



**Speech by  
The President of Iceland  
Guðni Th. Jóhannesson  
at  
the World Seafood Congress  
Reykjavík  
13 September 2017**

Dear friends

I am grateful for this opportunity, to address you all here at the World Seafood Congress in Harpa. Harpa plays an important role in our society, but so does the harbour outside. Without the harbour and the riches of the sea there would be no Harpa, no enrichment of our culture and mind.

For centuries, we Icelanders have relied on the ocean's resources. The twentieth century was the age of regained independence and sovereignty over the fishing grounds. It was the fisheries century. In some decades, fish products accounted for over 90% of Iceland's export income. "After all, life is salt fish", Nobel Laureate Halldór Laxness wrote in the 1930s. "The ocean is one half of our homeland", read a patriotic psalm in the 1940s.

In the last decades of the century, the clear risk of overfishing and stock depletion led to catch regulations, based on scientific advice. This policy created favourable conditions for the sustainable fisheries which many associate with Iceland.

While fisheries remain important for Iceland, they are no longer the backbone of our economy. Here in the capital region, there probably are almost as many people who work part-time in the pizza industry, making pizzas and delivering them to customers, as there are permanent workers in fish factories and on fishing vessels. At sea and on land, the fishing industry has changed tremendously; technological advances mean that fewer hands are needed to process the product. But note that here we have seen a considerable change in the kinds of work the fishing industry provides. Although we need fewer hands in the production itself we need more hands and minds to develop the necessary technology.

Dear friends: This is no news to you. This development is not tied to Iceland alone. The Blue Bioeconomy of the twenty-first century depends on innovation, sustainability, high-tech, diversity, globalization and forward-thinking. We see this so well here, at the World Seafood Congress. Allow me to add as well that this gathering is also a great testimony to the positive force that lies within the Icelandic fishing industry.

In this regard there are two important aspects of fishing and seafood, I should like to mention briefly, and they are related. One is the importance of quality in the fisheries. Quality will remain a key issue for consumers and therefore also for most producers. We in Iceland enjoy the clean maritime environment of the North-Atlantic, but quality is also an issue that has to do with work culture, control agencies and other aspects.

The other big issue is the threatening pollution of the oceans. We have all heard about the issue of microplastics, so abundant in the oceans. There are also oil spills and the aggregation of heavy metals – all of these are potentially threatening not only fishing sectors in several countries but the world community in general. We must all keep reminding governments and industries of these issues, in order to remedy the situation and secure continued access to the wonderful and healthy food provided by the sea.

To conclude: I mentioned pizzas. I can safely predict that we here in Iceland will never survive on making pizzas, as good as they are. I highly doubt that contemporary writers will follow in Halldór Laxness's footsteps and have a character in a novel say with passion: "After all, life is pizza." Early this year, I happened to ignite a great debate around the world by stating my distaste for pineapples on pizza, even declaring that if I had the power, I would ban that topping. That was a step too far and I was "forced" to issue a clarification on Facebook. I think I will just repeat it here, with the emphasis on the concluding words:

I like pineapples, just not on pizza. I do not have the power to make laws which forbid people to put pineapples on their pizza. I am glad that I do not hold such power. Presidents should not have unlimited power. I would not want to hold this position if I could pass laws forbidding that which I don't like. I would not want to live in such a country. For pizzas, I recommend seafood.

Congratulations on an excellent congress. Good luck in all your future endeavours.