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15th July 2016**"Scientists agree on improved stocks in European fisheries but work still to be done"**

Europêche has welcomed the clear words from the scientific community and Commissioner Vella at today's seminar on 'the State of Fish Stocks' organised by the European Commission. The Commissioner echoed the words of the scientists that in general, fishing mortality has reduced and stocks are growing, making it a more profitable industry for the fishermen. However, despite this good news, he reiterated that further efforts are needed when it comes to the Mediterranean.

The scientific data presented showed an increase in the number of fish stocks being fished in accordance with MSY, more robust stocks and the prospect of higher yield. The panel explained that many stocks have recovered and have delivered stable and sustainable catches showing that management over the years have been successful. Stocks such as northern hake, cod and plaice in the North Sea and sprat, herring and plaice in the Baltic have said to have flourished and across all ecoregions, a decrease in fishing mortality and an increase in stock levels has been observed for demersal, flatfish and pelagic stocks.

However, as Eskil Kirkegaard, leading ICES-scientist, pointed out that scientists are still unable to explain the situation with stocks such as sole in the Irish Sea and nephrops in the North Sea, which have both seen a decrease in fishing mortality but this has not been reflected in the stock size. This means that when calculating fishing mortality, other factors have to be taken into account such as species interactions and other human activities.

Managing Director of Europêche, Kathryn Stack, stated: *"It is essential that the positive trends and advice we have seen today in many stocks are translated into positive quotas. This is essential if we are to attempt to tackle the problem of choke species. For example, hake has exploded in the North Sea yet we have not seen the same increase reflected in the advice; a modest increase would actually increase choke species."*

Scientists agreed that more work needs to be done in the Mediterranean but that only 15 stocks were assessed this year which may make it difficult to draw real conclusions. Fishing mortality is still very high and the area would benefit from a possible TAC system for small pelagics and management plans in line with the CFP.

Ms. Stack continued: *"The fishing sector has to take the lead on the recovery of the Mediterranean together with the scientific community, governments and NGOs. Fishermen must be given a real say in forging fisheries policy because only through a real bottom-up approach will there be a better understanding of the rules, which will lead to a culture of compliance. We must also urge Member States and the EU to take adequate measures to reduce pollution, better management of coastal areas and also limit the impact of other human activities on the environment."*

Regarding the stock of Western Baltic cod, there was concern from the floor that the methodology used in the ICES assessments was flawed since recreational catches were included in the advice and given the lion's share of the quota at the expense of the commercial catch. It was also pointed out that huge cuts on this stock would impact upon vulnerable coastal communities in the region with irreversible consequences.

The economist Natacha Carvalho from the Joint Research Centre showed that overall, the economic performance of the EU fleet has been improving since 2014. It was said that the drivers of such positive developments have been a reduction in fuel costs by 9% following the 2008 fuel crisis. We have also witnessed a reduction in energy consumption by 25% and a reduction in effort (days at sea) by 1%. Nevertheless the sector remains vulnerable with loss of fishing grounds devoted to nature conservation and offshore wind farms, fewer young people entering the sector, reduced quotas and market saturation.

Whilst the performance of the large scale fleet has fared reasonably well, the small scale fleet of coastal regions are still suffering, with jobs and vessels slowly disappearing but is expected to improve by next year. It was also pointed out that economic performance of the fleet varied from region to region with North Sea and North East Atlantic fleets faring well yet Baltic fleets having deteriorated.

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Europêche represents the fisheries sector in Europe. Currently, the Association comprises 14 national organisations of fishing enterprises from the following 9 EU Member States: DE, DK, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL, UK.

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