

**24<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission**

**London, 14 to 18 November 2005**

**Opening statement of the European Community**  
(Constantin Alexandrou)

Mr. President, distinguished Representatives and Observers,

It gives me great pleasure to be here, heading the European Community delegation for the first time at this the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission.

Many of the old NEAFC challenges remain with us. Once again, we need to use our imaginations to follow those challenges through to their conclusion. Whatever the difficulties ahead of us, we have to take our decisions in the interests of the fish stocks and the fishing industry; it is our duty to do this. In this respect, we should recall the obligations to which we have all committed ourselves under the NEAFC Convention.

Mr. President, I am very pleased and satisfied to see that the three relevant coastal States were able to come to an agreement in Tórshavn on the arrangement for the mackerel fisheries for 2006. This is a very positive step by the Parties. It is the Community's wish that this will lead to a full NEAFC agreement for mackerel this week.

On the Atlanto-Scandian (Norwegian spring-spawning) herring, whilst it is disappointing that the coastal States have so far been unable to reach agreement on the management for 2006, I am hopeful that the coastal States can work together towards reaching a reasonable and acceptable agreement on the sharing of this stock by the end of the year. Each of the coastal States must work together to ensure that for the sake of our fishermen, we can have suitable arrangements in place so that they can start fishing on this stock by 1 January 2006. My delegation will be open to any possibilities for meeting any of the other relevant parties at this meeting this week.

For blue whiting, I must congratulate the coastal States for all the work they have done in reaching a technical agreement in Copenhagen less than two weeks ago on the sharing and the future management of this stock. This is after eight years of negotiations, some of which have been very difficult, not least for the Community as the largest shareholder. I know well that there are still some major hurdles to overcome before a full political agreement can be reached but I also know that there is the political willingness to reach this agreement, so I remain optimistic about the final result. The Community will do all in its power to ensure that this political agreement is reached at the earliest opportunity and that it is satisfactory to all the stakeholders.

With regard to redfish, NEAFC has over the years tried to play a leading role in the North Atlantic. Unfortunately, we have not been able to reach a common agreement in recent times. On the other side of the Atlantic, we know that NAFO will continue as our partner in the redfish fishery during 2006. Any changes to the assumed NEAFC TAC will result in consequent adjustments to the TACs adopted by NAFO. We recognise that this is a practical arrangement which takes account of the NAFO fishing levels.

The European Community remains seriously concerned about the state of the haddock stock at Rockall. We look forward very much to working with our partners here and with ICES towards formulating suitable measures for protecting this stock. If it is not possible to reach an agreement on such measures, the Community will propose a NEAFC recommendation to establish a conservation zone in the Regulatory Area.

In 2004, the Contracting Parties adopted a recommendation to reduce fishing effort on deep-seas species by 30%. I would like to stress that the Community continues to strongly support this position and will continue to take further measures for its waters to apply in 2006. Related to this, there are a number of areas of deep-water corals in NEAFC waters. During this week, we will demonstrate our commitment to the protection of deep-water habitats by proposing the closure of some of the more important of these areas. This is a clear demonstration by the Community of its commitment to the current developments within the context of the United Nations.

We will be discussing a proposal this week to amend the current NEAFC Convention so as to enlarge the scope of the Convention to include sedentary species. We feel that this is appropriate as these species are harvested and directly affected by the fisheries and we will be prepared to enter into a full discussion with our partners at this time.

I am aware that one of our partners, Norway, has encountered a number of problems in its area of fisheries jurisdiction with respect to IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing vessels and their fishing on a valuable resource. We welcome the attempts by Norway this week to address this problem although we recognise at the same time that there are still some complex issues which need to be resolved. Colleagues, I think that we will need to be imaginative in our overall approach to this issue.

Mr. President, distinguished Representatives and Observers, we have a very full agenda ahead of us. Much work has to be done. On behalf of the European Community, I would like to express the pleasure we have in being here in London. I look forward very much to being able to work with all my colleagues here this week. I hope that we can achieve some results of substance to underline the success of this organization.