

Claire Nouvian's speech during the round table
“Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean”
Official visit of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to Monaco
Friday 25 April 2008



Your Highness, Mr. President, distinguished Ministers, ladies and gentlemen,

I'll begin with a statement that today is recognized unanimously, using the words of Professor Daniel Pauly:
“We've declared war on fish... and we've won it.”

We have a **food capital** available for our use, the *only one* requiring no work for its growth, just sustainable harvesting: the ocean. Collectively, we have failed in managing this capital. The **aquaculture** solution often does nothing more than divert pressure onto different species, those that are destined to feed the predators we like to consume; For instance, it takes four kilos of wild fish to produce one kilo of farmed salmon, and the ratio rises to ten-to-one for farmed tuna.

We have long considered the oceans to be an **inexhaustible manna** whose yield ought to follow linearly the harvesting efforts put to use. Quite simply, these patterns were wrong: Nature has no regard for the linearity of our mathematical models. We are reaching the breaking point where populations are being overtaken numerically, and in an irreversible manner.

This is undeniably the case for bluefin tuna and for 42% of the Mediterranean shark species, now threatened with extinction.

And even though public **governance policies** have to date proved ineffective, we need them more than ever before, especially if we are to refuse that the **regulation of fisheries** be operated by the **fatality of economic logic**: when the price of fuel goes too high or when a fishery has reached commercial extinction.

I must absolutely insist on one specific point: in the majority of cases, we have **instruments of governance** available for our use — laws, legal structures, codes of conduct for responsible fisheries, ethical guidelines — all of these already exist and ask nothing more than to be implemented and enforced. Justifying inaction by claiming a lack of legal structures, just like claiming insufficient scientific data, is no longer acceptable.

What is lacking is political will. In this regard, marine protected areas (MPAs) are a case in point. Today, only 0.01% of the Mediterranean is completely protected as “no take” areas. This represents a surface area of only 268 km²! By comparison, 33% of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is entirely closed to fishing.

This is the ratio set by scientists in order to have MPAs fulfill in the future their function as “windows on the past,” and as living nurseries permitting the maintenance of ecosystems.

When we take stock of the changes needed in the short term, we realize that the only way to take up the challenge and get out of this dead-end is by using war economics and battle tactics. It remains for the political sphere to recognize that the nature of its own mission has profoundly changed: it is no longer a matter of *thinking* about reform, or of promising better days for humanity, but of avoiding catastrophe.

This is an extraordinary time — one without precedent — and one requiring the deployment of exceptional wills, one allowing the emergence of historical figures, who are capable of extracting themselves from the political time anchored in the immediate.

Let me conclude with a phrase borrowed from American biologist Edward Wilson: “Humanity does not define itself by what it creates, but by what it chooses not to destroy.”

Thank you for your attention.

Claire Nouvian
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