



STATEMENT BY
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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

AT THE OCCASION OF THE
EUROPEAN MARITIME DAY STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE

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Life in harmony, into the future
いのちの共生を、未来へ
COP 10 / MOP 5

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Commission share common interests with respect to the conservation and sustainable use of coastal and marine resources and the prevention of the physical alteration and destruction of marine and coastal habitats as a result of land-based activities. I would thus like to thank the Commission, as well as the Spanish Presidency of the European Union and the Government of the Principality of Asturias, for co-organizing the European Maritime Day, and for inviting me to share the Convention's enthusiasm with you. I am very happy that this day is being celebrated in a city like Gijón, which has a long standing fisheries tradition, especially in its Cimadevilla neighborhood.

The European Union has a vested interest in marine and coastal biodiversity, and maritime issues, since it has more sea than land, with 1200 ports and the largest merchant fleet in the world. Roughly 50% of the European Union population lives in coastal regions and the maritime economy accounts for 5 million jobs. It is important to consider environmental and fisheries policies and actions as intimately linked, and the EU maritime policy demonstrates this. This policy includes maritime transport, the competitiveness of maritime businesses, employment, scientific research, fisheries and the protection of the marine environment. In addition, the EU is committed to integrating economic and environmental sustainability. This is an important and positive step in international biodiversity protection.

This year, the European Maritime Day coincides with the International Year of Biodiversity, which is an important initiative to mobilize national, regional, and local actions for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources. Marine and coastal biodiversity is critically important to poverty reduction and the achievement of human development targets. For example, inland water biodiversity underpins the provision of most goods and services that freshwater ecosystems provide to people. These are diverse and include not only direct use for food, fibre and medicines but also benefits such as pollution and nutrient absorption and recycling, flood management, drinking-water supply and mitigation against the impacts of natural catastrophes and climate change. Marine ecosystems and maritime economies transcend national boundaries. The nature of the challenges is such that their answer can only be transnational.

Despite various efforts made at the national, regional and global levels toward meeting 2010 biodiversity target to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss, recent global marine environmental assessments have observed serious declines in marine living resources, losses of coastal habitats, elevated pollution levels, and poor water quality in many areas. More significantly, overall deterioration of the marine environment is being exacerbated by the effects of climate change, and coastal communities and local economies are adversely impacted by such trends as poverty, land use changes, overfishing, nutrient loading, sewage, and coastal developments, which put the capacity of the marine environment beyond its sustainable limit. The Spanish proverb "It is good fishing in troubled waters" may no longer be the case for much longer. Coastal communities and local economies are adversely impacted by such trends as poverty, land-use changes, overfishing, nutrient loading, sewage, and coastal developments, which put the capacity of the marine environment beyond its sustainable limit. In general, pressures on coastal and marine biodiversity are increasing. Over 50% of the world's population will live in coastal areas by 2015, putting unsustainable pressures on coastal resources.

By 2100, 70% of cold-water corals will be exposed to corrosive waters. Cold-water coral reef ecosystems provide habitat, feeding grounds and nursery areas for many deep-water organisms, and support characteristic and commercially important fauna several times as diverse as that found on the surrounding seabed. Tropical coral reefs provide in excess of US\$ 30 billion annually in global goods and services, such as shoreline protection, tourism and food security.

With the rapidly increasing speed of scientific and technological advancement in accessing the once hidden deep sea habitats and resources, human activities impose threats on sustainability of these valuable ecosystems in unprecedented pace and intensity. The adverse impacts of global climate change, such as ocean acidification, further compound the situations at global scale, and limit our scientific and managerial ability to respond in timely and adequate manner. Since marine fish and invertebrates are among the last sources of wild food on the planet, providing over 2.6 billion people with at least 20% of their average per capita protein intake, and considering that about 80% of the world's fish stocks are now fully fished, overfished or depleted, it is important to act now for the protection of these resources, and thus of our livelihoods. As Alejandro Casona, a Spanish poet and playwright put it, “a man’s worth is measured by what he builds”. So, let us build a maritime environment that we can all be proud of, one that supports our communities and respects the biodiversity that allows us to survive. I agree completely with President José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who has said that his idea of Spain was “that of a country committed to the environment and to the preservation of its landscape, of its natural riches, and its seas, because the hope for a future resides solely in the conservation of these resources”.

