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Oral Statement by the NEAFC Secretariat to the Third Meeting of the Ad-hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction

Kjartan Hoydal, NEAFC Secretariat – February 2010

NEAFC measures to protect biodiversity in the NEAFC Regulatory Area south of Iceland including the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone

I have tabled a written, rather lengthy, statement giving detail of measures adopted by NEAFC relevant to the conservation of biodiversity. I will try to highlight some pertinent points.

In April 2009 NEAFC decided to close five areas on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in the high seas in the North East Atlantic to bottom fisheries, in order to protect VMEs from significant adverse impacts. A proposal by Norway using new information coming out of the MARECO project formed the basis of discussions in NEAFC. The rationale of the proposal was very much in line with what is found in various guidelines discussed internationally. NEAFC received advice on the proposal from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, ICES, which assessed the proposal against the standards and criteria for identifying vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME), developed by FAO.

Pursuant to the competence of NEAFC, this implies that fishing activities by vessels flying the flags of NEAFC Contracting Parties - and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties - with fishing gear which is likely to contact the seafloor during the normal course of fishing operations, are prohibited within these areas.

At the Annual Meeting in November 2009 it was agreed to extend closures on the Hatton Bank to bring the borders in line with scientific advice from ICES. NEAFC also put in place a seasonal closure in an area south of the Icelandic EEZ known as a spawning ground for blue ling. A proposal for further extending the closures on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge was sent to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea for scientific review.

Following up on the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas NEAFC has adopted additional measures in its bottom fishing regulations. NEAFC has outlined “existing bottom fishing areas” where bottom fishing has taken place and “new bottom fishing areas” where bottom fishing has not taken place. In



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most instances there is not enough research or data to identify VMEs in the “new bottom fishing area”. To reduce risks of significant adverse impacts to VMEs, bottom fisheries in these areas are severely restricted. Normal commercial bottom fisheries authorisations are not sufficient and bottom fishing is only authorised under strict conditions in an Exploratory Bottom Fisheries Protocol. Vessels authorised under this protocol must have an observer on board. Observers shall collect data in accordance with a Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem Data Collection Protocol.

NEAFC has analysed the extent of the protection of VMEs in its Regulatory Area. The following rough estimates were arrived at:

AREA of NEAFC Reg. Area		Effective Fishing	Existing Area	New Fishing	Area	Closures	
square km		sq km	%	sq km	%	sq km	%
South of Iceland	4.900.000	42.500	0,9	4.502.200	91,9	355.300	7,3
Norwegian Sea	326.000			326.000			
Barents Sea	71.000	71.000					
Arctic Ocean	275.000			275.000			
		Area Fishable		Area and Closures			
	Sq km	%					
Fishable Area South of Iceland	655,000						
All closures	355,300	54					

It should be added that NEAFC considers that the NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement is adequate to monitor and manage the closed areas.

Representation of Regional Bodies

I would like to make the point that several regional fisheries bodies have moved in the direction of managing the use of all living resources and inserted strong conservation commitments into their Conventions.

In the NEAFC Convention the relevant text reads as follows:

- a) ensure that such recommendations are based on the best scientific evidence available;*



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- b) apply the precautionary approach;*
- c) take due account of the impact of fisheries on other species and marine ecosystems, and in doing so adopt, where necessary, conservation and management measures that address the need to minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and marine ecosystems; and*
- d) take due account of the need to conserve marine biological diversity.*

RFBs could, therefore, be the obvious choice of vehicle for immediate progress in conserving biodiversity. They are also well placed to involve stakeholders that will have to shoulder the consequences of any measures discussed by the Working Group, who are generally not represented at UN meetings. It is quite difficult to involve stakeholders in global discussions for a number of reasons. Regional and local discussions have a better chance of reaching the correct balance in the decision processes.

By cooperating regionally with other organisation with a mandate to regulate human activities the process can be further strengthened. NEAFC has agreed to look at the feasibility of organising a workshop, in collaboration with NAFO and OSPAR, in the first half of 2010 to review progress on ecosystem-based area management in international waters in the North Atlantic, with a particular emphasis on defining management objectives. This demonstrates NEAFC's belief in regional solutions and regional cooperation to move forward with respect to conservation of biodiversity including sustainable fisheries management.

We have to state that we consider the representation of regional organisations at meeting of this Working Group has been very patchy. This could be because Regional Fisheries Bodies see the discussions in the Working Group as duplication of discussions that have already taken place in FAO- COFI and the biennial RFB Secretariats meetings. This is regrettable considering their potential role in moving forward.

February 2010 NEAFC Secretariat