

FISHING FOR THE FUTURE

Asia and Europe Seek Common Goals On Addressing Global Fishing Challenges

FISHING policymakers in Asia and Europe need to work together in order to forge a common solution to global challenge facing the sector, one of the industry's leading figures has said.

Fokion Fotiadis, Director General, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at the European Commission, added: "Fisheries is all about harvesting a moving resource which depends on shared maritime ecosystems. It therefore makes perfect sense for Asia and Europe to work together." Mr Fotiadis was delivering the opening address at the second Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Forum on Marine Fisheries in Brussels, Belgium on April 28. As the head of the organisation hosting the event, he told delegates that both continents had a responsibility to take up common challenges.

"There is an ocean of opportunity to be unleashed by dialogue...the ASEM platform is unique in the sense that it is an informal and multi-sectoral tool. It is sufficiently flexible and thus able to address the new global issues and challenges."

Meeting the challenges

The fact that the fishing industry was inextricably linked to the current climate of economic turmoil had to be borne in mind, Mr Fotiadis continued. "Economic resilience and adapting to new challenges are paramount and core values such as co-operation and dialogue can help rebalance the world market...let us harness the challenges together to build a prosperous environment."

The Forum has been working to explore ways of meeting the challenges of the marine fisheries and aquaculture sector – an industry which is vital to the economies of both

Asia and Europe. High level officials from some 40 countries attended the two day event.

The European Union is the largest import market for fisheries products in the world, with imports totalling €16.4 billion in 2007. South East Asian countries are the second most important providers of fish and fisheries products to the EU.



Fokion Fotiadis: "There is an ocean of opportunity"

Delegates at the Forum worked to balance the security and prosperity of those in the sector with the need for sustainability and the preservation of the planet's resources.

Vast numbers of people in both Europe and Asia depend on the fisheries industry for their livelihoods in markets and

as processors and producers, but there are serious threats attached to quality and stock levels which need to be addressed. The ASEM Forum aimed to tackle these openly by building on areas of common interest.

European Union Member States are committed to working closely with all willing members of the international community in order to preserve a healthy balance between a strong and viable trade flow on one hand and the preservation of marine ecosystems and action to prevent the depletion of fish stocks on the other.

Setting out the debate

An important element of this strategy is the launch of a new EU Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. Referring to this, Mr Fotiadis said in his address: "Our aim is to reach out to the broadest possible constituency and to build consensus on the way forward."

The consultation exercise aimed to launch a broad debate among major stakeholders, he added. "It sets out an ambitious vision for a healthy European fishery and sustainable fish stocks by 2020. Only with the support of stakeholders, member states and the general public can this vision become a reality."

The Forum meeting in Brussels followed on from the first meeting of its type, the ASEM Forum on Trade and Investment in Fishery, which took place in Yantai, China last September. This prompted dialogue and helped to set the framework for the latest event.

Each of the four sessions held on the first day involved presentations by experts in each topic from Europe and Asia, followed by a panel discussion debate.

The first session looked at the challenges created by Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing – a critical issue within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). Particularly important is the need to adopt efficient measures to identify IUU practices and to fight against the trade of IUU products.



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In order to address the challenges, the EU adopted a new regulation in 2008 which is applicable from January 2010. This aims to prevent, deter and eliminate these activities by setting up a comprehensive and rational control system right through from the net to the plate. This will ensure an efficient enforcement of conservation and management measures.

Delegates at the ASEM Forum concluded that illegal fishing remained a major problem as it seriously undermined efforts to sustainably manage fisheries resources. At the same time, it caused loss of income for coastal communities – particularly in developing countries – where fishermen operated legally. There was a consensus, they concluded, that a comprehensive approach to tackle IUU fishing was needed and that co-operation was required to achieve effective solutions.

RFMOs needed to be encouraged to pursue their efforts against illegal fishing and products and IUU activities identified through measures such as port state control, blacklisting of vessels, certification schemes, VMS and illegal catch enforcement, with support given to developing countries.

EU responsibility

With illegal products being traded on the open market and the EU being the largest market and importer of fisheries products in the world, delegates declared that the European Union had a special responsibility to ensure it did not end up as the destination for these illegal products.

The new EU rules which will be implemented from January 2010 offer harmonised sanctions and action and could lead to increased international co-operation in matters of control and inspection.

Asian members recognised the new regulation as an important step forward but expressed concern about implementation, especially of the catch certificate, as it required complex rules and procedures. Difficulties with re-exports were also pointed out. Co-operation was

considered essential. The Commission said it was taking into account concerns of other countries. The fight against IUU fishing was an urgent one, and illegal fishing would continue to flourish until proper measures were taken.

The second session looked at the issue of future challenges facing tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. These issues are global and need common solutions in order to strengthen their action and effectiveness.



