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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat of the Council
to :	Delegations
Subject:	Summary record of the meeting of the Committee on Fisheries (PECH) , held in Brussels on 28 November 2012 – Item 9 on the agenda

The meeting was chaired by Mr MATO ADROVER (EPP, ES).

Item 9 on the agenda

Exchange of views with Karel De Gucht, European Commissioner for Trade

Commissioner Mr Karel De Gucht reviewed in his presentation the negotiation agenda in the area of trade and its relevance for the fisheries sector. Referring to Asia, he said it was a central negotiating partner for the EU, and highlighted agreements with the following countries in particular: South Korea (agreement concluded in 2010), Singapore (agreement to be finalised by the end of 2012) and Malaysia (agreement under discussion). Talks had just started with Vietnam and negotiations with Thailand were expected to start next year, the Commissioner said. He also considered Japan and India as two important negotiating partners.

Looking at the Americas, the Commissioner hoped to conclude an agreement with Canada in the near future, and he mentioned initial exploratory talks which had just started with America on a wide-ranging free-trade agreement. Mr De Gucht also underlined the importance of existing agreements with Columbia, Peru and Central America.

With regard to the Economic Partnership Agreement with Papua New Guinea, the Commissioner was aware of its significance and sensitivity to the European Parliament. He said that issues such as global sourcing or rules of origin would not be included in agreements beyond the Pacific region. He pointed out that since the EU's fishing industry relied for 2/3 of its consumption on imports, the importing of fishery products at affordable prices was indispensable. Furthermore, partnership agreements would not only help stimulate EU access to non-EU fisheries but would also contribute to achieving the EU's sustainability objectives.

Commissioner De Gucht stressed that while concluding such trade agreements an adequate level of protection of the interests of EU's fishing industry (e.g. employment) would always be ensured. Besides, trade partners would be urged to meet sustainability targets, to adapt international fisheries management standards and to fight illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

Following the Commissioner's presentation members of the Committee spoke on several issues. The main points can be summarised as follows:

- Ms FRAGA ESTÉVEZ (EPP, ES) asked which strategies could be applied to protect the EU's fishing industry and also other regions such as the Pacific from the negative effects of a free trade agreement with Thailand, which was the most competitive country in terms of canned tuna production at present;
- Ms LÖVIN (Greens/EFA, SE) enquired how it could be ensured that fishery products imported into the EU met high EU standards in terms of sustainability. She wondered also why imports from Korea to the EU were still allowed while it was a well known non-cooperating third country which had fines outstanding. In connection with Papua New Guinea she believed that the agreement had not been entirely to the benefit of the local population. She pointed to the negative consequences the agreement had had for local people, such as land grabbing, prostitution, etc.;

- Mr GALLAGHER (ALDE, IE) asked the Commissioner where the negotiations in the WTO stood on the issue of the EU's seal regime and the skinning of seals;
- Ms THOMAS (S&D, FR) enquired whether it would not be advisable to include in all trade agreements a component relating to fisheries requiring application of EU standards by all trade partners.

In his reply the Commissioner said that there was always a chapter in trade agreements relating to sustainability objectives. He believed that the EU was achieving adequate results in this area, especially if the partners could also be convinced that it was in their own interests to apply sustainable trade practices.

Concerning the negative affects of the agreement with Papua New Guinea on the local population, the Commissioner referred to two reports on the subject, one prepared by an external agency and another prepared by the MEP Mr MARTIN. These showed that the agreement with Papua New Guinea had had two main positive effects, notably in terms of job creation and secure income, which particularly benefitted women.

With regard to the agreement with Thailand, the Commissioner was confident that it would not have serious negative consequences for the fishing industry of Papua New Guinea, since the bordering Bismarck Sea was one of the richest tuna fishing grounds of the world.

On the subject of IUU fishing and non-cooperating third countries, Commissioner De Gucht said that eight countries were warned in November to comply with the arrangements currently in force. These countries had been given sufficient time to respond and rectify the applied measures. The Commission had also proposed an action plan to each individual country in question. The case of Korea was currently being investigated, but no comment could be made on it at this stage, the Commissioner explained.

Finally, with regard to the case on the seal trade and the trade in seal products pending before the WTO, Mr De Gucht said this issue would be dealt with separately, as an independent case, and would not be mixed up with the free trade agreement to be negotiated with Canada.