



**Recommendations for the 30th Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission
7 Nov 2011 - 11 Nov 2011**

Opening Statement: Pew Environment Group, Seas at Risks and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

Mr. President, distinguished delegates and observers,

The Pew Environment group would like to thank the President and the Contracting Parties for providing us with the opportunity to make an Opening Statement on behalf of Pew, Seas at Risk and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. We would like to offer several recommendations regarding the management of deep-sea fisheries for this year's Annual Meeting.

The UNGA recently held a review workshop (15-16 September 2011) on the progress of RFMOs and States in implementing the relevant UNGA resolutions, particularly paragraphs 80 and 83 to 87 of 61/105 and 117 and 119 to 127 of its resolution 64/72. In preparation for the UNGA review process, the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC), of which the Pew Environment Group is a member, conducted a review of the implementation¹ of these resolutions, including the application of the UN FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep Sea Fisheries in the High Seas by all RFMOs. The results of this review indicate:

- 1) While progress has been made in identifying and protecting some vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) as called for in UNGA resolutions 61/105 and 64/72, the efforts taken to date are far from comprehensive;
- 2) The environmental impact assessments of fishing activities called for in both resolutions have not been completed for the majority of bottom fisheries; and
- 3) The catch of many deep-sea species remains effectively unregulated and the status of most deep-sea species is unknown.

A separate scientific review² of the implementation of the UNGA resolutions also concluded that full implementation has yet to be achieved, with most deep-sea fish stocks in the high seas failing to be managed sustainably and many areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are likely to occur remaining at risk from the impacts of bottom fishing.

With respect to the management of deep-sea fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic, we recognize that NEAFC has closed substantial areas of the high seas south of Iceland over the past several years to bottom fisheries and that NEAFC continues to review information on the locations of cold-water corals through ongoing consideration of ICES (International Council for the Exploration of the Sea) advice which, in turn, is based in large part on information supplied by Contracting Parties (e.g. Spain, Norway

¹ "Unfinished business: a review of the implementation of the provisions of United Nations General Assembly resolutions 61/105 and 64/72, related to the management of bottom fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdiction" can be downloaded from www.savethehighseas.org.

² The impact of deep-sea fisheries and implementation of the UNGA Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72. Report of an international scientific workshop, National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, 45 pp. <http://hdl.handle.net/10013/epic.37995>

and the UK). We also recognize the important step forward taken by NEAFC in 2010 to require impact assessments to be conducted for bottom fisheries in 'new' fishing areas of the high seas outside of the existing bottom fisheries footprint.

At the same time however, we remain concerned that impact assessments are not yet required for existing fisheries (fisheries within the footprint) nor has a concerted effort been made to identify and determine the known or likely locations of other types of VMEs besides corals and sponges.

We would also note that the regulations for the management of deep-sea fisheries adopted by NEAFC to date are not based on sound science, have not proven effective in preventing overfishing and the depletion of deep-sea species, and are not consistent with the UNGA resolutions. While the sustainable exploitation of some deep-sea species may be theoretically possible, ICES has advised that there is insufficient scientific information to manage deep-sea fisheries to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks in the Northeast Atlantic. In addition, ICES considers the catch of deep-sea species in the region to be 100% "outside safe biological limits".³ Moreover, ICES has advised that bycatch and discard levels in deep-sea fisheries are high, that mis-reporting and non-reporting of catch are likely to be a serious problem, that VMS data are incomplete, and that for most if not all deep-sea species there is insufficient scientific information on the stock structure, stock size, age structure of the stocks, recruitment, status of the stocks, population size and the range or distribution of the stocks in the NEAFC Regulatory Area to provide effective management advice.⁴

The Annual Meeting of NEAFC this year represents an important opportunity to continue the work of NEAFC to bring the management of deep-sea fisheries into compliance with the measures called for by the UNGA. In this regard, we hope to see NEAFC adopt measures this year to:

Recommendations

1. Overhaul the management of deep-sea fisheries through adopting a recommendation that would require the catch of deep-sea species to be regulated on the basis of stock assessments, the best scientific information available and the precautionary approach consistent with UNGA resolution 64/72, paragraph 119(d). Where insufficient information is available to determine the status of the stock, the impact of fishing on the stock, and/or catch levels sufficient to ensure the long-term sustainability of the stock, then fishing for the stock or species in question (whether target or bycatch) should be prohibited.

