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Directorate general Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

"Some aspects of the Common fisheries policy in the  
Mediterranean Sea – overview and state of play"

**Crotone, 20 June 2008**

Dear President,

Dear representatives of the public administration, dear  
representatives of the fishing sector,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all allow me to thank the organisers for inviting the  
European Commission to speak on this important event.

The subject of our discussions today has been top of the agenda for  
some time now and we all know why. It is of particular relevance  
here in the Mediterranean Sea, where effects of climate change and  
global warming could be potentially more damaging and where  
ecosystems are more vulnerable and thus less resilient to these  
phenomena. It is therefore all the more important that we achieve  
two things:

- manage the natural resources in a sustainable way in order to  
ensure that also the next generation can use and exploit them, and
- de-pollute the sea in order to achieve the highest-possible  
resilience of the ecosystems to climate change phenomena;

In my intervention today I would like to present the European  
framework for a sustainable fisheries management in the  
Mediterranean, which is my daily business in the E. Commission.

First, I'll start by describing shortly the legal framework for sustainable fishing in the Mediterranean since the adoption of the new Regulation, then look at the current state of play concerning implementation, and finally I would like to broaden the scope and refer to the more general concept of Maritime Policy and its implementation in the Mediterranean Sea.

After several years of negotiation amongst Member States the new Mediterranean Regulation has finally come into force on 1 January 2007. It constitutes a legal framework for fisheries management in this region which goes far beyond a mere 'technical measures' approach. In fact, it is by itself a good example for a much more comprehensive and global approach to managing fisheries - and the respective ecosystems where harvested populations occur - in a coherent and sustainable manner. As many of you know, it contains

- provisions on protected species by referring to the lists established by the Habitats Directive.

- It also contains provisions on the protection of habitats, such as posidonia beds, coralligenous or maerl beds, on which the use of certain fishing gear is strictly forbidden or restricted;

- furthermore it sets common rules on the use and dimension of fishing gears and practices, to ensure selectivity of trawlers for a better protection of juveniles, and

- finally, it contains for the first time some provisions on recreational fisheries and, last but not least, some specific measures on control.

But the two main pillars of the new framework are certainly the requirement for Member States to adopt a coherent framework for fisheries management at their level, in the form of National management plans, and to designate additional fishing protected areas, which can be either permanent or seasonal. The underlying idea to this is clear and has been discussed at length with MS and stakeholders during the preparation phases of the regulation: Fisheries management measures should not be imposed 'top-down' by Community legislation, but should rather come through a 'bottom-up' approach involving the end-users, in coordination with local, regional and national bodies, and based on sound scientific input. The Community should merely set a common framework, not more. In this new approach each player has to take responsibility. By sharing the information to justify the different measures and provisions used in the Management plans, we reach together a level of transparency and effectiveness, which is needed to create a level playing field for all and to help to build mutual trust amongst fishermen.

In addition to these provisions, the regulation allows for a number of derogations to take account of specific local situations. For the

reasons of transparency and effectiveness that I just mentioned, the countries asking for these derogations must duly justify them, and they must also be part of the Management plans referred to before.

So, all this looks very nice in theory, but where do we stand on implementation?

Well, unfortunately there I cannot report much progress. On the contrary, we have seen so far not much effort deployed by Member States to come up with the Management plans or the designation of Fishing Protected areas. Some Member States have not presented yet any plan at all, and the plans presented by the others do not correspond to the requirements of the legislation. The situation is even worse for the fishing protected areas: only a few MS have reported existing FPAs, but none on new designations.

This situation is all the more worrying if one takes into account that the Regulation had been adopted by all Member States, by unanimity. I think it is not a very charming picture of ourselves, as a Community, if we show to the outside world that we are not taking seriously what we had just agreed. The credibility of the EU Member States and of the Community is at stake. And I would like to insist here that this criticism of non-implementation is not addressed to the fishing sector, but rather to their national and/or regional administrations. The ball is in their half of the pitch, and it is their responsibility to set up the plans and implement them correctly. The fishing sector - that is shown by at least some

reactions we have received - is willing to comply and to use the possibilities for support to switch to the new management regime rather sooner than later. I would in particular point here to the change of mesh size for towed nets, foreseen in the Regulation. While the regulation foresees the switch for 1 July of this year, smaller meshes can still be used under certain circumstances until May 2010. This does not mean however that one has to wait that long for changing the cod-end of the nets; on the contrary, the time between now and 2010 should only be seen as a 'phasing out period'; it is also worth mentioning in this context that financial support through the European Fisheries Fund maybe granted only if the change to the new mesh size is made before it becomes obligatory. Moreover, all other technical requirements of the fishing gears as laid down in the Annexes to the regulation must be implemented accordingly.