There is large potential to minimize impacts on water quality and reducing the risk of eutrophication, through investment in sewage treatment, wetland protection and restoration, and control of agricultural run-off, particularly in the developing world. More rational management of ocean fisheries can take a range of pathways, including stricter enforcement of existing rules to prevent illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Scenarios suggest that the decline of marine biodiversity could be stopped if fisheries management focuses on rebuilding ecosystems rather than maximizing catch in the short-run. Fishery models suggest that modest catch reductions could yield substantial improvements in ecosystem condition while also improving the profitability and sustainability of fisheries. The development of low-impact aquaculture, dealing with the sustainability issues that have troubled some parts of the industry, would also help to meet the rising demand for fish without adding pressure on wild stocks. I would like to remind you all of an Asturian proverb: “do not stand in a place of danger trusting in miracles”. We are in a place of danger and we must act without hesitation to bring back our coastal and marine environments to a place a safety.

The biological diversity of Spain is considered one of the highest in the European Union. For example, regarding habitats as defined by the Habitats EU Directive, more than 65% of European habitat types are present in Spain. Moreover, 50% of those considered priority habitat types are well represented in the country. Spain has the highest number of vascular plants, an endemism of about 25%, and also, the highest incidence of threatened endemic flora. It is estimated that 87% of the Mediterranean’s marine species exists in its western basin, underlining the importance to protect the Spanish Mediterranean coast particularly from the effects of rapid urban development.

At present, 4.5 million hectares, representing 8.8% of the Spanish territory, is protected, of this 15% of the Principality of Asturias, one of the highest levels of protection in the country. The most extensive protected areas in Europe are located in Germany (the Schleswig-Holsteinisches

Wattenmeer National Park, with 267 km²), Spain (the Marine Protected Area of El Cachucho, with close to 230 km²) and Greece (the Alonissos-Vories Sporades National Park, with 226 km²). Of these, only El Cachucho in Spain is exclusively a marine protected area. Incidentally, El Cachucho is located with the Principality of Asturias.

El Cachucho (also known as the Le Danois Bank) is an extensive offshore bank and seamount with surrounding slopes and a complex system of channels and canyons that covers 234 000 hectares. Protection of this deep water ecosystem is considered vital for both science and surrounding fisheries. It is an 'essential fish habitat' for blue whiting, blue-mouthed redfish and forkbeard. Specific management of fishing activities, oil exploration, minerals and military activity is proposed in the area. Spain has also been quite involved in the creation of other protected areas, and since 1998, the number of protected areas has increased by 59% and the amount of protected surface by 53%. More than half of the protected areas have been designated as being of international importance, including 37 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and 63 RAMSAR wetlands. Marine protected areas are quite important conservation initiatives, as they provide for the long term improvement and protection of biodiversity with them, while also providing sustainable breeding grounds for species that are essential to human livelihoods.

Additionally, the Spanish government recently enacted a complete prohibition on the fishing and commercial use of hammerhead and thresher sharks, for all of its fleet, independently of where they operate. This ministerial order is the first of its kind in the European Union and can be used as an example to follow for endangered or over-fished species.

I hope that this meeting and the celebration of EU Maritime Day will enhance the awareness and knowledge of marine and coastal issues and will renew your sense of duty toward one another and toward biodiversity, for a healthier future. Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, an Asturian philosopher, once said: "Good are positive thoughts, but they result as light as a soap bubble, if the effort for concrete action does not follow them".

Biodiversity is life...biodiversity is OUR life.

Thank you very much for your attention.
