

Common Fisheries Policy

CFP reform: Damanaki supports American model

By Anne Eckstein | Thursday 31 May 2012

The European Commission has never made any secret of the fact that, when drafting its proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), it drew inspiration from what is being done elsewhere – and in some cases proving positive – in terms of fisheries management, and in particular in the United States. This was made crystal clear at the 30 May hearing by the European Parliament’s Committee on Fisheries (PECH), during which Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki, accompanied by Jane Lubchenco, US under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere, presented and expressed support for the American model and highlighted its common points with the key elements of the proposed CFP reform.

In a joint statement, Damanaki and Lubchenco stress the shared goal and determination of the EU and the United States to work together to implement sustainable fishing that is economically profitable to coastal communities, and the consequent need to put in place policies and practices that encourage sustainability and long-term prosperity. The statement identifies the tools seen as most effective for achieving these objectives: an approach to fisheries management based on scientific findings, the precautionary principle and ecosystems; scientific research partnerships to develop innovative management methods and strategies; the fight against illegal, unreported and undeclared (IUU) fishing; the development of sustainable aquaculture to meet growing demand; and global implementation of this approach and best fisheries practices.

Damanaki reminded MEPs that in September 2011 she signed a cooperation agreement with the United States on combating illegal fishing (a joint task force is being set up) and announced that she planned to do the same with Japan next summer.

“WE SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE”

Lubchenco explained that, in the wake of the adoption by Congress, in 2006, of the Magnuson-Stevens Act on fisheries conservation and management, considerable improvements have been observed in fishery resources in US fishing zones. The system imposes catch limits and reporting measures in all fisheries managed at federal level in order to put a stop to overfishing and rebuild stocks. The latest data available show that 79% of stocks are now at maximum sustainable yield (level required to ensure the stock’s survival) or a higher level. One third of stocks under federal management are managed through a transferable fisheries concessions mechanism, which according to Lubchenco helps fishermen act more effectively in terms of total allowable catches (TACs) by giving them more flexibility, higher profits and a better quality of life. She even explained that management is regional within the three-mile limit but federal in waters between three and 200 miles, which results in more appropriate decisions locally – including the defence

of small-scale fisheries. Such measures, she added, are “very close” to those proposed by the Commission for CFP reform.

“We speak the same language,” said Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE, Ireland). “I hate to hear that the United States does better than the Europeans, but in this case I admit that it’s true and that the Americans are more advanced than we are,” observed Chris Davies (ALDE, UK), who added that the problem in Europe stems chiefly from a reluctance and lack of political commitment to implement the needed reforms. “How can this equation be solved,” he asked.

MEPs asked a lot of technical questions on how the American system works (transferable concessions, quotas, decentralisation, collection of scientific data) and on the socio-economic implications as well as support for fishermen during the transition. This transition apparently frightens MEPs. Without denying the difficulties but also without developing the matter further, Lubchenco admitted that “things were not always easy and the sector suffered,” but “we have to look to the future”.

GUIDED DISCOURSE?

While MEPs welcomed the possibility to discuss the American example with a representative of the US administration and found the exercise useful, Damanaki’s initiative prompted reservations among certain members. Maria do Ceu Patrao Neves (EPP, Portugal) found Lubchenco’s presentation “guided” because it was too openly favourable to Damanaki’s proposals. “It’s too good, too smoothed over to be true,” she said, voicing doubts about the assertion that the reforms implemented in the United States have all been positive and have all been applied without too much difficulty. Can this model be transposed to Europe all that easily? “No,” she said. The whole system is based on reliable scientific data and the collection of such data, said the Portuguese MEP by way of example. She regrets that Lubchenco did not answer questions on what is done in her country in this respect (who, how, using what method, harmonised or not, at what cost and who pays). In the EU, she noted, this is the responsibility of member states. Who is going to do it? How? Has a common methodology been developed? Who is going to pay? What resources will be available? She pointed out that the countries most concerned are also the most economically vulnerable (Spain, Greece, Portugal, etc). “The United States is a single country. The EU has 27 member states. We can of course go see what is being done elsewhere but it isn’t possible to transpose another system as such: it has to be adapted to our reality,” she concluded.

“Things were not always easy and the sector suffered, but we have to look to the future,” acknowledged Lubchenco

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