

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSION CHAIR

Minister for Agriculture and Food
Other Ministers of the CPCs
Secretary of State for Fisheries
President of the Regional Coordination Commission for Development of the Algarve
Mayor of the Loulé municipality
Distinguished delegates of the CPCs
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all thank the Portuguese authorities for hosting this annual meeting in this magnificent region of the Algarve. Likewise, I wish to thank the European Commission for providing funds necessary for the holding of this annual meeting in a hybrid format, after 3 years of sub-optimal conditions due to the pandemic. My thanks also to the ICCAT Secretariat for all the impressive work done to make this meeting possible.

In a few minutes we will start our work on the management of tuna stocks. As ever, this will keep us very busy and will demand the best of our will and our ability to find workable solutions that will preserve the effectiveness of our Commission to manage our stocks sustainably. I wish to draw your attention to a certain number of issues that, this year, constitute essential priorities for our work:

- We need to ensure the continuity of measures for those species which expire this year, even if only a roll over (swordfish, southern albacore, ...) to avoid any legal vacuum in the management of these stocks;
- Despite the efforts these last years, Panel 1 has not been able to reach an agreement for a new measure on tropical tunas. This is fundamental and pressing;
- The Panel 2 Management Procedure for Atlantic bluefin tuna is also an essential priority where we cannot fail;
- We should continue our efforts to secure adequate funding in the regular budget to cover the key activities that are still largely funded by voluntary contributions, mainly the meetings and the science;
- We also need to encourage CPCs to volunteer for hosting of meetings.

But over and beyond these priorities for this year, it is my strong view that the work of ICCAT in the years to come will not, cannot be just business as usual. Fisheries management has evolved considerably in recent times. When I started out, many years ago, we only talked about fish. Today, we also talk about marine ecosystems and biodiversity. And we all know this new paradigm is there to stay, so we have to ensure that the ICCAT of the immediate future is up to the task.

As you know, very soon we will probably have two new international instruments that may pose an existential challenge to our fisheries: the United Nation's BBNJ Convention and the Biodiversity 30x30 objective of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These two instruments may have an important bearing on tuna fisheries. And, while the objective of preserving marine biodiversity is one that I am sure we all agree upon, we should also do our best to ensure that such objective does not undermine the conduct of responsible and sustainable tuna fisheries.

Science tells us that fish is the healthiest animal protein in the world. Science also tells us that the carbon footprint of fisheries is generally lower than that of most land-based sources of animal protein, which means fish should be a strategic food source for the world under climate change. And we should also remember that among the Millennium objectives of the United Nations for 2030, the first and foremost is the "elimination of hunger and poverty", which in turn reminds us of the crucial role that fish and fisheries can play in achieving such objective.

This is why, while agreeing to implement the new international obligations on the preservation of marine biodiversity, we have to ensure that these do not prevent our fisheries from playing the crucial role they must have in the near future as a healthy, climate-friendly and sustainable source of food for people. In this context, easy solutions such as simply kicking out fisheries from very large oceanic areas will not be the best solution. There are practical ways to preserve biodiversity while continuing to conduct sustainable fisheries, and I am convinced that ICCAT can and should play a fundamental role in defining such solutions in the years to come.

The second challenge for our Commission is that of multilateralism. My experience at the European Union shows that ocean governance in general, and that of the fisheries in particular, will be multilateral or will not occur. But multilateralism has an essential condition: that of giving all countries a real opportunity to participate actively in decision making and election of officers. Presenting small countries with the fait accompli, the decisions having already been taken by the large countries, is not true multilateralism.

This is why I attach great importance to the discussion on decision taking methods, in particular in the context of the virtual working group that I have had the honour to chair these past few months. It is very important that all the Contracting Parties of our Commission feel truly involved in the decision-making process, and fairly so. I shall spare no effort to achieve a system which, while affording the necessary flexibility, provides an opportunity to all delegates to feel fully involved in consensus building.

The third major challenge for our Commission in the next few years is to uphold sustainable and responsible fishing in a world that is ever more dominated by the information society, where, unfortunately, it is increasingly easy to find public campaigns against worthy fishing activity. And these campaigns are neither innocent nor harmless: they contribute to giving fishing activity a poor image that has consequences for political decision making, and determination of consumer behaviour.

It is true that there are undesirable activities related with the fisheries: overexploitation of some resources, illegal fishing, and even slavery onboard some fishing vessels in the 21st century. These practices exist. But let there be no confusion: these activities do not affect the entire fishing industry. Against those who mix undesirable with responsible activity, and against those who talk about the fishing industry as if all those involved act in the same way, it is also ICCAT's responsibility to lead the fight against misunderstandings and biased information that undermine the entire fisheries sector, because of these few. Alongside illegal and abusive fishing, there is also legal, compliant, sustainable, transparent and socially responsible fishing.

Insofar as ICCAT is capable of ending overfishing, and combatting illegal fishing and socially unacceptable practices, we will have full legitimacy to uphold, clearly and without complexes, good, legal, transparent, sustainable, and socially responsible fishing, which will play an essential role in the supply of food for people and in the fight against poverty in the world under climate change.

I invite you all to work together to make our tuna fisheries an example for the whole world.

Muchas gracias, merci beaucoup, thank you very much and muito obrigado.