

**Maria Damanaki**

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

## **The price of no reform**

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

Conference "No fish left on the plate – why a radical reform of the Common Fisheries Policy is needed" organised by Fish of the Future Group

**Brussels, 22 June 2011**

Members of the European Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you for organising this event and indeed this campaign on the future of fishing. The "Fish for the Future" group and I have already discussed the problems of the current CFP; and we have established that we are on the same page.

I'm glad you gave me the opportunity to share with you today what would happen if no reform took place.

Well, I must say that the prospects without change are grim.

In general terms, it's easy to see that if we don't act, we will lose one fish stock after the other, and this will have two major consequences.

One is that, since nature doesn't like voids, other species will take their place, with a chain reaction of effects that is hard to predict. And we will have changed the ecosystem for ever.

The second is that the industry will face even more economic pressure. We will lose jobs, but not just in the fishing sector itself: also in the processing industry, in transport, in port infrastructure, at auctions... down to packagers and retailers. And all of us, as consumers, will end up with less fish on our plates.

So much for the general considerations. But I can also be more specific, because the Commission just carried out some modelling exercises to define what happens under different scenarios over a time horizon until 2022.

It appears that, if we were to continue with the current CFP, the best case scenario would be modest progress for some stocks over many years.

However, at the end of the day, we would be very, very far from the environmental, economic and social objectives that we have set for European fisheries. Let me explain why.

Let's assume we continue along the path of the 2002 legislation. Let's even assume that we follow our better last years decision under the Lisbon Treaty and the improvements of the recent Control package and of the long-term plans in the pipeline; let's say there are no changes to the current financial instrument, the current market policy, the ITRs policy or the external policy. Now let's see what happens to environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Environment first. We know that, in this scenario, 9% of our stocks would be at sustainable levels by 2022 - basically those covered by long-term management plans. The others would be heading toward collapse. I believe this figure requires no further comment. We simply cannot take the risk of potentially endangering 91 percent of the fish stocks!

At the same time, fleet size would shrink in ten years by 15% in terms of number of vessels; but such modest reduction would be offset by our increasing technological power and this means that overcapacity, the main driver of all our problems, would remain; as would overfishing and the high levels of discards.

Economically speaking, some fleets would still be profitable; but all would be vulnerable to fluctuations in first sale prices or fuel prices. The overall financial performance of the EU fleet would not improve. We'd still have to put up with the constant demands for higher fishing limits on the part of the sector. We'd still be likely to often depart from scientific advice.

More importantly, we'd continue to face a steady need to subsidize the sector. Maintaining the current level of subsidies would simply postpone the inevitable and

would do this at a high cost to taxpayers. In this perspective, subsidies such as the current Axis 1 of the European Fisheries Fund bear a heavy environmental cost and throw us deeper into the vicious circle.

In terms of social sustainability, I already said that jobs would be lost. Also, wages would remain below the national average and safety conditions would not significantly improve.

Let me be clear: whatever we do, whatever option we analyse, we will have to accept some decline in the employment rates of the catching sector, especially in the short term.

If we shrink the fleet, the staff working on the fleet will have to be helped to find another occupation elsewhere. However, we should not be tempted to artificially keep some jobs in the catching sector in the short term because the price to be paid is too high. Without change, the decline in fish stocks would lead to an even greater loss of jobs.

In reality, if we look at wages, the current CFP would perform far worse than any of the reform scenarios. The quality of employment - measured in terms of safety at work – would also get far better under the reform.

And these – wage levels and working conditions - are the really important parameters we should consider: not only because it is fair to the fishermen, but also because these are the things that may attract new people toward the fishing profession. Let us not forget that employment in the catching sector has been steadily declining in the last 15 years.

Another important social aspect is that the communities which today depend on fishing would gradually and inevitably decline. There are many such communities in the EU.

According to a study we recently conducted, fishermen are changing fishing behaviour; people are turning toward other fisheries-related activities, like processing and aquaculture, or are diversifying in favour of other maritime sectors - tourism in the first place, but also offshore energy, oil, gas and so on. This is a positive trend, which we seek to accompany with the Axis 4 of the current Fisheries Fund.

But the point is that the relative importance of the catching sector is decreasing and some of these communities may be close to a critical point below which they won't be viable any more.

There is also the aspect of governance to consider: the CFP has a very complex legal framework, which makes it very hard to implement and enforce. Maintaining the current structure would mean continuing with micro-management at the highest political level and more bureaucratic decision-making to the detriment of effectiveness and compliance.

Finally, the external dimension of the CFP has performed worse than expected. There is room for improvement, not only as regards environmental sustainability, but also in terms of international governance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Environmental, economic and social sustainability are equally important facets of the same issue. Without environmental sustainability, it will be impossible to ensure an economically profitable and socially viable future for the fishing sector. Business as usual will consign us to a gradual decline and we can no longer afford it.

Instead, we need to shift the focal point of our common policy. We need to move away from half-measures, and last-minute crises management toward a long-term, proactive CFP.

Change will not be possible without support from Members of the European Parliament, Member States, NGOs, industry and consumers. I count on your constructive support to make this change possible. Without a reform, the loss of fish stocks and the decline of the fishing sector will be inevitable.