



2015 NEAFC Annual Meeting (November 09 - 13)

Opening statement: Policy recommendations from Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, Oceana, Seas At Risk and WWF

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Observers, thank you for once again providing us the opportunity to observe and address this meeting. This statement is delivered on behalf of WWF, Oceana, the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, and Seas At Risk.

Improved data provision

We welcome the efforts done by ICES to provide NEAFC and its Contracting Parties (CPs) with advice based on the best available scientific methods and data. But ICES is dependent on data provided by the CPs to achieve the requested results. Currently, there are insufficient or incorrect data to distinguish the two stocks of *Sebastes mentella*, which impacts the scientific advice and threatens the sustainable management of these stocks.

We ask contracting parties to provide data following the NEAFC logbook format that will allow ICES to provide the advice requested by NEAFC in the required quality.

We welcome the efforts by NEAFC to improve the gear coding system through the foreseen introduction of the 'ERS' electronic logbook system. Nevertheless, we see that the current deficiencies are making it difficult to clearly identify the gears deployed by vessels operating in areas closed to bottom fishing such as those on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR). The ability to determine whether vessels are using bottom gears or not is critical to ensuring compliance with the measures NEAFC has painstakingly adopted over the past 10 years to protect VMEs.

We therefore ask CPs to accelerate the introduction of the ERS system to allow for a clear identification of vessels and their gears, especially in areas containing VMEs.

Moreover we ask CPs to put all other necessary measures in place to clearly be able to ensure, in real time, that bottom fishing does not occur outside of the existing bottom fishing areas as such activity constitutes IUU fishing and seriously undermine the effectiveness of the bottom fisheries regulations developed by NEAFC over the past ten years and the reputation of NEAFC in regard to the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolutions on bottom fisheries.

Conservation of deep sea species

We welcome the efforts by NEAFC to agree on management measures for an increasing number of deep sea species. We further congratulate ICES on the continued efforts to provide NEAFC with scientific advice regarding the species occurring in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (RA). In addition to the scientific analysis provided by ICES, also other respected organisations have conducted evaluations of a number of deep-sea species. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) published, in June 2015, the first ever European Red List of Marine Fishes. This list, developed by an international group of scientists, contains a number of species for which NEAFC has established management measures based on scientific advice provided by ICES, including three species of deep-sea fish. Roundnose grenadier (*Coryphaenoides rupestris*) has been listed as endangered, and blue ling (*Molva dypterygia*) and orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*) have been listed as vulnerable. The Red List also categorizes a number of species of deep-sea sharks endangered or critically endangered such as the gulper shark (*Centrophorus granulosus*), Leafscale gulper shark (*Centrophorus squamosus*) and Portuguese dogfish (*Centroscymnus coelolepis*). While we recognize that much of the fishing effort on these and other deep-sea species may occur within the EEZs of Contracting Parties, nonetheless in our view NEAFC still has a responsibility to take measures for the long-term conservation and rebuilding of depleted deep-sea stocks in the Regulatory Area.

We note that Article 1.2 of NEAFC Recommendation 19 2014 as Amended by Recommendation 09 2015 states:

“This Recommendation takes into account NEAFC’s responsibility as a regional fisheries management organisation to adopt measures in the Regulatory Area in regard to bottom fishing activities, in order to contribute to the key objectives of the UN General Assembly Resolutions on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep sea fish stocks and non-target species; the rebuilding of depleted stocks and, where scientific information is uncertain, unreliable, or inadequate, conservation and management measures established consistent with the precautionary approach.”

We ask NEAFC and ICES to consider the information provided by IUCN in its recently published red list of marine species in agreements on management measures for deep-sea species, including in particular prohibiting the catch or bycatch of species listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered unless management measures have been established to ensure that stocks of these species can recover.

Identification of VMEs

UNGA resolutions 61/105, paragraph 83 (b) and 64/72, paragraph 119 (b) clearly specify that RFMOs are required to identify where VMEs occur within its RA. Unfortunately, widespread lack of information on deep-sea ecosystems and the cost of the scientific surveys needed to conduct mapping of deep-sea habitats have been an obstacle to the comprehensive identification of these ecosystems.

In the NEAFC RA, information on the occurrence of VMEs is being obtained primarily on the basis of *in situ* surveys and historical data. This approach clearly limits the proper identification and protection of the VMEs in the RA; complementary methods are needed to be implemented.

Predictive habitat distribution models have been recognized by scientists and managers as a useful tool for identifying the geographical distribution of VMEs. Therefore the implementation of predictive models in the NEAFC RA represents a complementary scientific foundation for determining where VMEs are likely to occur and an opportunity to better implement the UN GA resolutions. Moreover the use of these models is in line with paragraph 119(b) of UNGA resolution 64/72, which urges RFMOs to use the best scientific and technical information available to identify where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known to occur or are likely to occur.

We therefore ask CPs to request that ICES incorporates the use of predictive habitat modelling for the identification of areas where VMEs are likely to occur and take appropriate conservation measures in these areas until further information is available.

IMO

We welcome the recent proposals put forward by Iceland that all vessels authorised to fish in NEAFC's regulatory area should have a mandatory IMO number. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2010, 2012) have concluded that the IMO number system is the best available for ensuring that fishing vessels can be easily and quickly identified, thus strengthening the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

We ask that NEAFC adopts suitable measures at the earliest opportunity and joins the majority of RFMOs in mandating the IMO number.

AIS

At last year's annual meeting the bottom fishing review stirred concerns over potential IUU activities in new fishing areas. In the light of this, NGOs are increasingly applying own tools and methodologies based on sAIS to track fishing activities including on the High Seas and draw conclusions with regard to compliance. We are happy to share important findings with the competent fisheries authorities concerned. The same applies to compliance with the deep water gillnet ban.

Marine Litter

We welcome the initiative by Norway to start gathering information on marine litter in the NEAFC RA and the willingness of the Contracting Parties to contribute to this initiative. We further appreciate the additional efforts by Norway to include related wording on the impact and reduction of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear in the upcoming new draft on the UNGA Resolution on Sustainable

Fisheries. We hope that the analysis conducted at NEAFC is only the first step on the marine litter topic and look forward to upcoming approaches both in NEAFC and other for a such as OSPAR.

United Nations General Assembly 2016

Finally, we note that in 2016 the UN General Assembly will conduct a review of the bottom fisheries measures established by RFMOs to implement UNGA resolutions 61/105, 64/72 and 66/68. The UN General Assembly will also hold the UN Fish Stocks Agreement Resumed Review Conference and two meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the development of an implementing agreement of UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The performance of RFMOs will be discussed and debated in all of these UNGA processes and we ask CPs to adopt the abovementioned measures we've recommended consistent with the obligations of states and RFMOs under international law.