

Mr. Karmenu Vella,
Commissioner for Environment,
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries,
European Commission,
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200,
1049 Brussels,
Belgium

May 22nd, 2018

Dear Commissioner,

In 2013, EU member states agreed to an ambitious reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This included a commitment to end EU overfishing by 2015 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest. The EU and the world welcomed this enlightened approach because it had strong potential to put EU fisheries on a path to sustainability and profitability. Since 2014, when you assumed responsibility for realising this ambition, there has been growing evidence of the declining status of economically and socially significant fish stocks, and the urgent need to reverse these trends through scientifically based management.

The *Our Ocean* conferences have played an important role in elevating the importance of proper stewardship of our ocean resources, by bringing together diverse stakeholders to stimulate ideas, coordinate actions and multiply efforts. You concluded the 2017 *Our Ocean* by stating:

*The true success of the Our Ocean conference will only depend on how seriously we take those actions.*¹

You have taken implementation of the CFP seriously in your leadership role. However, battling both the short-term interests and the lack of political will across several member states has delayed ending overfishing of EU stocks. Where science-based fishing limits have been set, healthier fish stocks have flourished², underscoring the power of reform. However, a recent analysis³ showed that in December 2017, contrary to the goals of the reform, 57 EU fishing limits were set *above* scientific levels. This unfortunate trend has resulted in only modest year-to-year improvements and – of grave concern to those who care deeply about fisheries – it risks failing to achieve the CFP’s goals by 2015, or 2020.

In 2017, an update of the World Bank’s landmark *Sunken Billions*⁴ report estimated that better management of global fisheries would unlock \$83 billion in additional revenues worldwide. This, along with the improved health of the marine environment, should be sufficient incentive for ministers to agree to end overfishing, yet myopic, short-term decision-making apparently remains the norm.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/vella/announcements/our-ocean-conference-day-2-closing-remarks_en

² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/airs/2017/natural-capital/marine-fish-stocks>

³ <http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Landing-the-blame-Atlantic-2018.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/02/14/global-fisheries-sunken-billions>

As the 2020 target for ending EU overfishing approaches, the ambition of the 2013 CFP must be rekindled. The future health of EU fisheries depends upon it. You have the power, position, and responsibility to ensure those reforms are successful. You indicated as much during a recent Brussels conference on the CFP when you said, “the evidence is clear: ending overfishing makes environmental, social and economic sense. In fact, in light of this evidence, the question is not whether we can afford to act. The real question is, how can we afford not to?”⁵ Simply put, too much is at stake to do anything less than achieve success in implementing the reform which will provide for a viable future – regardless of how difficult the task.

We write to say that we fully support you in achieving this goal of sustainable fisheries. We strongly encourage you to seize the opportunity of the coming months to finally bring the destructive and wasteful act of EU overfishing to an end, in keeping with the CFP deadline. We appreciate the challenges inherent in overcoming the inertia of the status quo. No one doubts that this kind of change is inordinately difficult. Moreover, in part because there are so many positive developments in ocean conservation globally, including the EU’s efforts to address IUU fishing, and because there is so much to lose by failing to act, now is the time to demonstrate EU and global leadership in fisheries management. Moreover, the reputation of the EU may be at stake. Since the EU has been a strong champion in tackling IUU fishing internationally, expectations are high that it will also put its own house in order.

We stand ready to support faithful implementation of the CFP, for the sake of coastal communities, the ocean and future generations whose economies, livelihoods, culture and food security depend on our generation’s actions.

Yours sincerely,



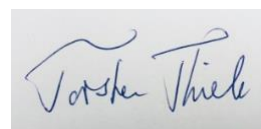
Kristian Parker
Oak Foundation



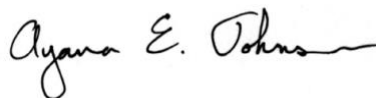
Jane Lubchenco
Oregon State University



Rashid Sumaila
UBC Institute for the Oceans & Fisheries



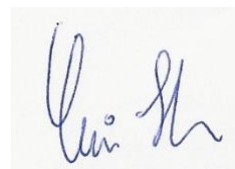
Torsten Thiele
Global Ocean Trust



Ayana Elizabeth Johnson
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Pascal Lamy
Jacques Delors Institute



Enric Sala
National Geographic Society



Kristina Gjerde
IUCN Global Marine & Polar Program



Yann Arthus-Bertrand
Photographer

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/vella/announcements/commissioner-vellas-speech-pew-charitable-trusts-countdown-2020-how-far-has-eu-come-ending_en