PRESS RELEASE FROM THE 2016 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION

The 35TH Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) was held in London from 14 to 18 November 2016.

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.

At the Annual Meeting, conservation and management measures for the year 2017 were adopted for a number of fish stocks. These include blue whiting, herring, mackerel, redfish in the Irminger Sea and Rockall haddock.

NEAFC is progressing further in its work regarding improvements to the conservation and management of deep-sea species. At this Annual Meeting, the “NEAFC approach to conservation and management of deep-sea species and categorization of deep-sea species/stocks” was adopted. This replaces the previous interim guidelines and categorisation, following review by NEAFC’s scientific adviser, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

This approach and categorisation, which was formally agreed, will form the basis of NEAFC’s conservation and management measures for deep-sea species in the future. Measures were already adopted at the 2016 Annual Meeting on this basis, including general conservation and management measures for all deep-sea species and more specific measures. These include prohibiting fisheries directed at deep-sea sharks, rays, chimaeras and spurdog, in addition to catch limits being set for several species of grenadiers in two separate areas. Bans on fisheries targeting basking shark and porbeagle remain in effect.

The protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), such as corals, continues to be an important issue for NEAFC. NEAFC has already closed bottom fisheries in all areas where VMEs are known to occur or are considered likely to occur according to scientific advice. NEAFC is now focusing on measures to ensure that bottom fishing only takes place in areas where it is authorised. This forms a part of NEAFC’s extensive Monitoring, Control and Enforcement System (MCS), which includes receiving information on an hourly basis detailing the exact location, speed and heading of all vessels in the high seas of the North-East Atlantic. No changes were made to the VME measures at this Annual Meeting, but emphasis on monitoring, control and compliance was reiterated.
NEAFC continues to place great emphasis on action against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fisheries. In this context, a number of different measures have been implemented, including NEAFC’s online system of Port State Control, which exchanges information on port entries in real time. Several amendments were made at the Annual Meeting to NEAFC’s Scheme of Control and Enforcement, to enhance efforts to ensure compliance.

A major step to enhance monitoring, control and enforcement was taken when the basis for an Electronic Reporting System (ERS) for NEAFC was formally adopted. Once completed, this is expected to be a significant improvement for fisheries inspection operations. Developments of technical solutions for the ERS will continue in 2017 on the agreed basis.

Following the 2014 performance review of NEAFC, two working groups were established at the 2015 Annual Meeting, one on Allocations Criteria and one on a Framework for Coastal State Negotiations. The 2016 Annual Meeting recognised the progress that the groups have made and mandated them to continue their work in 2017 with the aim of presenting formal proposals to the 2017 Annual Meeting.

NEAFC’s cooperation with other international organisations was highlighted at the Annual Meeting. This includes the collective arrangement with the OSPAR Commission for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. This collective arrangement, which has now been operational for two years, is intended to strengthen cooperation and coordination between the two organisations, and the intention is to include other organisations that have international legal competence regarding other activities.

NEAFC’s good cooperation with several other organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) was also welcomed.

The cooperating non-Contracting Party status of the Bahamas, Canada, Liberia, New Zealand and St Kitts and Nevis was renewed for the year 2017. These States cooperate with NEAFC and, in some cases, deploy vessels for transhipment operations in the NEAFC Regulatory Area.

The terms of the current NEAFC President, Johán H. Williams, Norway, and Vice President, Andrew Thomson, the EU, expire at the end of this year. Jacques Verborgh, the EU, was elected as President of NEAFC for 2017-2018 and Janet Nørregaard, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) was elected as Vice President for the same period.

Stefán Ásmundsson has been the Secretary of NEAFC since 2011 and will leave the position when his second term in office finishes in the summer of 2017. The NEAFC Commission agreed to appoint Darius Campbell as the new Secretary of NEAFC. He is currently the Executive Secretary of the OSPAR Commission and previously served as an official in the British civil service.

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

London, 18 November 2016