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Green Paper on the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

(Presentation by the President of the Hellenic Fishermen Confederation)

The subject of today's meeting is the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), against the background, however, of its failure so far.

If the European Union had wished to implement a European fisheries policy based on a European strategy for the sea, it would have done this well before 1994, enabling the Member States to take the necessary measures based on the specific features of their national fisheries sectors and marine ecosystems, always adopting a European-oriented approach in order to obtain a socially just and environmentally friendly fisheries policy.

Instead, we have a CFP which is a result of political compromises rather than that of a fruitful dialogue between the parties directly involved and it has been acknowledged that this is one of the reasons why it is deemed a failure. We consider that it has failed miserably.

European regulations and directives are drawn up and the Member States are called upon to implement them without the parties directly involved having a say in their development and therefore the fishermen could not accept them. Another fact is that the mechanisms for checking their implementation, in our country at least, are designed to favour large financial and also party-political interests, which serve those in power, thus sacrificing not only the CFP, already weakened by exemptions and political compromises, but also the future of one of the largest fisheries sectors in the EU in terms of manpower and vessels with passive fishing gear.

It is true that various lobby groups are in favour of dynamic fishing at European and national level, without considering the social, political and environmental costs. Protected ecosystems in Greece are still uncharted so that the European regulations restricting the use of towed gears and purse seines cannot be implemented, though several proposals have been made by the SAE for mapping them. This has resulted in the federations struggling to find money to carry out

mapping on their own (e.g. mapping the coastline of the NATURA 2000 site GR2450004 Nafpaktos – Itea). Although mapping has taken place, the Regulation is not being implemented.

However, in the purse seine management plans submitted to the EU in the previous period, the previous political leadership with exclusive responsibility wrongly informed the EU that it had been mapped, although there is a document from the Ministry of Environment, Regional Planning and Public Works which asserts the opposite. Although there is a study for seines towed from anchored vessels, the previous political leadership paid a large amount for a new study made to measure for somebody's particular management plan. Note that this study is in stark contrast to the previous study carried out in 2001 for the same gear.

If we look at the CFP in our country up to now, there can be only one conclusion: nothing has ever yet been applied relating to distance from shore and depth, for towed fishing gear and purse seines, the ban on the fishing and marketing of undersized fish, protected habitats, reference levels for national capacity and engine power, etc. The authority responsible for monitoring implementation of the CFP does nothing more than to conceal illegal fishing activities and invents excuses not to implement the CFP.

The satellite system to monitor the position of fishing vessels has collapsed. Penalties are imposed on only a very few vessels which do not have access. A large percentage sabotage the system or do not operate it or the system gives a position in another area while the vessel is elsewhere, without the necessary controls being performed or the statutory penalties imposed and the ship being detained. The information on illegal fishing activities required by the collective authorities is not provided on the pretext that it is personal data but this is not the case, because it concerns illegal fishing activities.

These services are openly and defiantly masking illegal fishing activities and are ridden by corruption. Recently, however, such activities and their concealment led to the drowning of a fisherman at Thassos and it is now necessary for not only the physical perpetrators of these acts but also those morally responsible to be brought to account.

There is of course a reason for all this. The policy of previous governments was to leave the subject of purse seines and trawls well alone.

However, this can no longer apply now that the new Greek government has placed Green Development at the centre of its policy. Our country is bound by international conventions, such as Barcelona and Rio, and by the end of 2010 must have taken measures to preserve biodiversity by halting its loss.

However, this is inconsistent with using towed gear and purse seines on the coast; these have been found to cause enormous discards of commercial and non-commercial species, trade in huge amounts of undersized fish, which is tolerated by the administration and has a devastating impact on benthic communities, hard substrate bottoms and protected habitats.

In order to obtain substantial results, it is necessary to ensure the following:

1. Improvement of the fishing sector's image
2. Substantial involvement of the parties directly concerned in formulating fisheries policy
3. The existence of an effective control mechanism (fisheries inspection service)
4. Collection of fishermen's scientific information and expertise
5. Recruitment of competent staff to the fisheries service
6. Use of international knowledge

Particular attention must be paid to the following issues in this reform of the CFP:

- Support and protection must be given to small coastal fleets which use passive fishing gear by setting up a system of special treatment. This part of the industry is of strategic importance because it maintains cultural links in isolated areas dependent on fishing, retains the social fabric of these regions, while keeping unemployment low without being an energy-intensive activity, and has a minimal effect on ecosystems because passive gear is used.
- The causes of the decline of fish populations, the degradation of ecosystems and risks to the sustainability of the industry must be spelled out. Such causes include: uncontrolled access to the coast, changing land use,

municipal waste, pollution from maritime transport, excessive use of chemicals in agriculture and overfishing through fishing practices such as towed nets and purse seines.

