Address by Minister of State for European Affairs, Lucinda Creighton T.D.,

Item: Multi-annual fisheries management plans

European Parliament

Strasbourg 17 April 2013

SPEAKING POINTS

President, Honourable Members,

It has been clear for some time that the Council and the Parliament have divergent interpretations of the provisions in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union as they relate to multi-annual Management Plans for Fisheries. This is a long running issue and will not easily be resolved. It has impacted on the effectiveness of the existing Common Fisheries Policy as progress on the adoption of Multi Annual Plans has been hindered.

There is no disagreement that multi-annual Management Plans are a vital instrument in fisheries policy and that must form the cornerstone of the future CFP. The Irish Presidency believes that we must find a way forward, particularly in the context of reaching agreement on a reformed CFP.

Minister Coveney, as President of the Council has made serious efforts to progress finding a way forward. He met informally at the beginning of the Irish Presidency with the Chair and the Coordinators of the PECH Committee to gain a clear understanding of their views. In addition, this issue was addressed during Minister Coveney’s formal presentation to the full PECH Committee on the 22nd of January.

The Minister also made the issue the topic for debate at the first Fisheries Council under our presidency in January. This was the first time that Ministers had addressed the overall issue. Following this exchange of views, Minister Coveney addressed the Parliament at the plenary session on the 5th of February to advise it of his conclusions. He reported that Ministers were also very concerned about the time passing without a resolution being found. He was pleased to be able to say 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. It is important to note that his comments were made in the context of his attendance at the Parliament’s historic first reading vote on the Reform of the CFP and this situation provides an important framework in which we envisage opportunities for future progress.

In the intervening period, the Irish Presidency has noted that the Parliament and the Commission have referred the matter to the European Court of Justice. This referral was in the context of the decision taken by the Council last December to amend aspects of the Cod Recovery Plan Regulation under the provisions of Article 43(3) of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Presidency considers that in the context of this new development we must work to deliver both a reformed CFP and make progress where possible on Multi-Annual Plans which are the cornerstone of the planned reformed CFP.

In the context of the current trilogue negotiations on the basic Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, the Presidency on behalf of the Council will work constructively with the Parliament and the Commission to provide a clear mandate on the principles, objectives and content within that Regulation for Multi Annual Plans that will ensure that the reformed CFP will be effectively delivered. The Presidency believes that we need to proceed in a legally neutral way that respects the respective positions of both the Parliament and the Council.

It is crucial too that governance processes are improved to allow a more regional focus which will reinforce a culture of compliance by operators which is essential to safeguard increasingly healthy fish stocks. We foresee that future multi-annual management plans will have the necessary scope and include the types measures that will allow the eco-system based management approach to be applied and practical measure to reduce unwanted catches thereby facilitating the landing obligation without under mining the commercial attractiveness of the sector.

The Presidency is also committed to taking a proactive to provide a basis for delivering multi-annual Plans under the Reformed CFP while respecting the position of both institutions. The Presidency plans to consider the situation and issues at its discussion on the Basic Regulation at the April Fisheries Council on 22 April.

The Presidency will continue to work with Council, Parliament and the Commission to reach agreement on future content of multi-annual Plans. Our ambition is to ensure that we are all in a position to move
positively and urgently on the adoption of critical Multi Annual Plans which must be put in place without delay to give practical effect to the delivery of the objective of the Reformed CFP.

When will the Irish Presidency provide the European Parliament with concrete proposals to produce a resolution to the current impasse?

The Presidency acknowledges that the current situation relating to inter-institutional responsibilities continues to be an area of concern. As I have said, arriving at an agreed resolution to this matter will be challenging. Suggestions for dealing specifically with the issue in the text of the Basic Regulation which is being progressed in trilogies are currently being examined and the Presidency is hopeful that a neutral way forward can be found. The challenges involved in securing agreement on this and other areas where divergence exists are not underestimated but neither are they surprising given the many challenging issues and diverse interests which are involved in the CFP reform proposal.

The Presidency is also seeking to find a way forward that will support agreement on multi-annual Plans that need to be adopted as soon as the Basic Regulation has been adopted. This will be critical in order to implement the ambitious provisions of the new Reformed CFP. Further consideration of the issues involved will be reviewed as part of the discussion on the Reform at the April Fisheries Council on 22 April.

ENDS