

SESSION 1 - Large Marine Species: Keystone of the Marine Ecosystem.



Moderator:

Lisa Speer, Oceans Program Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, USA

With the Principality of Monaco and HSH Prince Albert II leading the global campaign to protect the endangered bluefin tuna and other marine predators, it was only appropriate that the first Monaco Blue Initiative should address this issue. Large marine predators are essential to the stability and health of marine ecosystems as a whole, and time is of the essence.

Lisa Speer recalled the previous week's CITES meeting in Doha, which failed to approve proposals to protect bluefin tuna and certain sharks. Though disheartening, she said, "Some extraordinary progress was made - for the first time a fish made it onto the front page of newspapers all over the world."

Among other lessons from Doha, "the votes shine a spotlight on the failure of regional organizations to manage fishing," she said. Speer then outlined possible solutions to the rapid destruction of top marine predators and invited participants to debate them. The discussion that ensued hammered home one consistent theme: more than words, it was time for action.

Rather than create a new umbrella organization for global marine governance, participants argued for better coordination and cross-sector cooperation among the many existing bodies engaged in these issues. For instance, the World Trade Organization's potential for effective action was often overlooked, noted Tony Haymet of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography.

Closer cooperation between the WTO and other organizations like the IOC in Paris, the FAO in Rome and the ILO in London would facilitate addressing the ocean as an integrated platform. This would enable measures such as controlling sea ports. "Every fish on a plate has traveled through a port, becoming a 'respectable' fish along the way," Mr. Haymet said.

There was a draft treaty on ports, which would identify vessels carrying illegal fishing gear or fish caught in protected areas and prevent them from unloading, noted the Pew Charitable Trusts' Joshua Reichert. Ratifying this treaty would be a significant step, but implementing it would require assistance and training for developing countries, he cautioned.

Chairperson of the Alliance of Small Island States Dessima Williams supported an integrated global governance of oceans, but added that enforcement mechanisms were essential "to give it teeth." As did many participants, Ms. Williams considered reforming fishing subsidies to be the absolute priority.

Oceana CEO Andrew Sharpless summed it up bluntly: "The key driver of ocean collapse is the overcapacity of world fishing fleets. There are too many boats chasing too few fish," he said. Not

mincing words, he added that "If there is one last fish in the ocean, the Japanese, Chinese or Spanish will go after it."

Mr. Sharpless agreed that the WTO was perhaps best placed to take multilateral, enforceable action, noting that the organization was currently discussing eliminating subsidies aimed at increasing fishing fleet capacity.

UNEP Special Advisor Pavan Sudkhev said he saw the beginnings of a political will to tackle subsidies, and particularly fossil fuel subsidies. The subsidy system was unfair, with more than 80% of subsidies going to large developed countries, he noted. These subsidies "directly affect the competitiveness and sustainability of livelihoods in small island states," Dessima Williams added.

Furthermore, Mr. Sudkhev declared, spending \$30-\$35 billion yearly on increasing trawler capacity was simply not economically efficient. "The scarce resource is the fish, not the fishing fleets," he said.

It would make more sense to subsidize, well, fish - by increasing Marine Protected Areas, for example. National Geographic Fellow and marine ecologist Enric Sala noted that compared to fishing subsidies, MPAs were cheap - protecting 20% of the ocean space would cost about \$16 billion, and create 1 million jobs. "We need new business models whereby conservation efforts are seen as investments, not as sinkholes of money," he affirmed.

Pew's Joshua Reichert stated the sobering fact that less than one-fifth of one percent of the oceans was protected from exploitation. The greatest threat to the oceans today was industrial fishing, he said, which relied on indiscriminately destructive equipment such as bottom trawls and so-called pelagic long-lines. "Fishing with lines up to forty miles long with 10,000 hooks that rake up everything from sharks to juvenile turtles is like removing a tooth with a tractor," he said. "They ought to be banned."

Mr. Reichert argued that eliminating fuel subsidies alone could end destructive fishing almost overnight. "Left to function on their own and to compete as businesses, most boats would not leave port," he said.

Frédéric Briand of Monaco-based CIESM said better funding and communication were needed to combat what he diplomatically called "the other side," which sought to continue whaling and fishing of other large predators and had defeated the Doha protection proposals.

"Let's be frank about it, they get the votes by putting pressure on South American, African and Asian countries in particular, and they have the money," Mr. Briand said.

Alongside better funding, a powerful, simple message was needed, rather than complicated scientific explanations. The message Asian fishing lobbies used, namely that marine predators competed with man for fish, was wrong but effective. "We have to explain that the disappearance of top predators won't mean more fish," he concluded.

Susan Avery of Woods Hole agreed simple communication was key. The "One Atmosphere" slogan had helped advance climate change awareness, and though the ocean was more complicated because of competing national marine interests, "One Ocean" was an idea to carry forward, she said.

That said, more sophisticated communication also had a role to play, according to Gérard Riou, head of the Mediterranean for France's IFREMER. "Protecting the oceans is a fine message for public opinion, but we must inject science and economics into the equation to enable more focused recommendations for fisheries, and maintain pressure on existing structures for better management," he urged.

More transparent reporting by fisheries also helped, indicated the European Environment Agency's Jacqueline McGlade. She pointed out that the UN General Assembly now required countries to furnish regular data on the performance of their fisheries. This effectively created "a league table of dysfunctional fishing organizations," she said, which would ultimately lead to greater accountability.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UNEP, reiterated the need to consider ocean management from an integrated "systems perspective." For example, he explained, "we know the consequences of land-based agriculture for the oceans, so agricultural policy must take that into consideration. "

This approach did not preclude tackling specific issues, he said, taking bluefin tuna as an example. "The debate goes beyond that fish - it gets people to think about the oceans, and enhances their understanding of cause and effect," he said.

After all, noted Wendy Watson Wright of UNESCO's Oceanographic Commission, "the predator we are really targeting is humans."

END