



MINUTES OF INTERGROUP SEAS AND COASTAL AFFAIRS MEETING WITH COMMISSIONER MARIA DAMANAKI

24 March 2010

Corinne Lepage began by giving a warm welcome to the audience and by thanking Commissioner Damanki for having accepted to address the Seas and Coastal Zones Intergroup (the Intergroup). She highlighted the important commitment made by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) in agreeing to provide secretariat support to the Intergroup. **Mrs Lepage** also highlighted the work of her colleagues and underlined the growing strength of the Intergroup which to date was composed of over forty Members from across six political groups.

Mrs Lepage stated that the two prime objectives of the Intergroup were firstly, to ensure a coordinated approach amongst the Members on issues linked to maritime affairs and which were currently on the EU's agenda. Secondly, the Intergroup aimed to be a force for proposals and in this regard, it would work alongside other important stakeholders. Issues already identified for discussion included, employment in the maritime sector, adaptation to climate change and maritime waste. However, stressed **Mrs Lepage**, the implementation of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), was viewed as being the essential topic that should take centre stage at the Intergroup's first public meeting.

In this respect, there were many questions that needed to be addressed, said **Mrs Lepage**. These included, the type of governance structures that should be put in place, financing of the IMP, the future for maritime basins in the context of the IMP and also how to ensure coherence between the various sectoral policies of the Commission. **Mrs Lepage**, highlighted that she and the other Members of the Intergroup hoped to receive reassurances that the creation of a Commissioner with responsibility for Climate Change would not lead to the development of climate change policy being isolated from the other policy concerns of the Commission, such as the IMP.

Mrs Marianou (Secretary General, CPMR), began by giving an introduction to the work and the role of the CPMR, an organisation of 162 member regions that had existed since 1973. The CPMR was an organisation that promoted sustainable and balanced development across the EU's territory. Furthermore, its legitimacy was based on its membership of public authorities that were elected representatives and therefore, accountable to European citizens.

Mrs Marianou expressed her satisfaction that the CPMR had been instrumental in the creation of the Intergroup and that this example of constructive collaboration could help to boost the chances of sustainable maritime development of Europe. She went on to highlight two issues that in her view were crucial and which could be progressed in partnership. These were firstly, the issue of improving maritime governance, in particular at the level of the regions and sea basins. Secondly, the development of the IMP as an integral part of the EU's 2020 strategy was viewed as an area where it was important to join forces. **Mrs Marianou** believed that Commissioner Damanaki would be a keen advocate of the IMP within the College of Commissioners and in conclusion, she underlined the CPMR's commitment to contribute to the EU's discussions so as to help Europe achieve its maritime ambition.

Mrs Lepage thanked **Mrs Marianou** for her contribution and then passed the floor to Commissioner **Damanaki**.

Please consult the following website link for the speech of Commissioner Damanaki.

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/126&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Mrs Lepage thanked **Mrs Damanaki** for her introductory speech. She then opened up the floor to questions from Members.

Q (Gesine Meisner - ALDE): Given the constraints that we are facing in Europe, particularly as regards population growth, maritime and coastal areas represent an important potential for the EU's development to help confront many challenges we face. The Commissioner highlighted several of the Parliament's committees with reference to developing maritime policy however, little was said as regards the Transport committee and the promotion of EU maritime transport. What are the Commissioner's views on this matter?

A: It is my intention to fully cooperate with the Parliament's Transport Committee and with Mr Siim Kallas, Commissioner for Transport. Maritime transport is a key area that needs to be developed, particularly when we consider that maritime transport has a lower carbon footprint than most other modes of transport. We need to push ahead with plans for short sea shipping routes and the Motorways of the Sea. I am keen to collaborate with the European Parliament's Transport committee and suggest that we bring together the various committees that have a stake in this issue for overall discussions. The idea is not to interfere with the Committees' competences, but rather to involve all committees with responsibility in this field.

Q (Alain Cadec - EPP - VP of the Intergroup): The Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) looks at how to stimulate growth across all sectors linked to the maritime activities, including fisheries sector. Will regionalization of the Common Fisheries Policy and maritime territorial planning be genuinely helpful to the fisheries sector in tackling their current problems or could regionalization not just increase the burdens faced by this sector?

