The 33rd Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) was held in London from 10 to 14 November 2014.

NEAFC is the international organisation responsible for fisheries management in international waters in the North East Atlantic. Its Contracting Parties are Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation.

NEAFC is the first regional fisheries management organisation in the world to undertake a second performance review. The independent expert panel that had been appointed presented its report on NEAFC’s performance to the meeting. It was agreed to have an Extraordinary Meeting of NEAFC in May 2015 to discuss the report in depth and how NEAFC should respond to the panel’s various observations and proposals. While the report is largely very positive, it nevertheless identifies significant issues that need to be addressed.

NEAFC management measures will be in place in 2015 for a number of fish stocks. These include redfish in the Irminger Sea; Rockall haddock; deep-sea species; blue ling South of Iceland; roundnose grenadier; roughhead grenadier; and various shark species.
Management measures for the large pelagic fish stocks (blue whiting, herring and mackerel) will be set through a postal procedure as soon as the coastal States have reached a conclusion in their consultations which will continue later this month.

In addition to agreeing to management measures for several deep sea species, and general measures for all other such species, the meeting agreed on interim guidelines on the management of deep sea species. These guidelines establish a categorisation of deep sea species that is intended to assist in both the provision of scientific advice and in the development of management measures for deep sea species. Additionally, an ad hoc sub-group of the Permanent Committee on Management and Science was established to collate data on deep sea species and analyse them in a manner that will make them useful for the development of management measures.

The fight against illegal fishing continues to be a priority for NEAFC. To this end, various control and enforcement measures are ongoing. These include the expansion of the scope of NEAFC’s Port State Control in 2015. This will fully align the system, which is operated electronically, with the 2009 FAO Port State Measures Agreement.

NEAFC also continues to maintain its list of vessels that have been confirmed as engaging in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Such vessels are not authorised to enter a port in any of the Contracting Parties. The meeting noted amendments to NEAFC’s IUU list, both by removing a vessel that was confirmed to have been scrapped and by including on the list a vessel that had been identified by the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation. The meeting considered that such cooperation between regional fisheries management organisations was very useful to strengthen the fight against illegal fishing.

NEAFC has closed several areas to bottom fisheries to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. New closures were added at the meeting, based on scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The request to ICES for future advice in this context was also amended to ensure that it is consistent with the objectives set in the Recommendation on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems that was adopted through a written procedure earlier this year. That Recommendation has been deemed a significant improvement to the previous measures, although they had also been deemed consistent with the relevant UN General Assembly resolutions and FAO Guidelines. In addition to closing some areas to bottom fishing, and authorising it in other areas, the Recommendation sets out clear procedures for bottom fishing in new areas. This includes pre-assessments, an encounter protocol and detailed rules on exploratory fisheries.

Concern was raised regarding the possibility of bottom fisheries for species not managed by NEAFC being inconsistent with the obligations that Contracting Parties have pursuant to the Recommendation on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems. The Permanent Committee on Control and Enforcement was mandated to look at this issue.
Several measures of a technical nature were adopted at the meeting. These include making it compulsory to use sorting grids when fishing for shrimp with trawl in ICES sub-areas I and II of the Regulatory Area and several amendments to the NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement.

The meeting noted that 2014 had been the first active year of the Joint Advisory Group on Data Management, which is a joint body of NEAFC and its sister organisation for the North West Atlantic, NAFO. This group deals with various technical issues, and its joint nature contributed to harmony in the technical solutions applied in different areas.

During 2015 there will be the first meeting under the collective arrangement with the OSPAR Commission for the protection of the marine environment of the North East Atlantic. This is intended to strengthen cooperation between the two organisations, and the intention is to include other organisations that have legal competence regarding other activities. In particular, efforts will be made to present possible participation to the International Maritime Organisation and the International Seabed Authority.

The cooperating non-Contracting Party status of Canada, New Zealand and St Kitts and Nevis was renewed for the year 2015. A meeting of the Permanent Committee on Control and Enforcement in January 2015 will discuss the applications that were received for granting such status to new States. In this context, the meeting agreed to bring forward the deadline for submitting applications for cooperating non-Contracting Party status to ensure that the Contracting Parties will in future have enough time to consider applications before NEAFC’s Annual Meetings.

The meeting re-elected Mr. Johán H. Williams, Norway, as the President of the organisation, and Mr. Andrew Thomson, EU, as its Vice President.

For further information on NEAFC please see www.neafc.org, or contact the Secretary, Stefán Ásmundsson, on +44 207 631 0016 or stefan@neafc.org

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