

SPEECH FOR DIRECTOR GENERAL AGUIAR MACHADO

SEARICA CONFERENCE: WHAT CAN EUROPE DO FOR A BETTER INTERNATIONAL OCEAN GOVERNANCE?

2ND DECEMBER 2015

Chair, Vice Chairs, Honourable Members of the Intergroup, Presidents, Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to speak here today. The Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup is instrumental in promoting the sustainable development of Europe's blue economy. I am confident that we will continue to work together to ensure the sustainable development of our seas and oceans, both in Europe and beyond.

Oceans and their resources need to be protected

It is hard to overstate the importance of our oceans. Oceans have a **key role** as climate regulators. They provide 50% of the oxygen and absorb 30% of the CO₂ around us. Oceans also play an important role in our economy: fishing, energy, tourism, shipping as well as emerging sectors such as marine biotechnology are directly linked to the sea and its resources. In Europe alone, the blue economy provides around 5 million jobs and contributes with around 550 billion euros to our wealth.

However, oceans are facing increasing pressures from different sources. 30% of commercial fish stocks are overfished. Nearly 50% of marine biodiversity has been destroyed since 1970. Almost 12.7 million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans each year. The average sea surface temperature has increased over the past 50 years, and acidification has caused 50% of world coral reefs to disappear. And, on top of over-exploitation, pollution and climate change, it is estimated that the global population will increase to 9 billion by 2030, adding pressure on the oceans in our race for food, minerals and energy.

In the face of these pressures, we need to keep our oceans healthy. Because only healthy oceans can play their vital role as climate change regulators and as a source of jobs and growth.

Oceans offer economic opportunities that also help in tackling climate change

The blue economy offers great potential: for our decarbonisation efforts *and* for sustainable growth. For example, industry tells us that ocean energy could help to avoid 276 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually by 2050. Offshore wind farms are already starting to take off.

EU action

The EU has recognised the challenges and the opportunities we face in ensuring healthy oceans and sustainable blue growth. And we have decided to take action, on many, many fronts:

We have put in place a **robust set of environmental rules** to protect the marine environment, to ensure a sustainable use of marine resources and to help oceans continue to play their role in buffering climate change.

We have developed **legislation that requires countries across Europe to plan the use of maritime space**. This allows countries to predict and manage the cumulative impact of maritime activities on the seas. It also gives certainty to potential investors.

We are boosting the blue economy to create sustainable **blue growth**. With our EU-level blue growth strategy. With regional strategies to address common policy challenges in our different sea-basins. And with our upcoming **blue growth calls**, which will support technological innovation and interregional cooperation and road-mapping. Next year the Commission is dedicating about 7 million euros to support blue careers, blue technologies and blue labs.

We have created the Ocean Energy Forum for industry and other stakeholders to develop a strategic roadmap for the development of the **ocean energy sector**.

We continue to **promote sustainable fisheries**, both within and outside the EU. Internally, our reformed Common Fisheries Policy is already yielding results, with an increasing number of healthy stocks. Beyond the EU, we are pushing for more concerted action and better fisheries management where needed, and continuing our successful fight against illegal fishing worldwide.

Finally, we, together with the Member States, are investing heavily in **marine and maritime research**, to the tune of about 2 billion euros per year. We are encouraging scientists to cooperate better and to share more information. And we are giving researchers free access to maritime information.

International Ocean Governance

But the challenges that our oceans face today do not recognise national boundaries. We have a shared responsibility to take global action to protect our seas and develop the blue economy in a sustainable way.

I am sure we all agree: EU action alone is not enough to create a level playing field across all oceans and seas. Nor is it enough to avoid the kind of damage that we have witnessed with the land-based economies.

There is already good progress through the development of a new **UNCLOS Implementing Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction** (BBNJ) and the adoption of a sustainable development goal for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans.

However, this is just one part of our efforts to ensure effective **international ocean governance**. We want to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with our international partners on *all* aspects of ocean governance.

That is why, over the past months, we have carried out a **public consultation**, seeking views on the effectiveness of the current ocean governance framework, on possible gaps, and on ways to improve both at international and regional levels. This consultation closed on the 15th of October. We are now analysing the contributions and expect to publish the final results before the end of the year.

But some **major trends** are already clear. **First**, nearly all participants considered that current international ocean governance is not effective enough in ensuring sustainable ocean management. This is not necessarily because we don't have the right framework, but rather because of inefficient implementation and insufficient coordination. **Second**, all sectors of the economy would benefit from a more effective international ocean governance framework that ensures a level playing field, clarity on resource-management and sustainable oceans. **Third**, regional approaches should be strengthened in order to manage regional seas in a coordinated and coherent way. **Fourth**, the EU could contribute to capacity building in developing countries to improve ocean governance. **Fifth**, we need to learn more about the high seas, particularly the deep sea, and gain a better understanding of the functioning of ecosystem services and the cumulative impacts of human activities. **Finally**, stakeholders believe knowledge should be shared through open databases.

In addition to the public consultation, Commissioner Vella conducted a listening tour to hear the views of our international partners. All these contributions will feed into the international ocean governance initiative that we are planning to table next year.

And, as Commissioner Vella said at this year's Our Ocean conference in Chile: the EU would be delighted to host the event's 2017 edition in Europe, to keep the momentum set in motion by US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014. I do hope that this will contribute to tangible action to preserve the oceans' wealth and health.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Commission's work on international ocean governance has one clear aim: allowing the blue economy to take off while making sure that we use resources responsibly and sustainably. We must avoid making the same mistakes in the seas as we did on land.

At COP21, we have a unique opportunity to reach an inclusive and legally binding climate agreement, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C. Better-governed oceans will do their bit to keep global warming in check.

Yet ensuring healthy oceans is not just a task for the Commission. It is a task for all of us, together, here in Europe and abroad. I count on your support.

Thank you.