

17th North Atlantic Fisheries Ministers Conference
Reykjavík, Iceland – 2 to 4 July 2012

Communiqué

North Atlantic Fisheries Ministers enhance the sustainability of marine resources by taking practical steps to eradicate discards and address market challenges

Mr Steingrímur J. Sigfússon, Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, hosted the 17th North Atlantic Fisheries Ministers Conference held in Reykjavík, Iceland from 2 to 4 July 2012. The European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Fisheries Ministers and senior representatives from Canada, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation participated in the Conference.

Minister Sigfússon pointed to the fact that the participating parties at this Conference represent 20% of world fish catches.

Effective policies leading to the eradication of discards

In a protein hungry world, it is unacceptable to waste any valuable food resources. FAO has estimated that over 7 million tonnes of fish could be discarded on an annual basis throughout the world. This wasteful practice of discarding must come to an end in the near future. Healthy marine ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition are crucial in providing for the livelihood of millions of people.

Experiences were shared on current and future approaches towards discarding. It was agreed that the major objective is to eliminate discards. To achieve this goal there is a need to involve stakeholders at all stages, giving incentives for fishermen to land and account for all catches. Flexibility in the system could also allow for live release.

Improvements in gear and vessel technology can both minimise discards and facilitate the utilisation of bycatch and byproducts. However, there is also a need for fisheries specific solutions, taking into account the *Food and Agriculture Organisations (FAO) International Guidelines for Bycatch Management and Reduction of Discards*.

Market challenges and opportunities

Increasingly, seafood consumers and governments are looking for proof that products come from legal and sustainable sources. Consumers recognise that seafood, whilst being a good and healthy product, is not an unlimited resource. Retailers are equally aware of this fact. Proof of sustainability is in many cases becoming a requirement for market entry, but it was recognised that traceability requirements should not unnecessarily impede trade.

Ecolabelling schemes, which are already recognised as a marketing tool, allow producers and consumers to take responsible decisions underlining sustainability. Such schemes should at least conform to the minimum substantive requirements of the *FAO Guidelines for the ecolabelling of fish and fishery products from marine capture fisheries*.

The 3rd UN Conference on sustainable development (RIO +20)

It was recognised at the 3rd United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 20 to 22 June 2012, that sustainable management of marine resources can contribute to the world food security challenge. The overall outcome of Rio +20 was welcomed.

Norway will host the 18th North Atlantic Fisheries Ministers Conference in 2013.