Debate and discussion – delegates at the ASEM Forum

Three of the five tuna RFMOs which bring together many countries worldwide have conducted recent performance reviews, though these have revealed more problems than achievements. Delegates felt that a common action on priority themes had to be launched. Procedures, documents, methods and measures needed to be harmonised, and one global common working group was required.

Priorities included matching fleet capacity to fishing possibilities; reducing by-catches and incidental catches; reducing compliance; and considering the preoccupations and challenges of the developing coastal states.

After a lunch hosted by the European Commission, session three was titled Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures: Trading of High Quality of Foodstuffs and Looking Ahead to Future Development Policies.

Developing high quality foodstuffs

The EU attaches great importance to high quality goods and sustainable trade, but European standards are often perceived as one of the most important barriers to exports. As this is an ongoing challenge and an issue of common concern, discussion on this subject was particularly important.

Delegates agreed there was a common concern shared by Europe and Asia, and that human protection and plant health measures should not be used as a restriction on international trade.

European countries expressed views over the importance of food safety and ensuring that health and safety rules were not being used to protect domestic consumers. It was pointed out that European consumers were concerned about sustainable production and environmental protection.

The panel discussion recognised that Asia and Europe are important fishing partners and that Asian countries had been working to deliver high quality, safe and sustainable seafood. But they met regulatory difficulties that needed assistance from the EU.

The fourth and final session of the day examined tools for sustainable development in aquaculture. Asian and European countries agree on the growing importance of aquaculture to support world markets, and there is consensus that they need to work in close collaboration, particularly in order to achieve sustainable development.

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The panel conclusions recorded that aquaculture was important in both Asia and Europe – it now provides about half of the fish supply for human consumption and there is significant potential for future growth.

Aquaculture provides huge opportunities, delegates heard, but it also raises considerable challenges, particularly in relation to the environmental sustainability of production as well as to the quality and sustainability of products.

The EU will continue to promote improvement of the environmental record of some present practices and sees future aquaculture certification as an important means of improving the level playing field for the sector at a global level.

Co-operation is key

Countries in both the EU and Asia will engage in deeper co-operation in areas of common interest and also to promote sustainable development in the sector as a whole.

The day ended with a plenary session which presented the conclusions of the panel discussions, with the addresses delivered by the chair of each panel.

In their general conclusions, released at the end of the event and following on from the panel conclusions, the partners said they were “deeply concerned” by the worldwide impacts of IUU fishing and that RFMOs needed to be strengthened to deal with this. They welcomed enhanced co-operation, especially in adopting efficient measures to identify IUU, to fight against the trade and to improve decision making.

On tuna management, they said that they sought to increase co-operation within tuna RFMOs on a range of issues including the future reform of the RFMOs themselves, data collection, the proper management of capacity, tackling the problem of overcapacity, trade measures and compliance.

On high quality foodstuffs, partners agreed there was a readiness to foster ongoing discussions on sanitary and

phytosanitary measures through enhanced co-operation and co-ordination.

There was also an agreement to seek sustainable development of aquaculture and to work along with the FAO on technical guidelines relating to certification. There is a need for globally accepted norms for aquaculture production and ongoing work in areas such as a harmonisation of certification scheme will respond to that need.



Resisting seafood temptation at the Seafood Exposition

The partners said they were convinced that national solutions alone could not address the global problems of the fisheries and aquaculture sector appropriately. They believed that Asia and Europe would continue to play a major role and support the global sector wholeheartedly.

They added: “The sea faces many threats from many sources - transport, environmental concerns, trade - and Asia and Europe have a shared responsibility to ensure an effective protection. The ASEM partners will explore the possibility of strengthening their co-operation on maritime issues.”

On the following day, April 29, the delegates made a visit to the 16th Annual European Seafood Exposition, the world's largest seafood event, which was being held at the Parc Des Expositions in Brussels. (For more details, please visit www.euroseafood.com/09/public/enter.aspx.)

The visit provided ASEM delegates with the opportunity to view the seafood stands, to network and to share insights and information. They also had the opportunity to learn at first hand about the latest developments in the global seafood industry.

Enhancing understanding

The trips included guided visits to a number of different stands including a display and information resource belonging to the European Commission's DG MARE fisheries directorate (for more, visit ec.europa.eu/fisheries). There were also visits to facilities hosted by France and the German state of Schleswig Holstein. After the tour, delegates were invited to attend a cocktail reception hosted by Spain.

Founded in 1996, ASEM has become the premier multilateral channel for communication between Asia and Europe. An informal collection of members, it has facilitated dialogue between both continents and created greater understanding between peoples. It now represents 50 per cent of the world's GDP, nearly 60 per cent of its population and 60 per cent of global trade.

ASEM is made up of 43 countries plus the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. It has implemented nearly 100 initiatives with experts in themed working meetings and symposia.

To find out more, please visit ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/intro or www.aseminfoboard.org.