

Speaking time (Approx 20 mins)

Introduction

1. Good afternoon and may I extend a warm welcome to you all, on behalf of the Scottish Government. It is good to have Europe's Regional Advisory Committees here today.
2. I join you in looking forward to what will be two days of invaluable debate on the future of fisheries management. And for those of you from beyond our shores, I can assure you of some good Scottish hospitality.
3. To see so many distinguished names attending this event illustrates the importance of using this opportunity to enhance our dialogue in what is clearly a defining period for the future of European fisheries.
4. There is indeed a sense that we are at a crossroads for sea fisheries here in Scotland and across Europe.

5. Firstly, and most importantly, we have the Green Paper on the future of the Common Fisheries Policy – the key issue we are discussing over these two days. A discussion that for many fishermen, scientists, environmentalists, policy managers, and certainly the Scottish Government, can't happen soon enough.
6. Secondly, we have the growing awareness of our precious marine environment and the need to consider sea fisheries within the wider eco-system debate. Indeed, Scotland's first ever Marine Bill that will introduce a planning regime for our seas and new nature conservation measures crossed its first hurdle in the Scottish Parliament just last week.
7. And then we have an increasingly discerning market place where consumers and buyers are paying more attention to sustainability, and the ethical footprint of the seafood on their plate.
8. And finally, in an age of impending global food shortages, we know we have a moral obligation to safeguard one of the world's most precious, healthiest and, of course, renewable sources of food

9. And all this we have to consider against the background of the biggest recession since the 2nd world war! And against a background of climate change that only adds to the uncertainty facing our fisheries.

Importance to Scotland of fisheries management and of Scotland to fisheries management

10. The last reform brought about the Regional Advisory Council's whom we thank for their involvement today. These seven bodies have been an important step to ensure the voices of stakeholders in each region are heard by the Commission. The Regional Advisory Council's have been instrumental in developing management plans, especially in the case of mackerel, and in gathering together expert opinion. It is clear, however, that such organisations have the potential to play a greater role in the future of fisheries management.
11. And Scotland is, and wants to continue being, at the heart of the discussions on how we tackle these 21st century challenges.
12. We are gathered in Edinburgh, the capital of a European nation that has big fishing interests.

13. A nation that has and continues to provide both expertise and innovation in fisheries management. We are a country that is committed to bringing our industry and other stakeholders to the table to find the solutions that are required.
14. The calibre of the guest list which stretches across Europe from Iceland to Spain suggests to me that most of you will know of the importance of fishing to Scotland.
15. You will understand why the Scottish Government gives fishing issues the priority that they deserve.
16. To give you a sense of the role fishing plays in Scotland, let me tell you that over the past 12 months, Scottish fishermen made some seventy-nine thousand voyages into the most productive waters in Northern Europe. This extensive and productive resource accounts for twenty percent of all EU waters. Our inshore waters and our unique coastline are home to over 40,000 species and provide the spawning grounds for many commercial stocks found in the North East Atlantic and the North Sea.

17. We have seventy percent of UK quotas; and in 2008 our pelagic, demersal and shellfish fisheries together landed £400 million worth of fish into Scottish ports. The value of these landings and the onshore sector means fishing is many times more important to the Scottish economy than to UK as a whole.
18. You will now appreciate why we are determined influence the future of fisheries management.
19. Of course, Scotland is not alone in placing such a priority on fisheries. Many of our European partners represented in this room will be similarly determined to bring about the required radical reform for similar reasons.

Importance and potential of the conference

20. But there is no point just keeping calling for radical reform – we need alternatives to the status quo.

21. In Scotland, using what limited flexibility we have when it comes to implementing fisheries regulations we have strived to move from an emphasis on penalties to rewards. The best example of this is the introduction of the Conservation Credits Scheme where we developed incentives to buy back days at sea rather than just swallow the straight cuts proposed.
22. And to help us further, in January, I established an independent panel to produce an Inquiry into the Future of Fisheries Management. This authoritative panel, made up of experts you will recognise, was asked to produce an alternative model to the CFP.
23. It has now produced an Interim Report to assist the Scottish Government in responding to the Commission Green Paper.
24. This period of consultation and reform, I see as defining for the future of European fisheries, is bluntly depicted by the panel as “...the last best opportunity...” to cure the “...systemic failures of the current regime...”.
25. It is with this background that this conference takes place and with a clear sense that only by working together can the urgent reform of fisheries management be brought about.

26. This conference, is after all, organised by all of the RACs which were set up to provide greater stakeholder involvement at a regional level.

