



**Sailing towards 2020:
Community-Led Local Development in coastal communities**

CONFERENCE "SAILING TOWARDS 2020",

2-3 MARCH 2015, BRUSSELS

KEYNOTE SPEECH

OPPORTUNITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD

**Mr Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment,
Maritime Affairs and Fisheries**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon and I would like to welcome you to "Sailing towards 2020".

There is a famous saying that "all politics is local". I come from Malta, so in my case that saying is literally true.

The real meaning of that phrase is clear – it is the direct human interaction that matters. Why? Because we are all rooted in our local communities. Communities give people identity. The everyday decisions are the ones that people can see. The impact is clear.



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What is also clear, and what I want to talk to you about today is the value of these community-based decisions.

Specifically I want to talk about the successful way the European Fisheries Fund has helped community-led local projects.

The basic numbers are impressive. Between 2007 and 2013, over 800 million euros of public money were allocated to strategies supported by 312 Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) in 21 Member States. This money was used to support over **10.000 projects**, often quite small, directly selected by these action groups

These projects helped revitalise economic growth and job creation in remote areas.

In addition supply chains have been shortened, adding value locally to the catches, enhancing the environment, developing new activities from fisheries, including tourism.

In short, 8.000 jobs have been created and a further 12.500 sustained.



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This afternoon I am looking forward to touring the exhibition area and celebrating your successes. But, together with my services, I am also here to listen to you and learn how we can improve even more.

Your role is to tell us: what has worked to promote local development in coastal communities around Europe and what hasn't?

As Commissioner for both Environment and Maritime and Fisheries Policy, I believe we have a unique opportunity before us to illustrate that community-led local development in coastal communities is the way forward.

On the environment, it is not just about striking a 'balance'. It is about identifying good projects that integrate both these dimensions to create a sustainable future for Europe's coastal communities. As I heard recently; 'we cannot claim to have a good economic system if we do not have a good ecosystem'.

Many of the projects we will be seeing here today reflect this approach



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Let's take the example of "ZERO kilometre" type projects. These projects aim to reduce the distance between where a product is made or caught and the consumer. At today's exhibition, we will see several projects on shorter marketing circuits between fishermen and consumers. On the economic side, the added value of this type of project stays with the local producers. On the environmental side, this type of project helps to reduce the carbon footprint of the product.

Providing more efficient energy consumption is also one of the challenges that coastal communities face. The introduction of energy-saving technologies are helping to make the sector more energy efficient. One example is the development of biofuels for the fishing industry in Finland, a project we will see later on in the exhibition.

But as we find opportunities for efficiencies so we also need to find opportunities for jobs and growth in the blue economy.

I very much understand the interest of "Blue Growth" as Malta, my country of origin, is an island and most of its economy depends on the sea that surrounds it.



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In particular, tourism represents 14 % of Malta's GDP and 25 % of its labour force. For many coastal areas, tourism remains an underdeveloped opportunity and local communities can tap into that potential.

To foster Blue Growth and unleash its potential, we also need to better understand the interaction between sea and land and the opportunities and indeed, threats this interaction can bring for coastal areas. Local partnerships have an important role to play here.

These are some of the challenges and opportunities our coastal communities are facing. So what can the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, and in particular, community-led local development do to help?

Back in 2007, when Axis 4 first started in the European Fisheries Fund, the introduction of a territorial dimension in fisheries policy was seen by many as a strange idea. It was even seen by some as a way to get fishermen off their boats and onto the land.



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Nothing could be further from the truth. Nearly a decade later we can see how well integrated Axis 4 has become in communities up and down Europe's coasts. Community-led local development is now firmly embedded in the new generation of European Structural and Investment Fund programmes for the 2014-2020 period.

And we here in Europe are not the only ones that have understood that proximity and bottom-up approaches to policy design and implementation can work. The World Bank has for many years used the basic principles of local decision-making in its Community-Driven Development approach, to fight poverty and promote sustainable development across the developing world. Many other international institutions are also looking at local development to promote sustainable growth and jobs.

The local approach provides a better understanding of the way people make decisions, on the way they will behave.



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Local circumstances can be best understood in the fishing villages - like in Galicia, or Brittany or Scotland - and this can make policy delivery much more effective. The local approach can also help you adjust to changes more quickly. The further one is from the ground, the more difficult and slow it becomes to adjust policy delivery.

One such policy area we want to develop is Sustainability.

2015 is the European Year of Development in which we will together show the importance of protecting our environment while building our economy. We have a responsibility to ensure that we continue to promote the highest possible environmental standards and protection while helping new generations living in Europe's coastal communities to have a sustainable future.

Today's event is an excellent celebration of community led sustainability. Thank you for your hard work in helping your local communities throughout Europe realize their potential. I hope you will join me later in visiting the projects in the exhibition and I wish you all a successful and fruitful conference.



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I started by saying that all politics is local. You have shown the contribution that local communities can make. I hope that I have also given a good outline of how the European Union can actually reach, help and encourage those communities. Hopefully I have shown that all policies, including those of the European Union, are inspired by the local.

Thank you very much.