Opening remarks

I am honoured to have this opportunity to address this body today as President of the EU Fisheries Council. This is Ireland’s 7th Presidency of the EU and 2013 is the 40th anniversary of Ireland’s accession to the European Community.

In this Presidency, Ireland has set out an ambitious work programme aimed at delivering an agreed reform package for the CFP by the end of June. We are convinced that the programme must be ambitious if we are to achieve a successful Reform. Clearly this objective can only be realised if there is strong commitment from the Council and equal commitment and good working relationships with the Parliament and the Commission.

I will be concentrating my address on the Basic Regulation, in the context of the General Approach adopted by the Council of Ministers last June, and the December Pech Committee amendments to the original Commission proposal on the Basic Regulation.

I am of the opinion that agreement on the basic regulation can be
achieved by the end of our Presidency, however I fully appreciate the challenges we face in order to get there. As politicians and legislators, we all have a responsibility to deliver a reformed CFP which builds and protects the fish stocks around our shores, ensures a sustainable supply of fish for future generations, and provides for a viable livelihood for our fishers and all those who depend on this valuable natural resource for their economic and social wellbeing.

We have a window of opportunity open to us now, and there is a genuine willingness to work collectively towards the completion of this dossier. I have already addressed the PECH Committee of Parliament on the 22nd of January, and the CFP was a central topic on my first Council as President which took place on the 28th January. I was heartened by the level of support I received on both occasions for the Presidencies objectives and work programme, there was a recognition that both Parliament and Council needed to work cohesively if we were to have a successful outcome.

There are a number of areas which require thorough and careful consideration, one of those is of course the inter-institutional issue and its impact on Multi Annual Plans in particular, which form a cornerstone of the future CFP. This is a long running issue and let me be frank, I don’t have a magic solution right now. I do know that we must find a way forward within the confines of the Lisbon Treaty.
I made the issue the topic for the lunch time debate of Ministers at Council last week. Following a frank exchange, I can report that the Ministers were as one on the urgency they attached to finding a way forward. They offered to be both constructive and flexible in their efforts to find a pragmatic solution, which of necessity must recognise the respective competencies set out in the Treaty. I am considering how to take the issue forward and wish to work with you in partnership to try to resolve the dispute to our mutual satisfaction.

This inter institutional issue is a strategic issue which we must find a way of taking forward, but it should not be an issue which blocks progress on all other aspects of the Reform. While I am not able to guarantee success, I will guarantee to do all in my power to find an acceptable way forward over the period of the Irish Presidency.

On other aspects of the reform package, I feel that there is a lot of common ground between the Parliament and Council on many of the key areas, and I would be hopeful that progress can be swift on those. Other areas will require some extra attention as I said, and I will refer to them in my concluding words having listened to your comments.
Concluding remarks

I have listened intently to your interventions, and as a former member of this Parliament I fully understand and respect the positions being expressed and the reasons behind them.

I want to turn to the thorny question of discards and the proposals on the introduction of an obligation to land all catches. We are all in agreement on the objective here. The Council will be returning to finalising the remaining elements of its general approach on this later this month. The trick will be to develop a policy that can deliver real improvements while recognising the realities that exist. This item is and will continue to attract global media and public attention. It could be said that the perceived success or failure of a new CFP will be determined to a large degree on how we deal with the obligation to land all catches. The Councils General Approach and the position of the Pech committee are not too dissimilar, that is not to underestimate the body of work required to develop a workable and meaningful policy that bridges the differences in approach while not compromising on the overall objective.

Other key areas which require particular attention are Maximum Sustainable Yield, Regionalisation and Capacity management. I feel that both Council and Parliament are closely aligned on the objectives; the differences as I see them are to a large degree
technical. For instance, do we manage MSY on the basis of Biomass or Fishing mortality, what do we really mean when we discuss “overcapacity”. I am sure that the experts will be able to come up with wording that we can agree on that which is in the best interest of the stocks, which is what we all want.

I believe that the time is now right and that a momentum has already started to build behind finalising the reform. If we as Council and Parliament, with the support of Commissioner Damanaki, commit to open engagement during an intensive programme of trilogues over the coming months on all three legal instruments in the reform, we can secure political agreement on a reformed CFP during the Irish Presidency.

To conclude, there are differences in approach between the Council and the Parliament. However, there are also significant areas of common ground. As I see it the matters that unite the approach of Parliament and Council are more significant than the issues on which we have differences.

The Parliament, Council and Commission are all strongly supportive of a new CFP that places sustainability at the core of the policy. I am of the opinion that in order to deliver a reformed CFP all three institutions will have to work innovatively to deliver the reform during the lifetime of this Parliament and the current Commission. I have considered the issues, the procedures to be gone through and the timelines and believe that, with commitment, real engagement and
flexibility we can reach political agreement satisfactory to all by the end of the Irish Presidency. There is no time to be lost if we are to achieve this objective.
I look forward to working closely with you and the Commission over the coming months to realise a new horizon for European Fisheries for future generations.

Thank You.