2. Close additional areas in the NEAFC regulatory area to bottom fisheries - for example, along the Mid Atlantic Ridge⁵ and on Rockall and Hatton Banks⁶ as per ICES advice - where VMEs are known or likely to

³ Status of fish stocks managed by the Community in the North-East Atlantic. ICES Advice 2010, Book 11; 1.2.1.1.

⁴ ICES. 2010. *Widely Distributed and Migratory Stocks. Report of the ICES Advisory Committee, 2010. ICES Advice, 2010. Book 9. 299 pp.* <http://www.ices.dk/products/icesadvice/2010/ICES%20ADVICE%202010%20Book%209.pdf> Also, ICES response to NEAFC request to develop suitable criteria for differentiating fisheries into possible management types (e.g. directed deep-water fisheries, by-catch fisheries etc.) and to apply these criteria to categorise individual fisheries in order to enable NEAFC to develop fishery-based management initiatives. ICES Advice 2009, Book 9; 9.3.2.3. <http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2009/Special%20Requests/NEAFC%20suitable%20criteria%20for%20differentiating%20fisheries%20into%20possible%20management%20types.pdf> and ICES 2008, *Report of the Working Group on the Biology and Assessment of Deep-Sea Fisheries Resources (WGDEEP)*. 3–10 March 2008. ICES CM 2008/ACOM:14. 531 pp. Pages 70--71. <http://www.ices.dk/reports/ACOM/2008/WGDEEP/WGDEEP08.pdf>

⁵ For example, according to the advice provided by ICES in 2010 in response to the proposal by the EU to close additional areas along the Reykjanes Ridge, "The Mid-Atlantic Ridge is rich in biodiversity and vulnerable deep-water habitats. The area has been studied by several international research projects (e.g. MarEco and EcoMar, Gebruk *et al.*, 2010; Mortensen *et al.*, 2008;

occur based on the best scientific information available and the precautionary principle, unless bottom fisheries can be managed in such areas to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs;

3. Adopt mandatory Impact Assessment procedures for existing bottom fishing areas consistent with the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas and paragraph 119(a) of UNGA resolution 64/72; and

4. Establish much more stringent data collection and reporting requirements for Contracting Parties to “collect and share, in a timely manner, complete and accurate data concerning fishing activities on, inter alia, vessel position, catch of target and non-target species and fishing effort” for deep-sea fisheries regulated by NEAFC consistent with Article 5j and Annex I of the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. This is critical to the effective conservation and management of deep-sea fisheries. This should include a requirement to report catches taken in high seas areas as distinct from the catch within EEZs.

Finally we urge NEAFC to conduct as much of the Annual Meeting as possible in plenary sessions to facilitate transparency, so that a clear record of the debate, the positions of Contracting Parties on specific issues, and the decisions taken by NEAFC can be made a clear matter of public record.

For your information, copies of the DSCC report, the report of a scientist’s workshop, and a DSCC response to the debate at the UNGA workshop on 15-16 September are available for delegations on the table outside the meeting room and can be found on the website of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition at www.savethehighseas.org.

Thank you Mr. President.

Priede *et al*, 2009). These projects provide support for the occurrence of VME indicator species such as *Lophelia pertusa*, gorgonian corals and deepwater sponge aggregations associated to the hills and seamounts all along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. There are no data specifically within the proposed extension zones [proposed by the EU] but it is reasonable to assume that vulnerable deep-water habitats will be found in these zones.”

Advice to NEAFC on vulnerable deep-water habitats. August 2010. ICES Advice 2010, Book 9
<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2010/Special%20Requests/NEAFC%20Vulnerable%20deep-water%20habitats.pdf>

⁶ ICES 2011. Update of cold-water coral and sponge maps and the information underpinning such maps on Vulnerable Marine Habitats (including Hatton and Rockall Banks) ICES Advice 2011 Book 1, 1.5.1.3 / 1.5.4.1
<http://www.ices.dk/committe/acom/comwork/report/2011/Special%20Requests/NEAFC-EC%20Vulnerable%20Marine%20Habitats.pdf>