

## **Speech by John Perry TD, Fine Gael Spokesperson on the Marine, at the Carrying Capacity Conference, Westport, 28 September 2006 – CHECK AGAINST DELIEVERY**

I am delighted to have been invited by Aqua TT on behalf of Clew Bay Marine Forum, South-east Shellfish Co-op and La Tene maps to open the conference today. I would also like to extend my thanks to Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the Marine Institute and members of the EU funded Keyzone Project for sponsoring such an important event.

There is no doubt that the marine sector in Ireland has suffered challenging times in recent years. As we look to the future, we must ensure balance is foremost in our minds. While there is a need to develop new markets and business opportunities, we must balance this against the imperative to ensure that development is carried out on a sustainable basis.

The marine sector has often been challenged to have regard for wider environmental concerns, which in turn assists in maintaining products that are of the highest possible quality on a consistent basis. The key to sustainability and maintaining high quality produce is to determine the *carrying capacity* of a particular area. In this way the industry can continue to produce on a basis that meets demand, and in a manner that is consistent with protecting the environment which supports it. On this basis, determining carrying capacity for particular areas will play a key role in helping to ensure the continued development of the marine in Ireland. It is vital that all involved in the marine and those involved in coastal zone modelling and planning or environmental and water monitoring embrace the concept of carrying capacity. It is on this basis that the conference today is both timely and of huge importance to the future of the marine industry.

The study carried out on environmental quality and carrying capacity for aquaculture in Mulroy Bay, Co. Donegal in 2003 reveals the highly complex nature of *carrying capacity* studies. It is clear that there are a number of variables at play in determining the carrying capacity of a particular area. Therefore the decision to carry out studies on a variety of bays in Ireland should provide a comprehensive overview of the various factors necessary in order to sustain production. There is a fine balance between the environmental resources upon which marine aquaculture is dependent, such as water quality, space or feed and the ability of the environment to dilute and process the wastes produced by aquaculture.

The concepts that lead to sustainability are common in all practices and all capacity studies examine a number of key factors including;

- What determines the productivity of the environment?
- What the aquaculture consumes and produces?
- How the environment responds to the waste produced and
- To what extent it can sustain this process.

An estimate of the *carrying capacity* of a particular environment is the key to sustainable bay management. As Fine Gael Spokesperson on Marine, I have put forward a number of proposals aimed at transforming the marine sector. The achievement of sustainability in the sector forms the central focus of these proposals with a key recognition that unless the Irish marine sector continues to produce to the highest quality standards, it will not grow on either home or international markets. A key part of this approach has been to give nature a chance to renew.

I recently outlined a proposal to address the serious problem of declining salmon stocks in Ireland. The proposal entitled *sustaining our salmon stocks* contains a five-point plan which involves managing salmon stocks, voluntary compensation schemes for net fishermen, tackling pollution, commercial development of the industry and scientific research.

On the Marine in a more general context, Fine Gael has also proposed a sustainable industry development plan, the development of a management regime that accurately reflects the current state of fleet and fish stocks and the establishment of a stand-alone department of marine.

I welcome the recent announcement that the Government is planning *carrying capacity* studies for most of the major bays in the country and the fact that there is one already underway in Clew Bay. It is important that government should play a constructive role such as this and not just burden key sectors of commercial activity with additional regulatory obligations and restraints. In this context, I hope that the government not only facilitates these studies and uses their output to positive effect, but that it allows them to form part of an overall policy to make the marine a vital part of our economy.

I wish you well in your deliberations today and hope that your conference plays a pivotal role in driving recognition and acceptance of carrying capacity throughout the marine sector.

Thank you.