







2016 NEAFC Annual Meeting (November 14th – 18th)

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

Mr. President, 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.

IMO

As stated last year, we welcome the 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.

Performance review recommendations

The NEAFC performance review report presented at the annual meeting in 2014 provided NEAFC and its Contracting Parties with a great range of recommendations to improve both the functioning and the agreements of the Council. Since then, unfortunately only few proposals have been considered and some of those discussed have not been adopted. It would be a shame if this mechanism, which does not exist for many international bodies, would not be honoured and lead to better decision-making processes.

We especially would like to highlight in this respect, and as delineated in the report: The extent to which NEAFC adopts measures based on best available science, the successful allocation of fishing rights, the identification of optimum capacity, to prevent and eliminate excess capacity, the efficiency to make critical decisions, and adequate mechanisms for resolving disputes.

We ask NEAFC to actively work on these and other issues highlighted in the performance review report to improve the efficacy and efficiency of the Council.

Scientific advice on VMEs

Currently, NEAFC is still requesting scientific advice for closed areas based on a limited number of indicator species. NEAFC Recommendation 19:2014 on the protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) in the Regulatory Area largely incorporates the relevant provisions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions in regard to the management of high seas bottom fisheries, specifically Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72.

We urge Contracting Parties to request advice from ICES on areas where the additional VME indicator species included in Annex 5 of Recommendation 19:2014 are known or likely to occur, and recommendations on protecting VMEs formed by such species, including additional closed areas and thresholds for the encounter protocol.

Management of deep-sea fisheries

The high vulnerability of most of the deep-sea species requires more than ever the implementation of a precautionary approach and the use of the best available information. Unfortunately, current NEAFC management measures are of particular concern as they are basically related to an ineffective fishing effort restriction. This situation is not in line with the requirement to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep-sea stocks and non-target species as required under the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the UN General Assembly resolutions (e.g. 64/72 UNGA resolution, paragraph 119(d)).

To solve this undesirable situation, NEAFC agreed in 2014 on the establishment of a PECMAS ad hoc Working Group to improve the management regime for these species. Although some improvements have been made in this regard like the categorization of deep-sea species (a proposal expected to be adopted during the present AM), the lack of commitment of certain NEAFC CPs, which are not submitting required data on time, are delaying the expected progresses and outcomes of the ad hoc WG.

We urge NEAFC CPs to make efforts to speed up the process of adopting a new framework recommendation that brings the management of deep-sea fisheries in line with the UN General Assembly resolutions and international law.

Moreover to ensure the adoption of proper management measures, complete and accurate data on the catches of deep-sea species, including non-target species, are needed. Despite ICES improvements regarding the number of deep-sea stocks for which advice is provided, the ability of ICES to provide good advice is seriously hindered by the deficient information provided by some NEAFC CPs.

We call on NEAFC CPs to do their utmost to improve and submit the necessary data timely to ICES, and to adopt an interim on-board observer program, while the framework recommendation is adopted, in order to improve data collection.

Over the past several years, NEAFC CPs have made efforts to protect the most vulnerable deep-sea species in the RA, such as the prohibition to catch deep-sea sharks and the obligation to submit data on these species for further evaluation on the state of the stocks. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that

for other vulnerable or depleted species NEAFC has clearly not acted with the necessary strength or has disregarded the scientific advice. NEAFC is failing in protecting species listed in the IUCN red list, like roundnose grenadier (*Coryphaenoides rupestris*), listed as endangered, and blue ling (*Molva dypterygia*) and orange roughy (*Hoplostethus altlanticus*), both listed as vulnerable, and is repeatedly ignoring the ICES recommendation on the closure of orange roughy fisheries.

We urge NEAFC CPs to extend at least until 2019 the current NEAFC recommendation 7:2013 on conservation and management measures for deep-sea sharks in line with the available ICES advice, to prohibit the directed fishing for orange roughy at least until to 2020 according with the ICES advice, and to establish effective measures to prevent the by-catch of depleted and/or vulnerable stocks and species.

Bottom fishing outside the footprint

We are seriously concerned about the repeated findings of illegal bottom fishing (bottom trawls, set longlines and set gillnets) in "new fishing" areas without prior authorization of "exploratory bottom fishing" as revealed by the 2014 and 2015 VMS based NEAFC bottom fishing reviews. WWF could verify and corroborate these breaches for at least nine vessels via sAIS vessel tracking, including one activity in the Hatton Bank closure. That information was presented to PECMAC. The sAIS analysis was reiterated for 2016 and resulted in similar patterns.

We urge NEAFC Contracting Parties to start enforcement and to sanction such infringements.

Transparency and PECMAC

Since 2015, observers have been admitted to meetings of PECMAS. We are grateful for the possibility to attend these meetings and to be included in the discussions which provide a great improvement to the understanding of the decisions being taken at the NEAFC annual meeting. We would like to increase this interaction further and would like to kindly request the possibility to also attend meetings of PECMAC. Other RFMOs such as CCAMLR, ICCAT, NAFO, and IATTC to which many of the NEAFC Contracting Parties are also members, are fully open to observers, allowing them to attend and intervene not only at annual and scientific meetings, but also at compliance meetings. A number of NEAFC Contracting Parties have repeatedly stated the value of having NGOs attending and providing expert advice at meetings, and strongly advised having them participate in other meetings.

We urge NEAFC Contracting Parties to agree to allow observers to attend meetings of the Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance.

Finally, also on behalf of our organisations, we would like to thank the president and the secretary for the long years of good cooperation, for listening to us and for enabling us to fill our position as observers in the best possible way.