



Comhafat –Atlafco Conference of Ministers

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Declarations de M. Stefaan Depypere

**Director International Affairs and Market for fisheries and maritime affairs at the
European Commission
and
Chairman of ICCAT**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the kind invitation to this conference. I thank especially the Minister of Morocco Mr Aziz Akhannouch for his kind hospitality and the government of Morocco for this splendid organisation.

As you know I wear two hats being Chairman of ICCAT and Head of the EU delegation to ICCAT.

As ICCAT Chairman, you surely know that I have called for a regional meeting of 2 days with Comhafat/Atlafco ahead of the ICCAT annual meeting. That meeting will give us the opportunity to discuss in depth what your priorities and expectations are for this year, but also for the coming years.

I attach great importance to the most ample participation in ICCAT, so that it can become an even more inclusive RFMO. It is essential in my view that all Contracting Parties participate in the decision-making and I will do my utmost to further make sure that everybody can actively participate and have his/her voice heard. In this context, I want to stress that the important steps undertaken to ensure the proper involvement of scientists from developing states. Last year we have agreed, on the basis of an EU proposal, on a scientific capacity building fund and this year the dialogue working group between scientists and managers recommended that in future the Commission provides funds for two members per delegation (one scientist and one manager) for those Contracting Parties that wish to avail themselves of such assistance.

I am firmly convinced that RFMOs are the proper forum for Oceans governance and ICCAT has shown firm commitment, especially over the last years, towards effective and modern conservation and management measures of the species under its purview. ICCAT should be a model RFMO.

However, we should not rest on our laurels and recognize that we still have common challenges to face. The mechanisms for cooperation are there and we shall avail ourselves of those mechanisms to further consolidate ICCAT. I would summarize our challenges ahead with three concepts: better governance, better science and better compliance.

To conclude, allow me also to spend a few words in my capacity as Director for International Affairs and Markets for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs in the European Commission.

The EU is the largest economy in the world and the largest market for fishing products. As it counts for 24% of world imports, it feels that it has a special responsibility as a market state and acts accordingly.

Let me also express appreciation for the work undertaken after the signature last year of the Memorandum of Understanding between Comhafat/Atlafco and the EU Advisory Committee on Long Distance Fishing (LDAC). I am convinced that this memorandum will help reinforcing a framework of cooperation for promoting fisheries sustainability.

I would also like to spend a few words on tropical tuna fisheries, which are of major importance for African coastal states of the Atlantic Oceans as they are contributing to local economies through their own fisheries sector. The EU is the major customer for these products and is also a major actor in the exploitation of these stocks. The EU is supporting management decisions based on science and the application of precautionary approach and the ecosystem approach for fisheries management in RFMOs. For this reason, we are promoting a major tagging programme called AOTTP (Atlantic Ocean Tropical Tagging programme), for which a feasibility study was recently concluded by ICCAT. The EU is willing to largely contribute to this project with about € 13,5M (80% of the total), but we need the support of other ICCAT Contracting Parties to get to 100%. I count on your ample support on this, together with other contracting parties and possibly NGOs.

This comes in addition to the EU development action on fisheries, with several cooperation programmes in the fisheries sector relevant to the Comhafat/Atlafco members. In the new European Development Fund, we have introduced a new focus for structural support to the fisheries sector.

And to conclude I am very glad to inform you that for 2015 my services are exploring the possibility to set aside funds for Comhafa/Atlafcot for an amount of about €150.000 to improve fisheries governance through capacity building and training. Although the formal decision-making process has not been finalised yet, I am reasonably confident that the funds will be available and that they can further contribute to strengthen our relationship.