Q (Mathias Groote - S&D - VP of the Intergroup): The shipyard industry across Europe and in particular, in Lower Saxony continues to face severe problems. What are your plans in the months and years ahead to tackle these challenges?

Q: (Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines - EPP): What is your view on the role of scientific evidence in helping coastal areas to confront the challenges posed by climate change? Also do you have any plans to develop specific policies aimed at tackling the problems of sensitive areas, such as the Mediterranean?

First round of questions - responses by Mrs Damanaki

There will be plenty of opportunities in future to discuss in greater detail reform of the fisheries sector. However, it is important to stress at this stage that radical and deep reform is necessary and pressing. Serious problems exist with the current policy and new challenges are there to be confronted. Currently DG MARE is summarizing the responses received during the recent consultation and the early results of these will be discussed at the next Council meeting of Fisheries Ministers. We have taken into account the contents of Mrs Patrao Neves' report and we plan to have a first draft of our proposals for the future policy by the end of this year.

Regionalisation of Fisheries policies is very important yet the aim of a regionalised approach is not to increase the burdens experienced by the fisheries sector. My hope is for the creation of Regional Councils afforded real powers and being given the ability to take meaningful decisions, in accordance with the Lisbon Treaty and alongside the member States. This does not mean renationalisation of the CFP, but rather the return to a truly regional approach.

The role of scientific research in Fisheries Policy is without doubt very important and the EU's research and innovation programmes will be put at the service of the IMP. We will look at the results provided by scientific evidence and this will provide the basis on which we determine the necessary action and regulation.

As regards pollution in the Mediterranean, we now have the Marine Strategy Framework Directive which should help us address this issue. It is important that we move ahead with its implementation.

As regards the current situation in the shipyard industry, there are serious problems that need to be addressed. Perhaps a way forward could be through the creation of a funding scheme for the industry in support of those experiencing difficulties and which would address the matter of innovation in the industry. This is an issue that is worth exploring with Commissioner Antonio Tajani.

Second Round of Questions

Q (Chris Davies - ALDE - VP of the Intergroup): Your portfolio requires taking leadership across a number of key issues. We have a serious concern regarding the appallingly high number of discards within the fishing sector. How do you intend to tackle this matter? In addition, we have a major problem of pollution and waste in our seas, particularly highlighted by the existence of vast amounts of floating rubbish. These problems must be tackled on a cross-sectoral, cross departmental basis. Therefore, how do you intend to address them?

Q (Isabella Lovin - Greens - VP of the Intergroup): The fisheries sector depends heavily on evidence gathered through science and research, yet there is an enormous deficiency as regards the availability of facts and figures on the economics of our fisheries policies. Are you considering the introduction of stress tests on different types of fisheries management schemes? In addition, are efforts being made to recover information on the consequences for coastal areas of short term and long term decision making? Can we compare the contribution made by fisheries to coastal economies with the contribution made by other economic activities, such as tourism?

Q (Anna Rosbach - EFD - VP of the Intergroup): There are increasingly fewer fish left in our seas and a major contributor to this state of affairs is the effects of the 'plastic soup' which is found across vast areas of our seas and coastline. Would you agree that a way of

tackling this problem could be to encourage fishermen to go out in their boats and retrieve much of this rubbish, rather than to use their boats for fishing?

Q (Elisa Ferreira - S&D): It is crucial that we adopt a truly integrated approach to these issues, by bringing together the various layers of governance. The Commission needs to develop a variety of instruments whereby it can interconnect with the national and sub national levels of government. In addition, the Commission needs to reinforce exchange of expertise and cooperation between the different levels.

Q (Estelle Grelier - S&D): There remains inherent an contradiction between our efforts to promote economic development in coastal areas whilst at the same time imposing environmental constraints such as those of Natura 2000 which curtail areas defined as being 'sensitive' from realizing their economic potential. In France this is particularly highlighted by the problem of setting up wind farms in certain particular areas. What are your views on how best to tackle this matter?

Responses by Mrs Damanaki

As concerns the problem of discards of fish we must aim to eliminate these practices which are unacceptable. In order to achieve this we could look to exploit several different weapons. For example, we could look to promote mixed fisheries possibly through funding the selectivity of gears. Another means to wipe out this practice will be through improved maritime surveillance policy which can help us to make the fisheries sector more sustainable. A genuine EU maritime spatial plan could also help us to confront the issue of discards. We have taken some steps forward, but more needs to be done. We need to reinforce cooperation between the Members States and the Commission.

