



Annual Meeting of NEAFC  
12-16 November 2007

### **Opening Statement**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

First let me thank the Commission for providing Seas At Risk with the opportunity to observe and address this Annual Meeting.

Our primary reason for being here is the conservation of deep-sea species and vulnerable marine ecosystems. Seas At Risk would like to once again express its concern about the clearly unsustainable exploitation of deep-sea fish species in the NEAFC Regulatory Area. As we all know, most exploited deep-sea species are generally understood to be harvested outside safe biological limits. This is why ICES called for a “complete overhaul of deep-sea fisheries” in 2005. The interim prohibition of orange roughy fisheries in the Regulatory Area is an encouraging sign that NEAFC acknowledges the need for conservation measures for its deep-sea stocks. We therefore call upon this meeting to extend this measure until measures that ensure a sustainable orange roughy fishery can be taken. Currently the main problem for deep-sea fisheries management is the lack of data, and in situations where Contracting Parties do not provide data to conduct accurate assessments on the status of the fishery and the stock, fishing should not be allowed to continue.

With respect to the conservation of vulnerable marine habitats, Seas At Risk supports the Norwegian proposal to extend the NEAFC area closures until 31 December 2008 and evaluate these in conjunction with other actions NEAFC has to take in response to 2006 UN General Assembly resolution on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems from the adverse impacts of bottom fishing on the high seas.

Seas At Risk would like to stress, also on behalf of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, that the effective implementation of this UN General Assembly resolution is a matter of utmost concern to our organisations and many other NGOs, deep-sea scientists and others from around the world, as highlighted in a joint NGO letter to all NEAFC Heads of Delegation last week

The Resolution is clear on the actions States and regional fisheries management organisations should take by 31 December 2008; namely to assess the impacts of individual bottom fishing activities on the high seas and prohibit any high seas bottom fisheries that cannot be managed to prevent “significant adverse impacts” to vulnerable marine ecosystems. And furthermore, to close areas of the high seas to all bottom fishing where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known or *likely* to occur, unless or until they are able to regulate such fisheries effectively to prevent significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems.

Since the resolution was adopted, substantial progress is made on the implementation of the resolution in a number of regional processes in the South Pacific, CAMMLR and the North West Pacific. We are also encouraged to see a proposal for a regulation published by the European Commission in October for bottom fisheries by Community vessels fishing in areas not covered by RFMO's or arrangements and where no establishment of an RFMO is under way, consistent with paragraph 86 of the resolution.

Given that Norway, Iceland, Russia and the European Community were all active participants in the UN negotiations on the resolution which was adopted with consensus, we expect NEAFC to adopt an agreement that will ensure effective implementation of all the key elements of the UN General Assembly resolution.

Given that time is running out, an efficient and effective way to facilitate this process is to establish a joint OSPAR/NEAFC working group with the aim to make direct recommendations to NEAFC and OSPAR on areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known or likely to occur. Such a working group could meet early 2008 when the FAO guidelines on management of deepwater high seas bottom fisheries are ready.

Let me close by wishing this meeting ambition and success.