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## **How do we choose our fish?**

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Relais et Châteaux Conference

**Lisboa, 15 November 2011**

Dear "chefs of the world", ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to start from thanking you; not only for inviting me here, but also for your commitment.

This event, as well as the many projects that Relais & Châteaux chefs are putting in place -like the sustainable seafood culinary contest that Olivier Roellinger is sponsoring in France- help me greatly to gain support for our reform of the European Common Fisheries Policy.

We share the same goal –promoting sustainability– and the same concerns:

We hear that fish resources are depleted. That fish contains dangerous pollutants. That it is sometimes sold under false labels. We hear that big amounts of fish are thrown overboard because they were caught by mistake.

So what should we do?

Well, we can probably change the way we eat; but we definitely have to change the way we fish.

As Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, I am mainly responsible for that: the way we fish. But the two are more closely connected than one would think.

Because fish is a shared resource, the EU has exclusive competence for its conservation. Over the years the Common Fisheries Policy has become complex, with too much detail decided at central level. Too much focus is put on short-term economic interests, which too often seem to prevail over environmental considerations.

So, today there are fewer and fewer fish in the sea. We have fished too much. We have thrown away fish we don't want to land or for which we don't have quotas. And we have used taxpayer's money to build up bigger and bigger vessels. The result is that today seventy-five percent of our stocks are overfished.

According to our impacts assessment, if we don't break this vicious circle only 8 fish stocks out of 136 will be sustainable by 2022.

This would be an economic disaster for our fishing industry, particularly small-scale fishermen, who cannot easily move to other waters - just imagine the negative effect for the coastal regions. Also retailers and yourself, those who are there to take the best out of this noble food that is fish, will suffer the consequences.

Instead, we must turn this around and hinge our actions on sustainability – and sustainability only.

First of all, we have to stop overfishing.

We have to reach the idea of a sustainable level of exploitation –what we call Maximum Sustainable Yield– of fish stocks by 2015.

Second, we have to stop throwing away fish that is already killed, quota or no quota. I spoke to some of you and I know your commitment in this particular field. Let me tell you that your work is particularly important: you contribute to raise consumers' awareness and you help fishermen, giving value to fish that they would discard.

I propose to phase out discards in all fisheries in a step by step approach. We will accompany this with better gear selectivity and with proper support for the industry to implement it. Then we will have to land every fish caught in the nets. If it is undersized fish then it goes into fishmeal production. If it is oversize fish then the fishermen can sell it for human consumption and they will keep the profits from this sale.

But sustainability does not stop at our own doorstep.

Therefore the proposals for CFP reform do foresee a chapter on our fisheries policy in the world. European Union is going to sign Sustainable Fisheries Agreements with other countries. We will have to make sure that our fishermen behave abroad as they do at home, and that human rights are respected in these agreements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You know better than me that fish is universally acclaimed as a healthy component of our diet. We all know it is rich in protein, but it's not just that: its prime value lies in the fact that it contains clusters of brain-specific nutrients, the omega-3 fats, which our body cannot produce, and must get from the diet.

These fats, DHA and EPA, affect mental health throughout our life cycle. Scientists have connected poor mental development of babies with insufficient supplies of DHA during pregnancy. Later, DHA and EPA influence educational performance, aggressive behaviour, depression, senility and Alzheimer's disease.

Fish also helps regulate blood pressure, thus reducing the risks of heart attack, and blood sugar, which is good for weight loss and diabetes. It is a source of vitamins and minerals, it helps combat osteoporosis.... Should I go on?

I think I made my point, but let me add this: fish is also extremely good! And easy to cook, even for those who have not your professionalism.

So, we should keep consuming fish, and consuming lots of it. As long as it comes from sustainable sources!

I know that public opinion is in on the reform of the common policy. A recent poll shows that people want the fish in the shops to come from non-overfished sources. Hundreds of thousands have signed a petition against discards.

It is important to not lose the momentum for change and convince people that they have to choose sustainable fish for the sake of their health, as well as for taking care of both the environment and the future of fisheries altogether. But how can people choose? How do they choose their fish? How do you choose your fish, ladies and gentlemen? Your choice as chefs is key and convincing. You can show people, you can show us all what to choose and that is why today's event here in Portugal is so key for getting it right. If it is true that, as Fernando Pessoa says, "Every gesture is a revolutionary act", then you are helping us to conduct our revolution towards sustainability. If European citizens are ever more aware of the need to value sustainability, this is also thanks to the way that European chefs work. You can drive the change: eating sustainably means fishing sustainably.

But you have already proven to be a key player in this. You are among the "Seafood Champions" of this year, heavily involved in London as a sustainably Fish City initiative for Olympic games: The concurs for young cooks which you are organising are perfect examples on how you are driving change in the world towards better and more tasty menus. So help us to keep the momentum and move forward!

Thank you.