

Opening speech at SEAFOODplus conference

The Minister of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Helga Pedersen

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the third SEAFOODplus conference here in Tromsø.

The topic of the conference "Seafood for a better life" focuses on health benefits from consumption of seafood. This is a topic of current interest to authorities, researchers, the seafood industry and none the less - the consumer of seafood. I am sure that the next two days will arise as a hotbed for new co-operations and new ideas!

We are currently experiencing a global seafood trend. Demand for seafood is increasing, and all prognoses predict it will increase further. The demand is increasing both from consumers and from the Hotel- Restaurant and Catering sector. This is driven by a wish for delicious and tasty food, but also by increased focus on the health benefits from eating seafood instead of other proteins. Seafood products are getting more and more popular.

Norwegians are Nordic champions in consumption of seafood. Still, a new report from the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food Safety concludes that it is recommended that Norwegians should eat *more* fish than we do today. The benefits of eating different types of fish must be communicated to everybody – "Seafood for a better life".

As you may know, the marine sector is the second largest export sector in Norway, and we export more than 90 percent of our production. In fact, Norway is among the largest fish exporters of the world – and the EU are by far the most important market for Norwegian seafood export.

Norway's geographic position gives us a natural role in serving the European consumers with a wide variety of seafood products. But, it is not only important to be a large producer of

seafood. We know that it is even more important to be a reliable exporter of high-quality and safe seafood.

We care deeply about our reputation as a reliable supplier of seafood, and that Norway conducts sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management. It is therefore of vital importance for Norway to participate in a research programme like SEAFOODplus.

In the past, focus has been on how we can produce and harvest seafood most cost effectively. Today, however, we see a shift in focus towards a more market and consumer oriented production.

Norway needs to focus on how to deliver sought after seafood products to the markets daily, all year around. Furthermore the industry must emphasize that the consumers increasingly are interested in:

- quality
- the origin of products
- environmental impacts of the seafood industry
- ethics concerning production
- and about how seafood affects one's health and well-being.

SEAFOODplus will indeed contribute to provide new knowledge on the positive aspects of eating high quality seafood products. The shift in consumer focus is positive for all parts. Demanding costumers puts the seafood industry to an essential test. I anticipate that the demands will windup in first-class and tasty seafood products in all markets.

Researchers need to cooperate across borders, in forums such as SEAFOODplus. It is said, that knowledge and understanding is one of the few things which are enhanced if shared.

Furthermore the authorities also need to cooperate. Norwegians authorities establish a minimum standard for safe seafood and are responsible for environmental standards and regulations that affect fish health.

But we must not forget that the industry itself has a major responsibility in maintaining a certain quality of seafood products and in safeguarding the reputation of the products. The industry must be willing to use assets on research and innovation, and it must put an effort in to a continuously open communications with the consumer.

A clear division and understanding of roles is therefore particularly important.

In this respect, we must not forget that the consumer demands to have an influence on all levels of the value chain, from fork to the fish farm or to the sea. Openness and communication are key words.

It is an important task for the Norwegian fisheries authorities to give information on how we pursue a sustainable fisheries policy. Civil society, consumers, importers and retailers have an interest in how we manage our stocks and aquaculture and secure seafood safety. They need to know what regulations we apply, how and where the seafood is sold, and what kind of standards we apply when it comes to the environment and to safe and healthy seafood.

In cooperation with fishing authorities and management-related research institutes, the Ministry has established a new internet site called www.fisheries.no. The site contains updated information on;

- Norwegian fisheries and aquaculture management
- the different species we manage and breed in our waters
- and on our policies and measures regarding seafood safety and health issues.

At present, more than 80 articles written by the relevant institutions are accessible at the site.

I want to tell you in very clear terms that the Government cares deeply about health and welfare, just as consumers do. We are consumers to! Let this conference contribute to rich discussions and learning – because it is all about the best of topics; "Seafood for a better life"!