of our electricity. By 2020, these figures will be close to 200,000 employees and over 30% of our energy needs. This increase in energy generation at sea will also allow for new scientific information to be collected from the more than 5,000 offshore turbines, and increase the opportunities for mixed enterprises such as research, marine protected areas or aquaculture.

This continued growth brings with it surprising new products, from cancer treatments derived from algae to new bio-fuels that will power the transport of tomorrow. Much of the innovation in these sectors comes directly from the funding provided by the European Union and can then be fully exploited by the private sector.

Through exploring new avenues for research and development with the help of European support, for example from the Horizon 2020 fund, these industries will be able to take their bright ideas from the lab to the market. Bio-tech, renewable energy, aquaculture and mineral resources are four of the new sectors with the most potential for this.

Better research, innovation and cooperation will open up new economic potential: by 2020 employment under the blue economy could increase by 1.6 million jobs and will have an added value of around €600bn. By working together, Europe can harness this potential in a way which is economically and environmentally sustainable in the long term and create a bright, blue future for generations to come.
Coastal communities which depend on small-scale fishing need tailored and specific support to help them thrive, grow and provide incomes and jobs. That was the message during the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, and that message was heard when the new policy came to fruition.

That isn’t just because small-scale fisheries have always played an important role in Europe’s fishing industry. Or because their mostly small vessels are synonymous with large parts of Europe’s coasts. Rather it’s because the sector has a potential to deliver sustainable jobs, to feed local communities in the long term, and to lessen the impact of the ecosystems they operate in.

That potential is enormous. Small vessels deliver over 40% of the primary sector’s total employment, make up 80% of the fleet, and provide European citizens with fresh, local seafood often directly available to the consumers. They also help provide work elsewhere in the community – in local distribution, in net manufacturing, or even in the repair industry.

Many don’t trawl nets, but rather use passive gears such as fixed nets, traps, hooks and lines. These techniques have a reduced impact on the environment and contribute to lower discard rates, another central plank of the new CFP.

But such a large group is inevitably not a homogenous one and that creates challenges in itself. The term small-scale fisheries encompasses those which fish 20kg per trip to those which fish closer to 20 tonnes. Small-scale fishermen have encountered problems regarding access to fishing quotas, in securing acknowledgment by the rest of the industry, and in gaining representation in the advisory bodies that guide the sector.

That’s why the CFP has started to make inroads into these challenges. It introduced specific rules to keep the administrative burden for small-scale fishermen and their SME businesses as low as possible – they do not have to keep a logbook of their fishing activities, for instance.

The EU is also making sure that the right sort of investment is being made. Access to funding has been made easier, and under the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), a higher co-financing rate of 75% (50% higher than the normal rate) applies to small vessels.

But it’s not just about financing according to Maria Damanaki, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, it’s about “providing a framework to safeguard small-scale fishermen’s activities”.

Providing that framework is not just something which can be done centrally by the EU. Since conservation and access measures are largely local in origin, small-scale fishermen need a greater voice. To give them that, a group of over 1,000 fishermen from around Europe have formed LIFE (Low Impact Fishers of Europe), an organisation that represents the interests of small-scale, low-impact fishermen and women. LIFE sets out to influence policy development and implementation and to ensure that all fishing in Europe is carried out in a sustainable manner that harmful fishing practices are eradicated in line with the new CFP, and that concerns of small-scale fisheries are heard.

Small-scale fisheries, small vessels and small, often family-run, businesses are the heartbeat of many of Europe’s coasts. With the help of the changes to the CFP, the financial support on offer, and the growing collective voice of the sector, small-scale fisheries can continue to be that lifeblood for generations to come.
Interview with Jeremy Percy, Executive Director of LIFE (Low Impact Fishers of Europe)

In his forty-year career Jeremy Percy has worked across the whole spectrum of the fisheries sector. He has been a small-scale, and not so small-scale, fisherman, a fisheries manager and regulator, skipper of a fisheries protection vessel, and a fish processor and merchant. He was a founding member of LIFE, which represents the interests of Europe’s low impact fishermen and it’s with that hat on that we sat down to hear his thoughts on Europe’s small-scale fishermen.

What does LIFE aim to achieve for small-scale fishermen?
The primary aim of LIFE is to provide a clear and coherent voice across Europe for the low-impact, smaller-scale fishermen. One of the main drivers that brought so many of us together in the first place was that we share common problems, one of which is that we have seldom been able to genuinely influence policy at an EU level. The recently concluded CFP reform process thrust many of us together in a last-ditch attempt to make a difference, and having realised that we were not alone, and that it was in fact possible to gain some traction in this respect, it was a natural development to seek to maintain the momentum we had developed and create LIFE to carry our aims and aspirations forward on a more permanent basis.

