

Scientists and chefs demand urgent sustainability measures to improve the health of the seas

Ángel León gives a preview of part of his new projects during the first day of presentations of the congress that unites the sector in Málaga and Cádiz in defence of the sea

In the face of the environmental challenge of the current state of health of our oceans, various scientists have said they are optimistic as long as sustainability measures are taken quickly.

Scientists, fishermen and chefs have coincided in demanding urgent sustainability measures in order to allow for an optimal recovery of the health of our oceans during the first day of the 1st Meeting with the Seas, the multi-disciplinary congress in defence of the sea which Vocento has organised with support from Málaga Provincial Council and the Andalusian Regional Government. Leading the cause for the sea is **Ángel León**, who once again surprised the audience, this time by giving a preview of some of his many projects for the new season. They included an exclusive bit of news: the launch of La Dehesa del Mar, a brand under which he will be selling his marine cold cuts as of September.

“I’ve always been obsessed with the idea of bringing marine cold cuts to the general public, but it’s been a personal torture because, after meeting with four multinational companies, they only guaranteed a 25/30% fish content in the product. I ended up exhausted. But two months ago I lost my mind completely and thought: ‘I’m going to take the risk alone.’” He thus announced that they’re going to face the challenge themselves. “If we can drive in a wedge that leads to a new industry to allow people to eat in a healthy way and brings our children to snack on omega 3 it would be fantastic,” León admitted, giving a live demonstration of marine bacon which he cooked on the stage and which has arrived through a company that cleans fish and discards the stomach.

That gave the Cádiz chef a lightbulb moment. He pressed the stomachs of those sea breams and basses to form a sort of mass that would turn into the bacon. “Don’t tell me you don’t fancy having some bacon and eggs with omega 3 without anyone telling you off,” joked the chef, who also made the most of the congress he’d “always dreamed about” to reveal more of what he will be bringing to his three star restaurant, Aponiente (El Puerto de Santa María), in the new season: marine mycology, in other words, mushrooms and fungi he and his team decided to hunt for, and managed to find, in the sea. He presented the project at the congress along with his head of R&D, **David Chamorro**. “It all started with one of his crazy ideas, he said “there must be mushrooms down there,” recalls Chamorro, who joined up with the chef from Cádiz to launch this novel project which they’re now launching together with specialists from the University of Cádiz. They gave the Acetabularia, which they already work with, as an example. As León

explained, kept in fish tanks they have a great potential as, once cut, they grow in a sustainable way. They presented them together with an emulsion of plankton and truffle.

More novelties presented by Ángel León: the sea hare and its laying, a “skein” which is often found in the sea and that he started to ‘pull’ to incorporate it as an ingredient for the new season.

Gastronomy, science and fishing hand in hand at the same congress

Ángel León was the main course of a first day of presentations at the Meeting with the Seas, which brought a lot of topics to the table. From the current state of Spanish fishing to the future of marine biodiversity, via the experiences of chefs who have the sea close at heart such as **Moreno Cedroni** and **Javier Olleros**, who even gave live cooking demos at the Edgar Neville Auditorium.

Following the inaugural ‘Flames and Sea’ public event which unites Basque grills and skewers in Málaga’s El Palmeral on Sunday, the 1st Meeting with the Seas kicked off today with the programme of speeches at Málaga Provincial Council’s Auditorium. The delegate for Financial and Productive Development, **Juan Jesús Bernal**, opened the multi-disciplinary congress in defence of the sea which will run until Wednesday in Málaga and Cádiz. “We haven’t looked at the sea as much as we ought to have done, but we can’t lose track of it because the sea has a great potential for innovation and growth,” Bernal warned. Meanwhile Andalusian Regional Government delegate in Málaga **Patricia Navarro** said it’s a “complex but thrilling journey of international dimensions.”

That’s the essence of the Meeting with the Seas, or as the congress director **Benjamín Lana** explained, “the main objective is that, in years to come, everyone who sees they have a problem with their sea thinks they need to come to Málaga and tell us and we’ll be able to solve it.”

Carlos Duarte, director of the Red Sea Research Centre, said he believes so. He highlighted the fact that although in the 20th century half the ‘blue assets’ had been lost initiatives have been launched which establish the global framework to recover oceans. The expert emphasized the importance of changing the narrative on the current state of the ocean as, much to his frustration, only catastrophist headlines are given attention while positive ones that explain the progress in recovery of our seas are ignored. According to Duarte, “it’s possible to recover marine biodiversity in 2050,” an ability which is now in our hands and which, if we do not fulfil, “we will be held accountable by the future generations.”

Javier Garat, president of the International Coalition of Fisheries Associations, 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 19th 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.

The Bermeo Tuna World project arose in pursuit of sustainable tuna management. Project promoter **Rogelio Pozo** spoke about it. "Bermeo came about for sustainable management of tuna," Pozo explained, predicting that "the pressure on tuna is going to be very great." As he explained, captures of this fish represent 20% of world fishing, with 80% of it destined to the canning industry. However, Rogelio Pozo went further and encouraged us to think about what we eat and where food we find in the supermarkets comes from, because products with low prices may come from illegal fishing (he warned that between 15 and 20% of captures come from illegal activity).

Juan Carlos Mackintosh spoke about red tuna at the 1st Meeting with the Seas. His experience in the sector told him that it would take patience. He continued on his path in search of obtaining quality without affecting prices. He even visited Japan to discover their sustainable fishing techniques for himself. "We only fish what we're asked for," Mackintosh said, "always committing to putting quality before quantity."

There was also room for the chefs' opinions. Along with Ángel León, the two Michelin star holding Italian chef **Moreno Cedroni** (La Madonnina del Pescatore) spoke of the opportunity chefs have to contribute to sustainable development: "We chefs can do a lot for the sea, by using the products of sustainable fishing and eliminating the use of plastic." Furthermore, he highlighted the properties of fish and encouraged parents "to let their children eat it with bones and hands." The Galician vision was provided by **Javier Olleros** (Culler de Pau, una Estrella Michelin), who supplies his kitchen with produce from the Ría de Arousa estuary, where his restaurant is located. In his opinion, the rías are still the great unknown and he put particular emphasis on their biological diversity, wealth and the culinary potential of their products.

The day finished with a round table on 'Artisanal fisheries. Competition, sustainability and respect,' at which **Roberto Rodríguez Prieto**, from Artesans da Pesca; **Miren Garmendia**, secretary of the Federation of Guilds of Gipuzkoa, and **Arantza Murillas**, sustainable fishing management researcher, shared their concerns and discussed the reality of the sector. The programme of speeches will continue in Cádiz on Wednesday with the 'Science, industry and sea companies' section.

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