Now I would like to turn to some other recent Community initiatives that are also important for the Mediterranean. Last year we have published a Communication on the elimination of discards and unwanted by-catch in fishing activities. While the problem of discards is certainly not of the same size in the Mediterranean as it is in some other areas, unwanted by-catch and subsequent discarding nevertheless may occur in relevant quantities, and this should be reduced to the least possible levels. In the meantime the

Commission is preparing concrete measures for discard reduction in certain fisheries and has issued a consultation paper on this. While there are no Mediterranean fisheries targeted in this proposal this year, it is clear that in a subsequent proposal the situation in the Mediterranean Sea will also be examined closely. It is therefore important to think already about how to make fisheries cleaner and to reduce and avoid as much as possible all negative impacts of fishing on other species and on the ecosystems in general. In this context, it is important to note that the Mediterranean Regulation already prohibits not only the landing, but rather the catching of undersized species. If such catches occur, the skipper would have to move fishing grounds to avoid more such catches.

As many of you will know, we have presented earlier this year a Communication on applying an ecosystem approach to fisheries. This has been one of the main objectives of the CFP since the 2002 reform and we have already started implementing it since then. The Communication is just spelling out what exactly we understand by an ecosystem approach to fisheries, what has been done so far and what are the steps ahead. A healthy marine environment is obviously a precondition for healthy and productive fish stocks. In this respect the effects of fishing activities on the target stocks but also on the other stocks and parts of the ecosystems must be assessed. However, not only fishing activities are impacting on stocks and ecosystems. It is therefore important to take account of

all impacts and to tackle, as much as possible, the negative effects of all factors. For the Commission, therefore, an ecosystem approach can only be an incremental, or 'learning by doing' approach, where impacts of an activity on the ecosystems are taken into account as far as our knowledge goes. For fisheries policy we have already taken this road and adopted, at Community level, a number of initiatives going in that direction, such as long-term management plans for certain stocks, such as cod in the North Sea or BFT - closer to here! -, measures to protect sensitive habitats and sensitive species such as cetaceans, the new policy on discards mentioned before. A very good example for a comprehensive, ecosystem approach, and let me insist on that, is the Mediterranean Regulation itself, as I outlined already, but again – and I am repeating myself - a big effort is needed to improve implementation.

Let me now turn to the wider context of the Maritime Policy. As you know, the Commission adopted last October a Communication and an Action Plan for implementing the Integrated Maritime Policy over the coming years. This was fully endorsed by the Heads of State or Government at the December 2007 summit. So this is now a completely new situation where 27 Member States of the EU have decided to take a coherent, cross-cutting and integrated approach to the challenges, problems and opportunities of the maritime area. Fisheries clearly must be an integral part of this holistic approach to marine management.

Given the specific geographical conditions of the Mediterranean Sea and the many human activities that impact its coasts, it is also clear that the Integrated Maritime Policy is of particular relevance here. Applying an ecosystem approach not only to fisheries, but to marine management as such, in the framework of the new Marine Strategy adopted earlier this year is crucial to conserve our natural resources in the Mediterranean and to use them in a sustainable manner.

This is all the more important if we look at the international dimension here – and being in southern Italy, only a few hundred miles away from our southern neighbours clearly shows the relevance of the international dimension. What we need, both in fisheries but also in all other maritime sectors, is to reinforce and promote coordination and cooperation amongst us in order to stimulate growth in a context of sustainable development. This can only be achieved by taking care of both the "Mare Nostrum" and of the people living and working along its coasts.

As far as fisheries are concerned, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) are our main fora of cooperation. We are working to improve both the scientific basis in these organisations, particularly in the GFCM, but we also need more cooperation in control and monitoring of fishing activities. The GFCM must become an effective regional fisheries organisation, and it must be able to provide the scientific basis for

adopting common management measures. It must aim at achieving the best levels of exploitation of marine resources. And it must simultaneously strive towards harmonisation of fisheries rules. However, this multilateral framework will not function if national administrations do not actively support them and send their scientists to work in the GFCMs Scientific Advisory Committee.

The GFCM recommendations and resolutions on the development of a management programme for fishing effort, and on the compilation of data, adopted in 2006 and 2007, are important first steps towards the comprehensive and adequate effort control system we so urgently need. It is however really regrettable that the GFCM has not been able to agree on the freezing of fishing capacity and on a harmonised logbook for all Mediterranean countries as proposed by the Community earlier this year.

The enhanced cooperation and coordination of activities, as I said, needs to be extended to all maritime sectors. As a first step for implementing the IMP in the Mediterranean Sea we have recently organised a big conference in Slovenia. This conference included participation from all Mediterranean countries and is the first step in a process of enhanced cooperation amongst us on Maritime matters.

In addition, there are already cooperation structures in the Mediterranean, such as the renewed "Barcelona process: Union for

the Mediterranean", which will re-invigorate our Euromediterranean Partnership, and the European Neighbourhood Policy which is the bilateral framework for dialogue and co-operation with individual Mediterranean partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I think you all would agree that a polluted, overexploited sea will not attract tourists and will have a devastating effect on the richness of marine resources. Therefore, ensuring the health and sustainability of the marine ecosystems and looking at the various sectors connected to the sea in an integrated manner will lead to a better understanding of this crucial resource in order to use it more wisely.

Thank you.