



## A FUTURE MARITIME POLICY FOR THE UNION

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BERTIE ARMSTRONG, CHIEF EXECUTIVE SCOTTISH FISHERMEN'S  
FEDERATION

### Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity to address the joint hearing on this most important of policies for the Union. I am here to present a view from the fishing industry and I have two keywords for you.

- **Responsibility** – to sustainably harvest the renewable natural food resource from our seas.
- **Balance:** balance between, on the one hand actions in addressing what management measures we will apply to fishing: and on the other, how this will take account of our responsibility for responsible stewardship of the marine environment.

### The Green Paper

The aim and objectives of a coherent Maritime Policy are shared by all – how can it be otherwise when the aim is achievement of the full sustainable potential of the sea-based activity?

Efforts to retain Europe's leadership in sustainable development make note of the economic importance of the maritime economy, and develops a theme of innovation. This leads me to my first reference to **responsibility**. The responsibility I want to emphasise that which exists, within any Maritime Policy, to sustainably harvest the renewable natural food resource from our seas. "But that is already accepted" I hear most people say – well is it? Actually, there is a much greater tendency to regard fishing as a by product after precautionary measures to protect the environment are in place. I am not objecting, in any way, to measures to protect the environment. I am, however, introducing the second keyword, **balance** into the equation. When measures are proposed – the tools to manage our relations with the oceans – than we must apply to these measures a **responsible** and **balanced** way.

What exactly do I mean by **responsible** sustainable harvesting of our natural resource? As a Union, we are avid users of the seafood form of protein in our diet, born of centuries of availability and our own national preferences. We have a modern, complex seafood industry to satisfy these needs and desires, with a great deal of importation of products that we like and a great deal of export of our own catches

and products. With this as a backdrop, if we take any measures which unnecessarily damage our own capacity to harvest, then the void will be immediately filled by imports, caught by people, using methods in places over which we have no control; and then shipped to us in refrigerated transport over thousands of food miles. The place of member states in the market and in the infrastructures that support it will be lost, never to be recovered. This exposes then the essence of what I mean by **responsibility**. If we don't make the sustainable best of this resource, we will still eat fish, but we will have exported the responsibility to control the effect on the environment.

On then to what I mean by "balance". A word or two of background would be appropriate. The Fishing industry is generally on the defensive regarding its public image. Economically, we are in overall Union terms, not a very significant economic player – we are in our own fishing areas of course, but realistically, we have little global muscle. In contrast, some other elements of the maritime picture are so powerful and have such an effect on our lives that their place is taken as unquestioned. The oil and gas industry is a shining example of this. We in the fishing industry, by contrast, tend to be an easy target in environmental discussions and it is this that generates our present image.

Most of the negative perception of the fishing industry is a result of superficial, scientifically unsupported comment. If you question a random EU citizen as to what he thinks is happening to fish stocks, you will hear that the industry is largely doomed. That would be wrong, speaking for Scotland as an example – 5 from 7 of our target species are in rude good health and the others are the subject of recovery plans. We must take action to redress this public perception gap, by telling the true story more often. A good example of how the debate may assume a superficial nature is in the ICES advice for cod.

I have not mentioned our own responsibility as an industry in the stewardship of the environment. Speaking again of the Scottish industry as an example, the last 5 years have seen some radical change. We reduced the whitefish fleet by 65% in response to cod recovery and we now have the smallest footprint at any time in history. Further, the industry leadership is properly aware of the need to understand and contribute to fishery and environmental science. We recognise that a healthy environment is a productive environment and are quite prepared to make every contribution to that, including, where necessary, the swallowing of bitter pills.

If the responsibility to make the best of our sustainable seafood resources is accepted, then this will bring the economic benefits of a sustainable, profitable industry to the communities in the coastal regions where the industry is based.

I would like to address tools to manage our relations with the oceans – referring at last to the title of this session!

Marine spatial planning is an obvious tool in the box, and its use will require great care. It will look neat if each activity is allocated a box or channel, but flexibility will be required to account for change. In no sector is this more important than in fisheries. Climate change is one example of how things will be different as the years

pass. Closed areas for fishing deserve a special mention. They are often cited as an advantage to fishing, but I would recommend the following tests:

- What are the conditions in the area at the start?
- What is the aim?
- How will it be measured?
- What is the timescale and exit strategy?

Perhaps the most obvious tool for fisheries is the Common Fisheries Policy, the CFP. The major item in its reform has been the creation of Regional Advisory Councils, to bring stakeholders properly into consultation. It is early days, but there have been some early successes, most recently for instance, the Cod Symposium of 9 & 10 March in Edinburgh. For the CFP to work effectively as a tool of Maritime Policy, we must move away from short term, politically dominated decision making to longer term science based plans for fisheries.

### Conclusion

So to conclude, thank you for your time and I leave you with the keywords for the place of fishing in the Union's Maritime Policy:

- **Responsibility** – to sustainably harvest the renewable natural food resource from our seas.
- **Balance:** balance between, on the one hand actions in addressing what management measures we will apply to fishing: and on the other, how this will take account of our responsibility for responsible stewardship of the marine environment.

Bertie Armstrong  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Fishermen's Federation  
24 Rubislaw Terrace  
Aberdeen  
AB10 1XE

Tel: +44(0)1224 646944  
Fax: +44(0)1224 647058  
Mob: +44(0)7801 626822