

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Presidents,

The Commission would like to thank the Houses of the Oireachtas for their Opinion concerning the Commission proposal on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) {COM(2011) 425 final}, and apologizes for the long delay in replying.

This reform is about sustainability and our proposal responds to the challenge of ensuring an appropriate approach in terms of socio-economic, environmental and conservation ambitions. Sustainable exploitation of healthy stocks is a driver for socio-economic sustainability: managing fishing activities at levels that allow the maximum yields means larger stocks with significantly higher catches for the fishermen and consequently improved economic performance and profitability of the fleets. But there is more to this: safeguarding the existence of coastal fisheries and fleets, and a strong position for producers on the markets is also a part of the socio-economic dimension. The reform proposals (which include also the proposal for a European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and a proposal for the reform of the Common Markets Organisation) cover all these elements.

The Commission would like to take this opportunity to comment on some of the views expressed in the Report.

In its proposals for the reform of the CFP the Commission fully respects the principle of relative stability. It is clear from the consultation process that a large majority of stakeholders, in particular most Member States and fishing industry, attach great importance to this principle. Similarly the Commission has made reference in the proposals to the Hague Preferences by referring to the corresponding Council Resolution of 1976, and in particular to Annex VII of that Resolution.

The Commission appreciates the support for its approach on improved conservation of the marine biological resources with a multi-annual approach through management plans, including the target of maximum sustainable yields and ending of discards. The conservation policy is closely linked to governance issues. The Commission proposes the regionalization of the CFP. This proposal aims to ensure that regional views on conservation find their place in the policy, and that fishermen and other stakeholders participate in the design of concrete measures to manage fisheries sustainably. But regionalisation does not stop there. In fact the Commission wants to go further as we propose that fishermen are also part of the

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implementation process. The proposed model requires cooperation and dialogue among the Member States, industry and all stakeholders through the Advisory Councils.

The Commission takes note of the comments with regard to the timeline for the necessary changes. We should not delay fulfilling our obligations regarding maximum sustainable yield; this is an obligation we have committed to long ago, and now need to meet. In its proposals for fishing opportunities since 2010, the Commission has introduced a gradual approach to reaching the target date. Progress is clearly visible for a number of stocks. We fully agree with you that complete, reliable data are vital for policy-making, both in the preparatory and the implementing and enforcement phases of the policy. The reformed policy will establish clear, renewed obligations for Member States regarding the collection and availability of data.

On discards the Commission proposal is ambitious but realistic. This is a complex issue that requires a number of actions, including legislative changes, incentives, financial assistance and, in particular, strong efforts from fishermen to find practical solutions to avoid unwanted catches, which should build on good pilot-schemes that have already been initiated. The landing obligation would be a driver for change in this context.

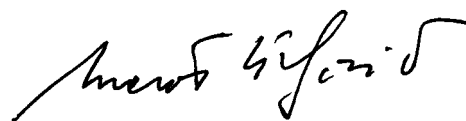
The Commission fully subscribes to your comments on the importance of fish farming and aquaculture. In the proposal for the CFP the Commission has introduced a chapter concerning the promotion of aquaculture. The proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund reinforces this support.

The proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund also sets out that there will be support for the implementation of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the transition to sustainable fishing, which will also include the need for improved scientific information. We need to invest in economic potential and growth support of coastal communities.

The Commission proposals for the reform are now with the European Parliament and the Council, and both institutions have started examining them. The Commission will work actively and constructively with all stakeholders in making the reform of the CFP a success for our fishermen and the coastal communities dependent on fisheries.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the comments raised in the Opinion submitted by the Houses of the Oireachtas and looks forward to continuing our constructive political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,



Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President