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Fishing opportunities 2011

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

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I presented to this Fisheries Council a proposal for fishing opportunities based on a fundamental principle, namely that of science-based management. My objective with this science-based approach is to ensure a profitable fishing sector that can rely on healthy stocks.

The Commission came into this Council aware that we would be facing a difficult discussion. The economic crisis that has struck Europe, along with the rest of the world, continues to take its toll on businesses in all sectors. Many of our fisheries are especially vulnerable, because they are at best only marginally viable to begin with. And economic difficulties have real social consequences for real people who live in real communities. They matter.

I came to this Council with a mandate from the Commission. This mandate could be summed up in some points, which have been my red lines throughout the negotiations over the last two days:

- 1. The EU is committed to bringing all its fisheries into line with the maximum sustainable yield by 2015. Fishing sustainably is a precise, quantifiable target, with a specific timeline. We can discuss about how we get there, but we cannot discuss about where we are going. This is a commitment which has been made by the Council of Ministers, not just by the Commission.
- 2. The Council has also put in place a number of long-term management plans. These plans can be revised if we see they are not delivering. But until they have been revised, they are there to be respected. They set precise objectives. They are designed to give clear guidance on how scientific advice should be translated into figures, both quotas and fishing effort. Sometimes science gives us a margin for manoeuvre, and we are grateful for that, of course. But the Commission cannot agree to decisions which would contradict the rules laid down in these plans.
- 3. The Commission cannot agree to any decision which would represent a regression in terms of sustainable management. We cannot accept that we make decisions this year which set lower standards of stock conservation than those we made last year. Once a decision has been made on matters of principle, as in the case for example of the shark action plan agreed last year, we cannot then start making decisions which would weaken the protection of the stocks concerned.

I came to Council with a clear mandate on these three points. And I am glad to say that, despite some difficult discussions on certain points, I have not been obliged to cross any of these red lines in order to make an agreement possible.

This does not mean the Commission has not been flexible. We have. Where it was possible to meet Member States' requests within the margin provided by scientific advice, we have done so.

So we have made a fishing opportunities package for 2011 which represents progress not just towards more sustainable fisheries, but towards our specific goal of achieving Maximum Sustainable Yield for all commercial fish stocks by 2015.

So I am very pleased to say we have a result which moves us closer to our goal of sustainable fishing by 2015, and I'd like to thank Minister Peeters and his team, and all my colleagues from the Member States concerned, for their good will and support in achieving this.

Thank you.