

NEACF 20th Annual Meeting

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Report by the NEAFC Secretariat

The North Atlantic

NORDIC CONFERENCE ON PROTECTION OF THE SEA AND SUSTAINABLE UTILISATION OF LIVING MARINE RESOURCES

Nordic House, Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, 21-22 June 2001

Summary

The Government of the Faroe Islands, in cooperation with the Nordic Council of Ministers, took the initiative to invite Environment and Fisheries Ministers and regional political leaders from across the North Atlantic to meet in Tórshavn, 21 & 22 June 2001 to discuss cooperation on the marine environment and the sustainable use of living marine resources in the North Atlantic. The Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands, Mr. Anfinn Kallsberg, opened the Conference; it was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands, Mr. Høgni Hoydal.

The Conference was the first forum of its kind to involve both coastal states and regions in an integrated discussion on North Atlantic marine environmental and resource management issues. Building on existing Nordic cooperation in this area, the Conference aimed to strengthen ties between the Nordic Atlantic region - coastal Norway, the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland - and the neighbouring coastal states and regions across the North Atlantic, from Scotland in the east to Canada in the west.

Participation included Fisheries Ministers from Newfoundland, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Norway, Environment Ministers from Iceland and the Faroe Islands, the Deputy Minister for Rural Development - Scotland, the convenor of the Shetland Council, the General Secretary of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Canadian Ambassador to Denmark, the Director General of DG Fish of the European Commission and high level representatives from administrations in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. Observers from regional management organisations, NGOs and parliamentarians were also present.

The Conference discussed the possibility of a regular political forum to focus on the enhancement of synergies in regional cooperation in the North Atlantic – as well as enhancing international focus on the North Atlantic as an important region in global processes concerned with both environmental protection and sustainable development.

In line with the findings of a Working Group of the Nordic Council of Ministers 'group of wise men', the Conference agreed that there was no need for additional legal instruments for the regulation of conservation and utilisation in the North Atlantic, but there was scope for a forum for enhancing the process by focusing on common positions in different institutions, thus guiding the implementation of existing legal instruments.

The Conference agreed upon the **Tórshavn Declaration** on the cooperation on the protection of the sea and the sustainable utilisation of living marine resources. It was decided that the next meeting would take place in 2003 in Shetland at the invitation of the Scottish Executive.

Themes and keynote speakers

1. Cultural connections in the North Atlantic

Chair: Høgni Hoydal, Deputy Prime Minister, Faroe Islands .

In pursuit of the cod:

Mark Kurlansky, USA, author of *Cod: A biography of the fish that changed the world*
One of the interesting tales in Mark Kurlansky's book is the that the Basques, after having depleted right whale stock on the western side of the Atlantic, turned to cod fishing, and for a couple of centuries kept secret the location of their far offshore fishing and whaling operations. In his speech, Mark Kurlansky stressed the need to involve the fishing communities directly in management.

Living from the sea in the new millennium:

John Goodlad, Chief Executive, Shetland Fishermen's Association & Senior Advisor to the Shetland Fish Producers Organisation Ltd.

John Goodlad described the problems and possibilities facing fishing communities seen from the perspective of the Shetlanders in a holistic and integrated manner. He stressed that fisheries had to be fully integrated in a social context and fishing communities could not stay isolated from globalisation and pressure from the outside and had to face the challenges in a constructive manner. He stressed the principle of community ownership and subsidiarity in management.

2. The marine environment of the North Atlantic

Chair: Siv Friðleifsdóttir, Minister for the Environment, Iceland
Chair's opening remarks

Environmental dynamics of the North Atlantic:

Dr. Bogi Hansen, Fisheries Research Laboratory, Faroe Islands

Dr. Bogi Hansen, oceanographer, addressed the question of the anthropogenic influence on the North Atlantic Ocean. He pointed out that the area is relatively clean with regard

to pollution by POPs, PCBs and the like. Only biological magnification through the food chain was a problem, making top predators like some marine mammals unsuitable for human consumption by exposed. ??