Why the CFP has not worked

Problems caused by the centralised nature of the policy

27. The fact that three decades into the CFP, we are still talking about overfishing in some fisheries, depleted stocks in others, poor market returns for many as well as the need for more and more cuts for many, surely tells us that the CFP has failed.
28. The reasons for the failures of the existing regime stem from the nature of the policy. It is a top down policy that is remote from those who make their living from the seas, yet one that enforces rules on every aspect of their industry. It is a policy that seeks to micromanage one-size-fits-all rules across Europe's differing ecosystems.
29. I often hear that our current predicament is not the CFP but the fault of fisheries managers not implementing the rules or the finger of blame is pointed at fishermen who circumvent the regulations.

30. Well in Scotland we have implemented the rules and our fishermen are bending over backwards to do what is asked for them. But ultimately you can't build a successful fishery using broken tools.
31. The current situation is untenable. Fishermen are left in bafflement at duplicative and a myriad of regulations that are often counter-productive. Regulations that alienate fishermen and that are perceived as not being enforced equally across Europe.
32. And the most untenable aspect of the CFP is discards.
33. Just think - we have a supposed fisheries **conservation** policy that for 30 years has led to a monumental waste of valuable fish stocks.
34. It is simply unacceptable that one outcome of the existing regime is that, to stay within the law, fishermen are compelled to discard quality marketable fish over the side of their boat already dead. No one can commend a policy that sees millions of tonnes of fish simply dumped back into the North Atlantic every year. And this flaw undermines all the good work being achieved through conservation measures that are actually working.

35. Discards are a waste of a valuable food resource in a world where people are hungry and it's both economic and environmental madness.
36. Skippers, conservationists and scientists are united with the Scottish Government and many others in condemning this practice.
37. We must work together to eradicate this problem. It has led to a situation where in 2007 and 2008 we have had to throw back into the North Sea an amount of cod which might have had the potential market value of up to £100 million. And that's just cod!
38. There is something fundamentally perverse with a policy that leads to a situation where for every ten tonnes of North Sea cod landed, up to eight tonnes are discarded.
39. This forced wastage leads to greater pain for our fishermen in the form of reduced quotas. To think that we actually have a system in place that calculates quotas for landing on the basis that fishermen are expected to dump much of what they catch in the first place!

40. This damaging result is no-where more evident than in our mixed fisheries. Discards are the direct result of applying single-species quotas combined with effort controls in a mixed fishery like we have in the North Sea and many other fisheries.
41. This wholly inappropriate policy is the result of the one-size-fits-all top down approach that the Common Fisheries Policy enforces.

Why bottom up localism is better

42. There is light on the horizon. The current situation is not all doom and gloom.
43. It does not come as a surprise that this source of light comes from the industry and those who work most closely with our fishermen.
44. For instance, here in Scotland, our successful and very profitable pelagic fleet of its own volition has recently introduced jigging machines on their vessels. This has enabled the skippers to sample the shoals of herring and mackerel they pursue in the North Atlantic. A simple industry born solution that has hopefully resulted in less wastage of stock and a higher value of landing.

45. This spirit of innovation is by no means limited to our pelagic fleet. In the demersal fleet we have seen the use of the Orkney trawl which catches about fifty percent less cod while retaining the desired haddock and whiting. In the shellfish sector moves to increase the minimum landing size of langoustines will have the effect of improving the market value. Both simple industry born solutions that show the benefits of the bottom up approach.

CCTV innovation linking to discards

46. It is clear that we will require new policies to tackle discards.

47. We must permit our fleet to land more of what they catch in return for catching less than the first place. This of course highlights the need to focus fisheries management on removals from the sea rather than what is landed ashore.

48. And we can't wait until 2013 for the outcome of the CFP review.

49. If we do that we are consigning millions of tonnes of fish to waste.

50. But we recognise that we need to indentify new innovations to make this happen.
51. One such innovation we are jointly exploring with industry and other countries to help us tackle discards is the use of on-board cameras.
52. This innovation potentially offers a solution to the scandal that is discards, the ending of which is one of the quickest ways the industry can help itself and help to better conserve stock.
53. Trials of this are already in place here in Scotland and have taken place in Denmark.
54. Put simply, the use of on-board cameras can provide the evidence and give complete confidence in delivering a catch quota system. Such a system would give extra confidence to both managers and consumers that our fishermen are responsible stewards of our shared resource. Of course, fishermen must receive just rewards for such actions and as I have explained this must be allow fishermen to land more of what they catch in return for reducing overall effort What we in Scotland refer to as a “catch less, land more” policy.

55. There are other potential benefits of such a system. A move from limiting time at sea to regulating time actually spent fishing. This would remove many of the unfair constraints on fishermen whose fishing patterns are influenced by distance from the shore.
56. Naturally of course the biggest benefit would be in tackling discards thereby providing additional income for our fleets and reduce the need for imports that are so harmful to our industry.
57. I trust that you see that the future for European fisheries does not need to follow the same failed paths that have been treaded in the past. A centralised policy such as the CFP can't succeed across the vastness of European fisheries with differing ecosystems.