Clearly when looking at the environmental and social impacts of fishing, we need to take a long term view, looking ahead 10/20 years. This will help us to plan a more sustainable future for the fisheries industry.

Whilst the scientific advice that we have at our disposal is not always complete, it is certainly the best quality advice that we can afford. This advice comes from various sources, including external scientific sources and we have to accept that once we have been given the advice and considered the implications of scientific advice, we then need to be consistent and follow its recommendations.

As regards the plastic soup, it is major problem yet it is questionable whether it would be possible to persuade fisherman to leave their jobs to go out and collect this plastic waste. Fishermen are particular and have a specific way of viewing their profession, which would make it difficult to persuade them to use their boats for retrieving plastic waste rather than for catching fish. However, it may be possible to provide fisherman with incentives to not go out in their fishing boats.

It is true that there are important inconsistencies and incompatibilities in our EU policies. A way to address the issue of these inconsistencies could be to move available funding towards the practice of selectivity, greening of the fisheries sector and the promotion of a more sustainable approach. The way to achieve this is through building bridges between the Members States, the European Commission and the Regions to get the buy-in of all those with a stake in this issue.

Q (Maria Patrao Neves - EPP): It is important for the IMP to have a global reach and that it can be applied to areas with geographic specificities. How will the IMP take account of the needs of the outermost regions? Also what indications wan you provide on the future financial aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy? Also what are the indications for funding under the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)?

Q (Jaroslaw Walesa - EPP): What is your view on the implementation of the ecosystem approach towards the fisheries sector?

Q (Georgios Koumoutsakos - EPP): What are your views as regards short sea shipping? Also we are facing the challenge of how to deal with smaller ships and vessels once they come to the end of their life. Would you be receptive to the idea of providing support for recycling smaller ships?

Q (MEP): Small fishing communities feel acutely the impact of the EU's maritime policies. How will the economic and social needs of small fishing communities being taken into account by the IMP?

Q (Diane Dodds - NI): The EU's fisheries policies need to ensure that decisions taken which impact on small fishing communities and on the availability of jobs in local areas must be taken at the level closest to the people concerned by the outcomes. Also the IMP needs to examine the problems of marine pollution and the safe disposal of ships, particularly since the disposal of ships often takes place in developing countries which are reluctant and ill-equipped to undertake their obligations in the most environmentally conscious manner. What are your views on these matters?

Reponses by Mrs Damanacki

Small scale fisheries represent an important sector and we are currently considering proposals that target this sector. Work still needs to be done in the Council, in particular, the Member States need to provide a definition of small scale fishing.

As concerns the Fisheries Council in December, it is crucial that we avoid Member States bargaining tactics. In order to determine the rules we will stick with independent scientific advice and only that which has been commissioned by the European Commission. Member States will not be allowed to shape the rules on the basis of their scientific advice provided from national sources. We need to achieve a level playing for our fishermen and in order to do so, we need to decide upon rules that are based on impartial advice and which all players will need to abide by.

Action in support of short sea shipping should be supported however further discussion needs to take place with DG Move and with DG Enterprise to see how best to take this forward. It would not be possible to provide financial incentives to all those wishing to recycle medium sized ships. However, there could be grounds for considering a system of incentives for recycling these types of ships.

With respect to using fish in the processing industry, this of course cannot be prevented however, European Consumers must be provided with information as to what they are buying, which means improved labeling. By improving traceability of fish products we can support consumers that favour more sustainable forms of fishing.

It is important that the needs of the outermost regions be taken into account by the IMP and to this end, I wish to see the creation of a Regional Advisory Council to deal with the concerns of the outermost regions. This matter needs to be looked into.

As regards the funding under the new Fisheries Regulation, these are presently being discussed however, no decisions have been taken as yet.

Mrs Damanki concluded by thanking the Intergroup and its Members for their questions and comments.

Mrs Lepage thanked all those present for having contributed to afternoon's debate. She again thanked the Commissioner for her presence and her responses to the questions posed. In conclusion, **Mrs Lepage** stressed the need for a coherent and ambitious EU maritime policy for Europe. In this context, she ended with the proposal for the establishment of "European Etats Généraux de la Mer", which shall be understood to mean "multi-lateral talks between maritime leaders".