

**Introductory remarks by Commissioner-designate Damanaki at the European
Parliament hearing, Strasbourg, 19 January 2010**

Introductory remarks prior to questions

President Fraga, Honourable Members,

Standing before the European Parliament as designated Commissioner is a great honour. It is a high point in the life of a long standing Member of a national Parliament of a Member State which is deep-rooted in Europe. My own European convictions are strong because they are a product of a long political process which was not always easy.

Europe has had a strong policy (indeed one of the few common ones) on Fisheries for decades and also seeks to develop the maritime sector coherently and sustainably. We have to succeed. I welcome warmly the fact that fisheries will – in the new institutional environment of Lisbon treaty -be subject to codecision as the ordinary legislative procedure, securing thus an even greater role for the European Parliament.

We have a solid foundation on which to build due to the work of my predecessors, especially Mr Borg. However, there are areas in which we can– together the EP, Commission, Member States and the stakeholders – engineer change for the better.

Allow me to touch on FISHERIES first.

The ongoing CFP reform is vital and will, of course, be a central focus of my work. Judging from the nearly four hundred contributions received, the public consultation on the Green Paper has succeeded in gathering a broad range of views from stakeholders and the public. I will take the consultation very seriously into account, as well as the views of your Committee. The time for decision and implementation has come.

I have four keywords to mention:

1.Sustainability is a keyword for my future proposals to you and the Council. Environmental, economic, and social sustainability. I believe we can find the synthesis and the balance between the three and make them work in harmony, not only in the long term, but here and now.

We can fish less and earn more. We can address the overcapacity of our fleets to make our fisheries more profitable. At the same time we have to safeguard small-scale fisheries from negative effects. Fisheries are more than a source of food. For our coastal areas fisheries represent security, culture and history. It is a way of life. It is a life with many difficulties to which I am well acquainted since I was born in a fisheries village. Only profitable fisheries can guarantee the livelihood of fishermen and their families. For fisheries to be profitable, the seas must have fish in a sustainable way.

We can fish less and valorise fisheries more. We can promote all the appropriate methods of fishing management and develop environmentally friendly aquaculture. We can face the economically wasteful and nonsensical practice of discards and make it a thing of the past. We need to and can invest in the quality, freshness and labelling of our products, providing good food to European families.

2. Democratic responsibility for all the partners of the sector is another keyword. The fisheries policy is a common policy but this can be achieved without taking the most detailed decisions at the highest political levels. We have to face the possibility of decentralisation and regionalisation of our policy, the possibility of active involvement of the stakeholders, while of course fully respecting the Treaties.

3. Global dimension of our fisheries policy has to be fit for the 21st century. It is fair to say that fisheries Partnership Agreements need a better delivery. They can secure a safer international environment for our industry and a development advantage for our partner countries. In terms of providing sustainability for their resources, creating new jobs, building their ancillary industry and respecting the democratic and human rights. These are areas in which Parliament has expertise and strong presence, which can be strengthened. The Lisbon treaty –putting EP and Council on an equal basis – demands for a qualitative change. Nevertheless this is not an issue depending on my responsibility only; it is a horizontal issue, concerning the whole of the Commission and the Council. I look forward to exhaust all the margins to have the better answer in the New Framework agreement.

4. Compliance is the last, but not the least, word I want to mention. The credibility of our policy is at stake. We need guarantees for compliance and a fair competition with neighbouring countries fishing in the same waters. I count on your expressed support on our Control Framework. We have to cooperate with Member States to achieve monitoring for our industry and blocking imports of the IUU fishing products into the Union.

Let me turn to MARITIME issues.

The Blue Book has received support and impulse from the European Parliament and the Council. So, now is the moment to go further than the practice of seeking synergies of the different sectors. We have to forge ahead with the concept of an integrated sea-basin management to provide our main sea regions with tailor-made solutions, as President Barroso described in his political guidelines. Coming from an island with rich maritime tradition, starting from the depths of antiquity, from the Minoan civilisation, I will be proud to contribute to blue growth in Europe.

We can focus on:

1. Opportunities for blue growth. Innovative maritime spatial planning can unleash the potential of unexploited maritime resources for alternative energy, low carbon transport, trans-European energy networks and blue biotechnologies. The motorways of the sea, short sea shipping, coastal tourism can create new perspectives.

2. Creation of blue jobs. The promotion of maritime skills and the establishment of the certificate of maritime excellence can contribute in this direction.

3.Security for Citizens, Fisheries and Transport. The development of a new integrated maritime surveillance system is a core challenge towards a European maritime space without barriers.

4.Reinforcement of the knowledge economy thanks to leading European marine research. We can contribute to this with the establishment and good functioning of the new integrated EMODNET (European Maritime Observation Data Network) and MARATLAS (European Atlas for seas).

If I am confirmed as Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, I will get straight down to work to make a real and positive difference for those whose everyday lives depend on fishing and for our coastal environment. I would be immensely honoured to play my part, shaping these policies together with you in a real partnership, so as to give our fisheries and maritime communities a viable future.

Thank you.