Regionalisation – Scottish Government thinking

Background to development

58. So there are alternatives and it has been the long standing position of this Scottish Government that our fisheries stakeholders must be central to our thinking. They are the real experts on the subject and have already helped bring forward solutions.

59. The debate on the future of fisheries management is steaming ahead. We have consulted across our country; holding workshops on our islands, in our highlands and in our largest city. We have done and continue to hold an open and frank online consultation with the public at large. And of course we have held one to one meetings with stakeholders interested in all aspects of fisheries.
60. To further inform our outline thinking I commissioned the aforementioned Inquiry into Future Fisheries Management. This panel has acted independently from the Scottish Government as it has set about gathering evidence and opinion to offer alternatives to the systemic failings of the Common Fisheries Policy.
61. The Scottish Government has long stated that returning control to Scotland is our guiding principle throughout the current debate on the future of the CFP.
62. That is why I was so pleased with the publication of the Inquiry into Future Fisheries Management Interim Report that brought a possible framework for a decentralised model to public notice.

63. The outline model that begins to emerge from this document has received a positive airing when presented to stakeholders in Scotland. More widely it was received well when discussed at the Pew Conference on Regional Fisheries Management held in Brussels.
64. By decentralising fisheries management and implementing locally appropriate measures, we can achieve a much greater degree of co-management of fisheries with stakeholders.
65. In Scotland, we have seen this with our own Conservation Credits scheme, mentioned earlier. This scheme with stakeholder involvement led to better understanding, better design and better compliance with fisheries management measures.

Overview of model

66. We want to bring control back to Scotland - looking beyond the current Common Fisheries Policy. We would wish to work with our European partners to set long term, but realistic, targets for the health of our seas and everything living within it. These targets would be based upon biological and ecological imperatives within clearly defined regions.

67. And member states working together could devise plans for their seas and ensure that economic and social objectives could be considered from the outset.
68. Ultimately this would result in a future for fisheries management where the member states of the EU can make decisions with stakeholders on how best to progress and fulfilling the potential of the Regional Advisory Councils. It is a future where sound decisions are taken on long term plans and accountability is held as close as is possible to our fisheries stakeholders.
69. Finding alternatives to the CFP is important to this Government. That is why we have established the Inquiry into the Future of Fisheries Management. I am proud that here in Scotland we have started the ball rolling on putting forward models to radically overhaul the failures of the current regime. Further work of course is required and we will continue our dialogue with stakeholders to bring forward solutions.

Benefits of regionalisation

70. By looking at the failings of the current regime, many of which to be fair were recognised by the green paper.

Such as;

- its micromanagement,
- its detachment from the industry and from stakeholders,
- its myriad unworkable duplicative regulations and,
- its quashing of innovative conservation

71. It is easy to envisage the benefits of introducing real reform through returning decision making to member states who in turn work together on a regional basis.

72. To me the greatest benefit is that we will be allowing the real experts, those who care most about the future of fishing to have a greater say in its management. The involvement and buy-in of our stakeholders is crucial to the future of sustainable fisheries.

73. Locally developed and locally appropriate fisheries measures could be introduced with flexibility built in to incentivise positive behaviours from our fishermen. The Danish trial of on-board cameras illustrates this point.

74. At a larger level it makes sense for member states to work in the regional context. The enactment of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive means that member states must cooperate with their neighbours to ensure Good Environmental Status for their seas. I fail to see how the logic of managing fisheries on such a basis does not then follow if member states are in the driving seat.

CONCLUSION

75. These are the issues which must be addressed.
76. I am particularly keen that the Scottish Government response to the Green Paper emphasises the need to protect our historical rights but also protect our stocks by stopping discards. We will do this through developing better, innovative ways of managing our fisheries while respecting the cultural and social importance of fisheries to Scotland. And we will seek the UK Government's support and your support.
77. I believe that the importance of this conference is clear. We have an opportunity during this period of consultation to make a case for genuine reform to fisheries management that will be to the benefit of all involved in the sector.
78. And given the urgency, I also believe we have a duty to our fishermen and to conservation to demand some of changes that are urgently required now – not in three years time.

79. Change is needed and need now. Our fishermen are suffering at the hands of a policy that has failed. Given the impact of the recession these failings are becoming even more visible.
80. This is the challenge we face and I hope the outline thinking of the Scottish Government has given a framework we can build upon.
81. Over the next day and a half we will listen to some of the most informed views on this subject and it is crucial that we all build upon the ideas voiced to do what is right for the future of fisheries in Europe.
82. I have confidence that the people in this room have the ingenuity and determination to find the solutions that will bring prosperity to our fishing communities for generations to come and that will safeguard the rich fish stocks – the rich food supply in our seas.

Thank you.