However, there are other anthropogenic influences, and he was able to refer to new research by him and his co-authors published that day in *Nature*. It has puzzled researchers that the general trend in global warming has not shown up in the North Atlantic. It has now been shown that the cold-water overflow from the Nordic seas North and West of the Iceland-Faroes-Scotland ridge through the Faroe Bank Channel has weakened. This leads to a weakening of the Atlantic inflow of warmer water into the Nordic seas. Another anthropogenic signal in the early 1990s was the occurrence of strong south-westerly winds. Recent research shows that these winds depend on surface temperatures in tropical seas. Tropical sea surface temperatures have increased because of anthropogenic global warming. Unusually strong south-westerly winds in the early 1990s are thought to have had a profound impact on the apparent ecosystem collapse in Faroese waters in the early 1990s with total Demersal catches dropping to the lowest levels in the last 100 years of fishing around the Faroes.

International environmental regulation of the North Atlantic: is it enough?

Davið Egilsson, Director, Environment and Food Agency, Iceland

David Egilsson had led a subgroup, which advised the panel of 'wise men' of the Nordic Council of Ministers on the need for legal instruments to regulate utilisation, pollution prevention and conservation in the North Atlantic. He suggested that shared problems and common approaches made cooperation essential.

He gave a very informative overview of the situation in the area and of the legal instruments available. He pointed out that some organisations only dealt with one aspect of anthropogenic activities and their impact on nature, whilst others overlap. He noticed the decision of OSPAR on marine protection zones in 1998, which addresses all three main aspects - pollution prevention, utilisation and conservation.

The Large Marine Ecosystem approach, which arose from UNCED in 1992, is a systematic integrated approach. He saw this as a paradigmatic shift, which changes the focus of the management of natural resources at all levels. His final conclusion was, however, that with the exception of airborne mercury, instruments are in place to protect the marine environment. A forum of North Atlantic ministers, who would oversee and coordinate what was actually done under the different legal regimes, could make implementation easier and enhance the efficiency of marine protection.

3. Securing sustainable livelihoods from North Atlantic marine resources

Chair: Otto Gregussen, Minister of Fisheries, Norway

Sustainable economics in the management of fisheries and natural resources:

Dr. Ragnar Árnason, Professor of Economy, University of Iceland.

Dr. Árnason in his keynote lecture, outlined the heavy dependence on the natural resources of six main communities in the North Atlantic: Northern Norway, Shetland, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and Newfoundland. He outlined general principles for the optimal use of natural resources. The social importance of these resources implies the need for optimal use, which is maximisation of the flow of benefits from the resources over time. Anything else implies social waste. He pointed out a number of concerns that led to a demand for sustainability, for example the role of communities in the North Atlantic as custodians of their natural resources globally.

He then, on a theoretical basis, described the demands on management, enforcement and the judicial system to be able to implement optimal paths of utilisation. He saw a clear distinction between the situation where a resource is national property and where a resource is shared between several jurisdictions. He stressed the need for using efficient instruments in management, either property rights or corrective taxes or subsidies.

The EU's Common Fishery Policy and the North Atlantic:

Steffen Smidt, Director General, Directorate General for Fisheries of the European Commission

Steffen Smidt pointed out the need for changes in the Common Fishery Policy (CFP) especially:

- Using a multi-annual and multilateral fisheries management system
- Applying an eco-system approach to fisheries management
- Dealing with discards
- Addressing the economic and social dimension of fisheries management
- Establish clear objectives

These must be based on clear biological reference points and targets, together with the consideration of economic and social objectives.

The Commission would make detailed proposals in November on the North Atlantic (and the Baltic), and on shared stocks, and the need to address issues of management together.

He envisaged a need in the future to evaluate scientific advice, policy objectives and constraints.

He invited greater contact and more openness with international partners and closer co-operation in sharing technical data and providing the necessary research

The Commission would communicate on the following topics:

- Integrating environmental policy requirements into the CFP
- A Biodiversity Action Plan for the fisheries sector
- A need to measure and monitor

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- The impact of fishing on the surrounding marine environment
- The changing dynamic of the inter-relationship between fish species
- The impact of extraneous environmental effects on fish stocks and fisheries.

The Commission had looked into all aspects of this problem and called for input from the North Atlantic fisheries jurisdictions in this process. At the end of the day it must be accepted that the number of fishing vessels has to be reduced and there will be fewer jobs in the fishing sector.

Other statements

The Chairs of the different sessions made statements and other ministers and politicians participated in the discussion sessions after each theme and the final roundtable discussion.

The political consensus at the Conference is expressed in the Tórshavn Declaration in Annex I.