What are the problems you envisage as regards managing the different interests present within LIFE?
I believe that the wide diversity of players within the low-impact, smaller-scale sector across Europe is actually an opportunity rather than a problem. What unifies us is that we can develop common solutions to common problems and call on the massive talent and experience of thousands of fishermen to contribute to the sustainable development of the sector. LIFE already has member organisations from the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, France, Spain and Greece, with applications pending from within those and other Member States. LIFE aims to provide a service to all these organisations and their members, and I am already excited at being supported by so many individuals and organisations in Europe. They have already recognised the very real benefits they can access by working together as part of this initiative.

Are you pleased with the improvements the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has made as regards small-scale fishermen?
Like most regulations, the new CFP offers some very significant potential benefits in the years ahead but at the same time presents some very real issues to be overcome if we are to survive and thrive as a sector. There are, for example, going to be some challenges in ensuring that the implementation of the ban on discards does not damage sustainable fishing interests whilst at the same time doing away with the wasteful practice of being forced to throw away perfectly good fish. In the same vein, having to reach Maximum Sustainable Yield by 2015 will result in potentially draconian short-term cuts in access to stocks. As ever, cuts of this nature can have a disproportionately negative impact on smaller-scale fishers who cannot simply steam away to pursue other stocks in other areas but are restricted to the fish close by.

On the other hand, the new article 17 that places a legal obligation on Member States to include social, economic and environmental criteria when allocating the resource is, as described by one senior EU official recently, revolutionary. This will for the first time ensure that access to quota in many Member States is not based solely on historic track records, that tend to reward those who have caught the most, and sometimes too much in past years, but will recognise that access to a finite public resource is and should be based on far fairer and more equitable criteria.

An additional requirement, linked to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, is...
“The primary aim of LIFE is to provide a clear and coherent voice across Europe for the low-impact, smaller-scale fishermen.”

for Member States with a small-scale fleet in excess of 1,000 vessels to produce an action plan for the development, competitiveness and sustainability of small-scale coastal fishing.

LIFE anticipates that these developments will illustrate that the low-impact, small-scale fishermen of Europe, if suitably supported and given equitable access to the resource, are part of the solution to the challenges that confront the fishing industry and the marine environment, rather than part of the problem.

How can local, national and international communities support the work that LIFE and small-scale fishermen are doing?
LIFE is an organisation of organisations, so on a local and national basis, small-scale fishermen’s organisations in our sector across Europe should join LIFE. This will serve to strengthen their own positions and give them a pan-European voice. Internationally, similar groups are invited to get in touch to share best practice and give further weight to our aims and aspirations. LIFE will reciprocate. At the same time, we are also keen to work with non-fishing organisations that support and encourage sustainability in fisheries and the marine environment.

Fishing always seems to be at some sort of crossroads or other and the current situation is no different. What is different is that for the first time, the overwhelming majority of fishermen across the EU have the chance to get their voice heard and, through LIFE, can have a real impact on their future survival and prosperity.
FACTS AND FIGURES ON AQUACULTURE

AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION

EU is the 8th biggest producer in terms of volume
1.53% European Union
60.75% China
11.94% Others

Did you know?
Aquaculture will soon surpass wild fisheries as the main source of seafood. This reflects the transition which happened on land in the past with the evolution from hunting to farming.

In AD 79, Pliny the Elder described fish and oyster farming techniques in his book Natural History.

AQUACULTURE IN THE EU

1.25 million tonnes produced in the EU each year
50% molluscs & crustaceans
23% freshwater fish
27% marine fish

Top 7 aquaculture species produced in the EU
1. Mussel
2. Trout
3. Salmon
4. Oyster
5. Carp
6. Sea Bream
7. Sea Bass

AQUACULTURE CONSUMPTION

23.1 kg per person
Average seafood consumption per year in the EU

24% of EU consumption comes from aquaculture

43% From EU
57% Non-EU countries

The most consumed aquaculture species in the EU are salmon and mussel

Did you know?
Nine out of ten mussels eaten in the EU are actually farmed.

AQUACULTURE BENEFITS

85,000 directly employed in European aquaculture

+14,000 enterprises in the LOCAL EU
90% of which are micro-entreprises (with under 10 employees)

Fish and shellfish provide oils, healthy proteins and minerals.

At every step from egg to plate, farmed seafood is traceable

Sustainable aquaculture is needed because fisheries alone will not meet the growing global demand for seafood. Aquaculture can also help reduce pressure on wild fish stocks.