

NAFO ‘fiddling while Rome burns’ with their reform agenda.

Amsterdam, 26 September 2005—The Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO) has not taken the call by the United Nations General Assembly for ‘urgent action’ against destructive fishing practices seriously, Greenpeace said today.

Sixty percent of the world’s high seas bottom trawl catch comes from the Northwest Atlantic, the area that NAFO is supposed to manage. In 2004, more than 1,100 scientists from 69 countries called for a UN moratorium on high seas bottom trawling because of the irreversible and destructive impact it has on deep-sea ecosystems. Yet at the conclusion of the NAFO AGM in Tallinn, Estonia this week, all that NAFO members seemed capable of agreeing on was the need to “develop guidelines to gather data” and “review existing research”. This in an area where as a result of overfishing and NAFO mismanagement, 4 of the 6 straddling deep-sea fish stocks under NAFOs care are currently under moratoria.

“If the members of NAFO were being truly responsible about the state of these deep-sea fisheries and the extent of the destruction of deep-sea ecosystems by bottom trawling, they would put a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling in place now, while they sort out the mess that these fisheries are in,” said Bunny McDiarmid, Greenpeace International oceans campaigner. “The NAFO AGM’s response is pathetically inadequate to the urgent action that scientists and the UN have called for to protect deep-sea biodiversity. By the time they have finished developing guidelines and reviewing information there may not be anything left to protect,” she said.

Greenpeace, a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (1) is calling for an immediate temporary United Nations General Assembly moratorium on high seas bottom trawling, until such time as scientists have had the time to assess the extent of the biodiversity of the high seas and decision-makers have adopted binding regulations that ensure that fisheries in such areas are sustainable and equitable.

This year three highly critical reports on NAFOs operations and performance have been released. (2). While many of the reforms proposed, such as implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, and ensuring that the use of the objection procedure does not negatively impact conservation are long overdue, without a moratorium in place these reforms amount to ‘fiddling while Rome burns’ said McDiarmid.

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(1) The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, an alliance of over 50 international organizations, representing millions of people in countries around the world, is calling for a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling. For further information about the Coalition visit www.savethehighseas.org



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(2) Greenpeace NAFO Case Study July 2005; Canadian Government Report of the Advisory Panel on the Sustainable Management of Straddling Fish Stocks in the Northwest Atlantic, Sept. 2005, and a WWF report Sept. 2005