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Fisheries and nature under Team Juncker

Green MEP Isabella Lövin expresses concern at the downgraded commitment to nature and environment protection

So, overall, are you happy with the proposal from Jean Claude Juncker?

I am worried about the direction the new Commission seems to be taking. My overall impression is that there is a clear risk that both environmental and fisheries policy is demoted and that Jean-Claude Juncker is putting more emphasis on economic growth than protecting the environment.

What is your initial reaction to the proposal of Karmenu Vella as commissioner for environment and fisheries?

It is clear that Karmenu Vella will have two heavy responsibilities. I have no opinion on him as a person, but it is clear that his portfolio will require a huge commitment and I hope that he is prepared to work hard to protect our seas and our environment. I hope that his previous role as tourism minister in Malta has provided him with an understanding that there is an economic value in nature, without exploiting and destroying it.

What about the structure of the portfolio they will have?

I am very doubtful about the choice of merging environment and fisheries into one portfolio and making one commissioner responsible for areas that previously were the charge of individual commissioners. The two previous commissioners for these portfolios, Janez Potočnik and Maria Damanaki, have both worked more than full time on their respective policy areas. The fisheries commissioner Maria Damanaki spent a lot of time and effort on the international dimension of the fisheries policy, such as global ocean protection and fighting illegal fishing internationally. I fear that these tasks will now become neglected, since Karmenu Vella will also have the broader environment portfolio to deal with.

If appointed, Karmenu Vella will have to report to the designated vice-president for energy union Alenka Bratušek and the vice-president for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness Jyrki Katainen. Neither of these two 'super-commissioners' has been given the remit by Jean-Claude Juncker of defending the environment in cases of conflict between growth and environmental protection. That is very worrying.

If you could pose one question to the candidate, what would it be?

In situations where there is a conflict between nature conservation and economy, what side will you be on?

What other issues do you think the candidate will need to address in their hearing?

He will have to make it clear that he will defend the reform of the common fisheries policy and implement it in the way intended by the co-legislators. In particular, it will be the responsibility of the Commission to propose fishing quotas that will lead to larger fish stocks rather than larger short-term catches.

The common fisheries policy must be implemented all over Europe – including the Mediterranean.

Vella will also have to address the implementation of protected marine areas.

He must show commitment to making the EU's fisheries agreements with countries in Africa and the Pacific Ocean coherent with EU development policy and respect the needs of local fishermen and the right to food security.

The EU must be a leader in sustainability and prevent the depletion of fish stocks of poor countries. We must stop the destruction of the oceans and protect them for our children and generations to come.

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