



SEAS AT RISK

Committee on Fisheries, Twenty-sixth Session, Rome Italy, 7-11 March 2005 Seas at Risk Statement on Deep Sea Fisheries

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I am speaking on behalf of Seas at Risk, a European Federation of 16 NGOs concerned with the protection and restoration of the marine environment. Seas at Risk has been actively working on deep sea fisheries for several years now, and has been observer to NEAFC since 2002, when NEAFC first opened its doors to NGOs. Seas at Risk is also a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition.

In light of yesterday's Statements, Seas at Risk is deeply concerned that COFI will fail to take the necessary immediate and effective action to address the issue of destructive bottom trawl practices on the High Seas.

It seems that much emphasis was placed on the development of a code of practice, which in fact already exists in the form of the UN FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rather than developing a new Code, Seas at Risk strongly recommends that FAO thoroughly review high seas bottom trawl fisheries in light of the existing Code. Seas at Risk believes that the development of a new code is not only time consuming – time that is invaluable to the protection of deep sea biodiversity, but also it will prove to be a fruitless exercise when there is clearly insufficient information on deep sea science for it to be effective.

In addition, Seas at Risk believes that the most important contribution that the FAO can make at this stage is to perform a review of the existing science, gaps in governance regimes and gaps in quantifying fishing activity. Seas at Risk urges COFI member countries to commit themselves to providing the urgently needed information on location, history, catch, by-catch etc to the FAO for compilation in time for consideration by the 60th UN General Assembly.

Further Seas at Risk would like to bring to your attention the reference made in paragraph 6 of the FAO background paper on deep sea fisheries (COFI/2005/6), that deep sea fishing on the high seas where there are no RFMOs with legal competence to manage it, is unregulated or unreported fishing. Such fishing should therefore be declared IUU fishing and we call upon COFI to acknowledge this and call upon member countries of COFI to commit to eliminate this form of IUU fishing.

In line with paragraphs 3 and 6 of the FAO background paper on deep sea fisheries, Seas at Risk commends Norway's proposal for an interim ban on flag states to engage in high seas bottom trawling where there are no RFMOs in place, as this is consistent with the International Plan of Action agreed by COFI in 2001 to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the threat posed by bottom trawl fishing on the High Seas is an issue not just of sustainable fisheries but also of the protection of a major reservoir of the world's biodiversity on the global commons. It is of utmost importance that COFI members recognize and act within the broader context of the commitment of the international community as a whole to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity worldwide.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

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