

Talking points on a proposed moratorium on high seas bottom trawling

Fisheries Agency of Japan

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1. Background

- (1) Some environmental NGOs and countries that are strongly influenced by such NGOs have been demanding a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling at meetings related to the United Nations General Assembly since 2004. Paragraph 66 of last year's UNGA resolution (A/RES/59/25) requested States to consider "the interim prohibition of destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling that has adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems." According to paragraph 71 the UNGA in 2007 will discuss whether a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling is necessary. It is expected that this issue will also be discussed at the Informal Consultations on Oceans and The Law of the Sea and Sustainable Fisheries Resolutions to be held at the United Nations headquarters in October and November 2005.
- (2) Environmental NGOs targeted high seas driftnet fisheries with an unscientific moratorium by UNGA Resolution 46/215 in December 1991. Now, they have chosen high seas bottom trawling as their next target and have started a campaign for its moratorium. The UNGA is again being used as the place to run their campaign since it is rarely attended by fisheries experts, avoiding scientific discussions on this issue at the fisheries specialized organizations such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs).

2. Japan's position

- (1) The Fisheries Agency of Japan has the honor to refer to the UNGA resolution (A/RES/59/25) and wishes to express its serious concern over political initiative on the part of certain Governments and radical anti-use environmental organizations in attempting to install blanket moratorium on high seas trawl fishing. The political nature of the initiative is without doubt, as they had never cared to have FAO involved before advancing such call.

- (2) We are very disturbed in this context with the growing propensity of these groups toward using political and diplomatic arenas for their political purposes-an attempt to discredit or exert undue influence in their favor on the competence of FAO and RFMOs on highly specialized scientific issues.
- (3) The moratorium as proposed is without scientific justification and is a blatant challenge against the UNCLOS regime and its objectives. It defies, inter alia, the following facts; productivity of the high seas being so meager, almost all of the present day fisheries take place within the resource-rich EEZs. In addition, trawling operations on the high seas occur almost exclusively on traditional grounds as evident in publications by FAO, ICES, PISCES and other RFMOs.
- (4) It is thus quite obvious that there is no compelling reason to single out and condemn high seas trawling as against same activities within the EEZ, let alone practices on resource and environment use on land. The fact that they are insignificant both in number and contribution to the world's food supply should never be the reason for discrimination and for them to be conveniently used for political agenda of anti-use groups.
- (5) We might call, in this juncture, the attention of your Government to the agreement at the FAO COFI meeting in March 2005 on the FAO's initiative to strengthen its activities for the management of deep sea fisheries.
- (6) We welcome this initiative and are convinced that this is the right approach to proceed for furtherance of the objectives as pronounced in the UNCLOS. In conclusion, we should be most grateful if your Government is good enough to place our viewpoint under favorable light and to find possible to join with us and other like-minded delegations at the forthcoming UN meeting in October and November 2005 in their efforts to support the above-mentioned FAO initiative and thwart political interventions on the part of anti-resource-use elements.