



Ecology Action Centre

deepsea
conservationcoalition

For Immediate Release

NAFO Makes Progress on Protecting Deep Sea Ecosystems. Bycatch and Unregulated Fisheries Continue to be a Conservation Problem

Halifax, Canada (September 27th, 2013)—This week, at the 35th annual meeting of the [Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization](#) (NAFO) deep sea fishing nations agreed to additional measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems which include seafloor organisms vulnerable to bottom fishing. Extensions were made to existing closed areas for large gorgonian corals and seapens one new protected area agreed as well.

“This is significant progress over last year,” says Susanna Fuller, Marine Conservation Coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre and an observer to the NAFO meeting. “The protection of these deep seas ecosystems is key to maintaining high seas marine diversity.”

Two additionally proposed areas were not agreed and are pending the analysis of more information from research surveys. There was also not agreement on completely closing the seamount areas to fishing, where an exploratory fishery for alphonso took place in 2012 on the Corner Rise Seamounts. This issue has been referred for further discussion.

“This is a disappointment,” says Matt Gianni, Political Advisor to the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. “The Corner Rise seamounts have been in theory closed by NAFO since 2007. They form an important part of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem. The alphonso fishery continues to be unregulated, which is no longer tolerable given the high rate of bycatch in this fishery and commitments to sustainable management made by all of the NAFO countries in numerous international agreements.”

One important success for environmental and conservation organizations at NAFO this year was that NAFO took a decision to open working groups to observers, with a clause that some elements of discussion may be closed.

“This marks welcome progress in transparency and accountability which is expected from organizations such as NAFO,” says Fuller.

All area closures will be reviewed in 2014, and impact assessments for all fisheries are due in 2016. NAFO agreed to broaden the discussion on bycatch and unregulated species during intersessional meetings before the 2014 annual meeting.

Beginning in 2004, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a series of resolutions committing all NAFO member countries to protect such deep-sea areas, known as 'vulnerable marine ecosystems', from the harmful impacts of fishing. The UNGA resolutions also committed high seas fishing nations to conduct environmental impact assessments of deep-sea fisheries to ensure that they are managed sustainably and without damaging deep-sea ecosystems. The implementation of these resolutions will be reviewed again in 2015.

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The Ecology Action Centre and Deep Sea Conservation Recommendations for the 35th Annual Meeting of NAFO are available here:

<http://www.savethehighseas.org/publications/>.

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The Ecology Action Centre was founded in 1971 and works on a wide variety of environmental issues in Nova Scotia and Canada through education, research and advocacy. EAC has been involved in sustainable fisheries work since the cod collapse in 1992. www.EcologyAction.ca

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition was founded in 2004 to address the issue of bottom trawling on the high seas in the absence of an effective governance regime. The coalition is made up of more than 70 NGOs, fisher organizations, and law and policy institutes committed to protecting the deep sea. A coordination team works together with a Steering Group that consists of Ecology Action Centre, Greenpeace International, Marine Conservation Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council, Pew Environment Group and Seas at Risk. www.SavetheHighSeas.org