Let us deal with the 5 key questions posed in the Green Paper:

1. The Commission has a completely mistaken approach to the problem of overcapacity in the fishing industry. It considers that capacity is about the number of vessels, the days spent at sea, tonnage and power. This is a basic mistake which affects everything else. The fishing capacity of a vessel has to do with the actual dynamics of the fishing gear used and fishing capacity will have to be defined on that basis. This, however, involves conflict with major financial interests and, at least up to now, with the EU and the Member States. This was not the intention. The large number of vessels involved in small-scale coastal fishing are small vessels, mostly working with more selective fishing gear, which do not work on most days in winter because of the weather, have engines which are not energy-intensive, and remain at sea only for a relatively short time in order to reduce costs. Everyone knows that no EU Member State has implemented the ratio of 1 to 1 for engines, but no one speaks up and so a mistaken policy prevails. The proposal for transferable fishing rights is the most dangerous proposal because it would concentrate substantial rights in a few hands and would strike a blow to the social base of small-scale coastal fishing. This is equivalent to destroying coastal regions and small-scale fishing.
2. Focus on policy objectives. The final texts of European Regulations and directives are not based on scientific data. They begin with them and with significant findings, but on the way to adoption at the Council of Ministers are distorted by political compromises, exemptions and interventions, in order to serve large interests in fisheries (failure at the Council of Ministers of proposal 589 on tuna fishing, etc.). All the above lead to disorientation from the main objective, which is to maintain ecosystem services and the proper distribution of their benefits to mankind. Only a socially just and environmentally friendly policy could produce the desired result in this

direction. Of course, this policy must be the fruit of a participatory process in order to be accepted and must of course be easily verifiable.

3. Decision-making. Only with close stakeholder involvement will the decisions taken be effective. The RAC and the Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture do not have a very clear role. The vast majority of stakeholders do not participate, and only a few are involved for monitoring purposes. Nor are their administrations elected.
4. The responsibility of industry. It is only with the substantial presence of fisheries' organisations and their multilateral support (financial, social and political) that the industry can take effective responsibility for everything related to it. There is a substantial lack of control structures and for this reason a Fisheries Inspection Service should be set up with sole responsibility for fisheries issues. The Commission Decision of 9 October 2009 (Article 12) should be used in order to utilize EU funds to set up a fisheries inspection fleet and to push ahead with the recruitment of dynamic staff who will keep abreast of national and Community legislation through continuous training seminars, because this responsibility must finally be taken away from the Port Authority services, which are largely responsible for the poor shape of the marine ecosystems and the fishing industry as well as its poor image in the world.
5. Differentiated regime for the protection of small-scale coastal fishing. The importance of small-scale coastal fishing is stressed in all the EU's reports, but so far little has been done in this direction. Financial resources were used to reduce small-scale coastal fisheries (some 6000 coastal vessels were withdrawn).

Following on from this general position, we would like to make the following proposals concerning the reform of the CFP:

- Small-scale coastal fishing should be defined as fishing carried out by vessels using passive fishing gear, irrespective of vessel size.

- Fishing capacity should be determined on the basis of the dynamics of fishing vessels depending on the type of fishing gear used.
- Transferable fishing rights should not be applied.
- There should be a fund for one-off payments for the scrapping of vessels using fishing techniques contributing to the poor situation, which are energy-intensive, and also for changing activity.
- Creation of European organisations of different interest groups because differences actually exist; their management should be elected and not appointed.
- VMS should not be installed on coastal vessels and installation of the AIS system should be obligatory on vessels with towed nets and purse seines.
- A national fisheries inspection service should be set up immediately and form part of the European fisheries inspection service .
- Support for collective fisheries organisations for effective participation and active involvement in defining, accepting and checking the implementation of the CFP.
- A fee should be payable for large-scale fishing which would be used for research and protection.
- The system of collecting fisheries data should be based on quality research and not on a statement from the fisherman.
- Improvement of the image of the fisheries sector (differentiation of fishermen and vessel owners at national and European level).
- The dynamics of leisure fishing should be recorded (human resources, fishing gear, vessel tonnage, engine power, catch).
- The limitation of days at sea should not be applied to vessels using passive fishing gear.
- Management plans should not only refer to stocks or types of fish but should also constitute ecosystem management plans.
- Discards should be reduced through the use of 50mm square mesh at the cod-end and by removing the towed fishing gear and purse seines in areas where there is a concentration of young fish, rivers, river mouths, posidonia beds, the edges of lagoons and fish breeding sites.
- Effective implementation of EU Regulations Nos 1005/2008 and 1010/2009.

- Creation of a product traceability system. We have long been proposing to cut the upper tail fin from imported products and the lower tail fin from farmed fish products so that imported products are not described as Greek and farmed fish are not described as wild.
- Creation of fish farming parks in the open sea in order to decongest the coastal zone.
- Use of alternative fuel to reduce the emission of pollutants and oil consumption (using liquid natural gas, etc.).
- Financial support for small-scale fishermen for disasters, whether or not recurring, caused by extreme weather and sea mammals.
- Promotion of parallel activities for small-scale fishermen to enhance their income.
- Access to the 3 nautical miles zone should be restricted to fishing by small vessels without depriving them of the right to operate within the entire economic zone as well as in international waters, with the relevant licences.
- EU Regulations 26/2004 and 1281/2005 on main and subsidiary gear should be repealed immediately because there is always the risk that many gears used for coastal fishing will be prohibited.
- Tuna purse seines should be banned immediately.
- Immediate posting on the Ministry's website of vessels engaged in illegal fishing activities and the sites where they are operating.
- EU Regulation 1967/2006 should be implemented in Greece immediately and Mr Kontos' unlawful Ministerial Decision No 164198/03-03-08 on the 1 mile zone should be repealed.

We hope that this time the CFP will be the result of a serious, responsible approach instead of being based on political compromises and blackmail.

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