



29th Annual Meeting of NEAFC, 8-12 November 2010

Opening Statement

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

Seas At Risk welcomes the opportunity to observe and address this meeting.

NEAFC plays a crucial role in the conservation of deep sea species and habitats in the North-east Atlantic. Insufficient information is available to determine the impact of fishing on the majority of deep-sea species and stocks caught or taken as by-catch in the NEAFC Regulatory Area, and even less so to determine what level of catch could be considered sustainable. **We therefore fully support the recommendation by PECMAS to annually report on the NEAFC website, the effect and effectiveness of the regulation on deep-sea fisheries and measures to conserve vulnerable marine ecosystems.** This would be a first step towards increasing the availability of information.

It is clear that deep-sea fisheries management requires substantial improvement. In spite of the measures agreed by NEAFC since 2004 to cap and then reduce fishing effort, the reported deep-sea catch rose by approximately 60% between 2004 and 2008. Furthermore, the capacity of EU deep-sea fleets, responsible for 95% of the catch, has not been effectively reduced¹.

Given the vulnerability of deep-sea species to fishing and the lack of information on their status, full compliance with the precautionary approach is required. The 2009 UNGA resolution (64/72) clearly states that this means **a temporary fishery closure unless or until sufficient information is available which enables the long-term sustainable management of these stocks.** We note the upcoming UNGA review, in 2011, of measures taken by NEAFC to implement this resolution, and call upon this meeting to show more ambition in the regulation of deep-sea fisheries and to live up to international commitments. **A significant first step would be to close all fisheries for orange roughy and deep-sea sharks.** This would allow more coherent management for these stocks, both in and outside the EU EEZ.

¹While overall reductions in tonnage, fishing power and number of vessels were observed in the deep-sea fleet between 1999-2006, the fleet has also adopted more technically efficient vessels with greater fishing capacity. Reductions were for vessels of between 500–2000 Gross Registered Tonnage while the larger vessels (>2000 GRT) increased both in terms of the overall tonnage (+34% to 228,669 GRT) and fishing power (+45% to 305,052 Kw). Efficiency indicators (Grt and Kw per Vessel) for these vessels also increased by 26% and 47% respectively meaning fishing capacity has not effectively decreased. (Data from Villasante, S. 2010. "The deep-sea sector has increased its fishing capacity by 34–44%. Global assessment of the European Union fishing fleet: An update. Marine Policy 34: 663–670.)

NEAFC Contracting Parties are committed by the same UNGA resolution to submit Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for *all* of high seas bottom fisheries. Seas At Risk would like to stress that, under the current NEAFC framework, no EIAs are required for bottom fisheries within the existing footprint. The UNGA resolution does not make this distinction between fisheries in- and outside the existing footprint. In fact, the ICES advice to NEAFC underlines the likelihood that VMEs occur within the existing footprint, in areas open to bottom fishing. **Therefore, we re-iterate our request from last year to extend the requirement for EIAs to all proposed bottom fishing activities in the NEAFC Regulatory Area.**

As a final comment on deep-sea fisheries, we call on this meeting to maintain current area closures, as recommended by ICES, and in addition, to **adopt the closures on the Mid Atlantic Ridge proposed by the EU in 2009.**

We would like to end our statement with a note of concern over the “mackerel war”, as it has been dubbed in the press. Although the stock is not currently considered overexploited, its sustainability could be compromised if a coordinated approach is not taken by all Parties with an interest in this fishery. **We urge NEAFC to help facilitate negotiations with the aim of establishing a long-term management plan supported by all Parties concerned, ensuring scientific advice is followed for the long-term sustainability of the stock, and unilateral quota setting is discouraged.**

Seas At Risk wishes you a successful meeting.