

Address to Conference on High Seas fishing, St. John's, NFLD, May 5, 2005

Jeff Ardron, Oceana (Living Oceans Society)

Mr Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak. First, I would like to echo all other speakers in thanking the governments of Canada and Newfoundland for initiating and hosting this conference.

As has already been pointed out, we all appear to be in consensus that there is a pressing need to respond to the serious environmental situations reflected in our high seas fisheries and also, I might add, in our domestic waters as well.

In Prime Minister Martin's speech, in the ministerial statement, and especially in the Summary Report, there is a clear recognition of the myriad of short-comings in the way fisheries are currently being managed; that is, the status quo is not sufficient, and by the status quo I include the slow pace of implementing the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, in particular articles 5 & 6 which include the precautionary approach, ecosystem-based management, and the importance of both fisheries and the habitats upon which they rely.

At present, the damage occurring to the sea bottom's habitat is not being addressed and we implore all delegates to take this issue seriously and support the interim prohibition of bottom trawling until such time that proper management measures that protect habitat can be implemented.

We are pleased to see many delegates have recognized that the RFMOs need to be strengthened in terms of enforcement. However, in order to manage in an ecologically effective manner, most RFMOs will also have to transition from a single species approach to an ecosystem approach to fisheries. As has been pointed out, this will not always be easy, but it is necessary. We agree with the statements of other delegates and with the Summary Report that RFMOs should undergo regular performance assessment in terms of meeting their ecosystem objectives.

In the move from words to action, we have stirred up many good ideas. However, the action statements have not yet appeared. Perhaps four days was simply not enough. In any case, the need for actions remains, and we ask the international community to meet again, and if necessary, again, and soon, until meaningful actions are agreed upon. The cost of not taking action is simply too great.

Finally we would like to thank the conference for inviting international NGOs, and encourage future conference organizers to include domestic NGOs as well.

Thank you.