



Press Release

For immediate release.

Ministers gamble with deep-sea fish stocks

Brussels, 22nd November. After two days of Fisheries Council negotiations EU ministers have agreed a typical EU fudge and gambled that deep-sea stocks will survive another 4-5 years of over-fishing. Despite scientific advice from ICES that orange roughy, blue ling and deep water shark fisheries should be closed immediately, Ministers agreed only relatively modest cuts in 2007 and 2008, aiming at a final phase-out only by 2010/11. Seas At Risk condemns ministers for their lack of political courage, and is shocked at their willingness to gamble with the future of whole ecosystems.

“Given the current status of these stocks, it is far from certain that they will survive the levels of fishing agreed by ministers in the run-up to the phase-out”, said Monica Verbeek, Fisheries Policy Officer at Seas At Risk. “The scientists are clear that these fisheries should be closed. It is shocking that the Fisheries Council’s only response is to fall into their usual habit of disregarding scientific advice and appeasing those countries that profit most from over-fishing; deep-sea fish species are too vulnerable and recovery too slow to sustain such a ministerial habit.” A number of countries led by the UK supported stronger action but their initiative was defeated by France, Spain, Portugal and Poland.

An ICES recommendation to reduce fishing for roundnose grenadier to the lowest possible level and to dramatically scale-down fishing activity on other deep-sea stocks was dealt with in a similar manner. In line with a decision at last week’s Annual Meeting of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, the Council agreed a token 5% cut in overall fishing effort, a cut that will in any case be difficult to verify since reliable fishing effort data is rarely provided by the countries involved.

In a related development, negotiations will end this week on a proposed United Nation’s General Assembly Resolution on a moratorium on bottom trawling on the high seas. Deep-sea bottom trawling is the most destructive of all current fishing practices, not only decimating deep-sea fish stocks but also destroying vulnerable deep-sea habitats such as cold-water corals and seamounts. Many nations, including a good number from the EU, are supporting the proposal, but a joint EU position in favour of a moratorium appears to be being blocked by Spain.

For more information call:

Dr Monica Verbeek

Seas At Risk’s Fisheries Policy Officer

Tel: +351 21 4647255, Mob: +351 96 5617846,

E-mail: mverbeek@seas-at-risk.org



NOTES FOR EDITORS

- Seas At Risk is a Brussels-based independent non-governmental federation of environmental organisations concerned with the protection and restoration of the marine environment. More information on Seas At Risk and deep-water fisheries can be found on their website: www.seas-at-risk.org
- The cuts in TACs agreed by the Fisheries Council (Brussels, 22/11/06) were as follows: 25% in the catches of orange roughy and deep-sea sharks in 2007 and a further 25% in 2008, aiming at a phase-out in 2010. For blue ling they agreed a reduction of 40% over two years, aiming at a phase-out in 2011. They agreed to reduce catches of roundnose grenadier by 15% in 2007.
- Deep-sea fish species are characterised by slow growth, extreme longevity, and very low levels of reproduction. This makes them highly vulnerable to over-fishing; the serial depletion around the world of deep-sea fish species like orange roughy is testimony to this. So vulnerable are deep-sea species that some scientists believe it is impossible to fish them sustainably.
- ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea) is an international science organisation studying North Atlantic marine ecosystems and the living resources they sustain. It works with experts from its 20 Member Countries including the Russian Federation and the USA. One of the tasks of ICES is the provision of scientific information on effects of fisheries and advice on fisheries management in the North-East Atlantic. Last year ICES called for a complete overhaul in deep-water fisheries management, after a decade of increasingly alarming warnings on the unsustainability of these fisheries. The ICES advice on fish stocks (ACFM 2006) is available on the web: www.ices.dk
- In July 2006, a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) report examined the implementation of a 2004 UNGA resolution for States and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), to take urgent action including the prohibition of bottom trawling on sensitive marine ecosystems. The report concluded that current measures are far from sufficient. Since then, many nations including Australia, New Zealand and the US, have declared support for a prohibition on high seas bottom trawling.