

Meeting with the Seas

## Fishing in the 21st century. Myths, realities, risks and benefits

Javier Garat

The first speech of the first day of the Meeting with the Seas congress was given by Javier Garat, president of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations.

Javier Garat, one of the greatest experts in the world in management and defence of fishing activities, opened the speeches for the first day of the Meeting with the Seas congress. For thirty minutes, Garat focused his presentation on the current reality of fishing, dispelled myths and praised the benefits of consuming fish, referring to its benefits for health and prevention of illnesses.

Following the acknowledgements, Garat created an x-ray of the Spanish fishing sector with facts and figures that alluded to Spain's leadership in the industrial fish production sector within the European Union. The expert spoke of how the Spanish fleet has been reduced to adapt to demanding fishing regulations -of 22,000 boats, currently just 8,972 remain-, of the amount of fish currently caught -more than 920,000 tonnes- or of the country's position in terms of captures -we hold 19<sup>th</sup> place- with figures that are far removed from those displayed by countries such as China or Indonesia, among other facts. Positive information that places Spain among the countries which are the most respectful of marine resources. It must be stressed that the Spanish fishing sector generates more than 30,000 jobs in Spain and 22.59% of that of the European Union.

Javier Garat then proceeded to address all the myths surrounding the fishing sector one by one. Among other things, he spoke of the disappearance of the figure of the pirate, of the boom red tuna is currently experiencing – contrary to beliefs – with historical levels of biomass, he dispelled the belief that the stocks are overexploited – almost 67% is being carried out at appropriate performance levels-, affirmed that the scientific recommendations are currently being followed, highlighted the sustainability of the current FAD –which avoid undesired species getting caught in the nets-, he denied that the Spaniards practice finning and stressed that with good regulation -such as that carried out by the United Nations- bottom trawling can avoid being destructive. He also wished to vindicate the function of the regional fishing organisations: “Although there's room for improvement, all it would take is some reinforcement and provision of adequate resources for them to do a better job,” he said.

To conclude, he gave a quick overview of the risks and benefits of consuming fish and highlighted the scientists' affirmation that eating fish has more benefits than disadvantages. He spoke of Anisakis and explained that for everyone who likes to eat their fish grilled, fried, boiled or oven-baked the cooking temperature must be above 60 degrees to ensure the parasite is killed. Meanwhile, for those who prefer to eat their fish raw or semi-raw he recommended they first freeze it and maintain it at a temperature of -20 degrees for five days. Regarding mercury, he pointed out that although pregnant women should not consume species such as swordfish, shark or tuna as a precaution, the other species can be eaten without danger as their mercury levels do not affect our health. For any further concerns, he stressed that the recommendations of AECOSAN should be followed.

Javier Garat is the president of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations, general secretary of Cepesca, president of the European Fishing Enterprise Association (Europêche) and president of the European Fishing Technology Platform (EFTP).

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