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FISKERI- OG KYSTDEPARTEMENT

Royal Ministry of Fisheries and Coastal Affairs

Agenda item 7(g) and 8(g) – for discussion

AM 2006/33

North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission
22 Berners Street
London UK W1T 3DY
United Kingdom

Your ref.

Our ref.
200600910- /SW

Date

**Proposal for a mandate to the Permanent Committee on Management and Science –
protection of vulnerable areas**

NEAFC agreed in 2004 to close four seamounts and a section of the Reykjanes Ridge in the Regulatory Area for three years to bottom trawling and static gears, so as to protect vulnerable deepwater habitats of particular value to fisheries resources. This measure will be in force until 31 December 2007. The Commission needs to consider a new proposal on protection of vulnerable areas at the Annual Meeting in 2007.

According to the annotated agenda closed areas will be dealt with under agenda item 7 g) Closed areas. It is also said in the annotated agenda that a proposal for prolongation of the closure of the five areas will be presented by Norway and possibly other Contracting Parties. Norway will instead introduce another way forward in dealing with this topic.

At the Annual Meeting in 2005 the Commission established the Permanent Committee on Management and Science (PECMAS). Norway finds it appropriate to mandate PECMAS to evaluate the closed areas introduced in 2004 and to consider new proposals for protection of vulnerable areas, in order to facilitate discussion and decisions by the NEAFC Commission in advance of or at the Annual Meeting in 2007. The Working Group on the Future of NEAFC also discussed the role of PECMAS at their meeting in February 2006, and found that PECMAS also should be used to handle aspects related to area closures not directly related to fisheries management.

Norway has therefore prepared a proposal to mandate PECMAS to look into this item. The mandate is enclosed this letter.

Yours sincerely,
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Director General

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Proposed Mandate to the Permanent Committee on Management and Science

NEAFC agreed in 2004 to close four seamounts and a section of the Reykjanes Ridge in the Regulatory Area for three years to bottom trawling and static gears, so as to protect vulnerable deepwater habitats of particular value to fisheries resources. This measure will be in force until 31 December 2007. The Commission needs to consider a new proposal on protection of vulnerable areas at the Annual Meeting in 2007.

The Commission therefore requests the following from PECMAS, within 1 June 2007:

1. An evaluation of the appropriateness and experiences with the closed areas introduced in 2004, i.e.
 - a) The Hecate Seamount (on the mid-Atlantic Ridge, MAR)
 - b) The Faraday Seamount (on MAR)
 - c) The section of the Reykjanes Ridge north of the Charlie-Gibbs Fractures Zone (on MAR)
 - d) The Altair Seamount
 - e) The Antialtair Seamount

The evaluation should be based on scientific information and advice, but also take into account the principle that lack of scientific information should not prevent protective action.

2. Proposals for criteria for the identification and selection of vulnerable areas that need protection, taking into account criteria developed by e.g. OSPAR and the current scientific information on habitat quality and exploitation history.
3. Proposal, if appropriate, for new areas that should be considered closed to fishing activities, with a specification of what gears that should be prohibited.
4. Specification of data shortages and critical data needs that require attention and action from NEAFC and Contracting Parties.
5. An evaluation, in view of Pt. 1) and the continued shortage of spatially and temporally resolved data on habitat quality and fishing history, of alternative protective strategies and measures to those implemented in 2004.

These might include: a) An overall ban on bottom trawling and static bottom gears within the deepwater areas of the Regulatory Area; b) Closure of all deepwater areas of the Regulatory Area to bottom trawling and static gears, permitting fishing only in areas where scientific evidence is sufficient to define sustainable exploitation levels and practices; c) small scale and restricted exploratory fishery in accordance with a scientific protocol not to exceed 20% of the fishable area of each seamount.

6. Proposal on a protocol for the collection of the data required in exploratory fisheries to assess seamounts, with a view to future recommendations on management measures.

7. Advice with regards to the acquisition of relevant information on fisheries and habitat quality. Actions might involve active monitoring at sea, fishery-independent investigations, and measures to secure timely data flow to science and advisory bodies such as ICES.