

Vilamoura 14/11/2016  
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Dear Minister, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,  
Welcome to Vilamoura.

Here we meet again. This is the 20th special annual meeting of ICCAT. This is also the fiftieth anniversary of ICCAT. We have something to celebrate. We are now 51 members and we welcome Guinea Bissau as our newest member.

The world is increasingly convinced that improving the governance of the oceans has become an urgent challenge. Many important events have been organised to address this challenge. I refer inter alia to the so-called "our oceans" conferences -most recently in Washington- and to the recent conference that was organised by the African Union in Lome. I may refer also to the recognition of the critical ocean dimension at climate summits such as the COP 22 in Marrakech. I refer also to declarations and communication such as the communication on ocean governance that was made last week by the European Commission and the European Unions High Representative. Leaders at top level agree that better ocean governance should be a priority.

Well, with ICCAT we can proudly report that we deliver ocean governance in practice and arguably with quite some success.

We actually study and manage the tuna and tuna like stocks in a verifiable and sufficiently dynamic manner, adapting to the evolution of the stock. Following scientific advice has been a pillar for our decisions.

We are precautionary but also sufficiently courageous to allow operators to make the best use of the resource when the stock situation allows it. The objective of ICCAT is to make the best possible use of the potential of the ocean to feed the populations with a very high quality source of proteins. Precautionary, yes, but not paranoid. We have shown that we can take tough, even draconian, decisions. Yet we have also shown that we are ready to let the operators benefit from an improved stock situation as soon as this seems warranted. We may have to take tough decisions again. We will, if needed.

ICCAT has been a self critical organisation. A learning organisation. It has been willing to adjust decisions when needed and I thank parties for having cooperated constructively in such cases. It has carried out a first performance review -the outcome of which was very critical- and it has worked constructively to remedy the criticism. This led inter alia to the convention amendment which we should conclude this week. I encourage all parties to make this happen. The permanent quality improvement process in the SCRS -formulated as a Total Quality Management process in the best science resolution adopted in Istanbul- is another performance improvement and the efforts to achieve inclusive participation by all contracting parties in the preparation and decision processes is yet another one. You have decided to carry a second performance review and we will have the pleasure of discussing it during this session.

The RFMO are rather unique -when looking at the spectrum of international organisations that deal with ocean matters- in submitting themselves to such regular performance evaluation. And within the group of RFMO, arguably ICCAT is one of the better performers. I am glad to report to you that on two occasions, the international community has indirectly shown its confidence in ICCAT. It did so in the FAO when selecting Driss MESKI as president of the regional secretariat network of all RFMO and it did so again when asking myself to continue the great work of my good friend Russell Smith in chairing the KOBE process. We will discuss the Kobe process during our plenary session.

We regret that Martin could not be with us. He sends his best regards and the best moral support we can offer him during his recovery is making the annual meeting a success. I count on all of you. We have a busy schedule ahead of us. As you have seen on the programme, Sunday 20/11 is not allocated yet to any particular panel. I hope that we can maintain this Sunday free. It depends largely on how efficient we will work during the week. Thank you for your good cooperation.

I would finally thank the secretariat for its excellent preparation, and I would thank the Government of Portugal and the European Union for hosting and financing the present meeting.