Mister president, distinguish delegation, NEAFC administration, coastal states, observers and others.

MSC welcome the opportunity to attend the annual meeting of NEAFC. We are currently concern about the status of the MSC certificate of the 3 pelagics, mackerel, Atlanto Scandan (NSS) herring and blue whiting. There are 4 certificates for each specie i.e. Iceland, Norway, Faroe and EU have their own certificate.

MSC fishery standard consist of 3 core principles,

- Principle 1 Sustainable fish stocks
- Principle 2 Minimizing environmental impact
- Principle 3 Effective management

In a fishery assessment there are 28 performance indicators (Pi) measured by an independent accredited certification body also called Conforming Assessment body or in short CAB. Each Pi is measured on the scale 60-100. If all Pi scores are above 80 then the fishery pass but if one Pi scores below 60 then the fishery fail and if one or more score are in the region of 60 to 80 but average score of each 3 principles reach at least 80 on average, then the fishery pass certification. In such cases the fishery certificate contain condition for each Pi which were scored below 80 level. The fishery client gets certain timeframe set in the certificate to close the condition, i.e. raise the score above 80 level. Around 94% of all new fishery certificates do have one or more condition. The fishery client is then required to work with stakeholder etc to improve the scoring during given timeframe and if the client is unable to raise the score then the certificate become at risk to become suspended.

All certificates of the 3 pelagic, are required to make improvement and contain conditions at least on two Pi.

- 1.2.2 harvest control rules and tools
- 3.1.1 Legal &/or customary framework

The timeline to close condition like those are often 4 years from date of certification. As the different fishery client in these 3 pelagic has entered certification at different time, then the timeline to close has been different between clients. Last years the fishing mortality has been higher than advice with lately result in reduced biomass. This is consequence of the lack of agreement between the fishing states. To close these conditions then the total fishing mortality need to be brought down to the level which are consistent with scientific advice and the management plan need to be responsive to the fluctuation in the fish stocks. For that to be effective then there is need for a sharing agreement between the coastal states in these fisheries.
In MSC new fishery certification process, which will be valid as of 1. March 2019, then all overlapping MSC certified fisheries will have to harmonise their timeline, so all fishery will have to close their condition at same time. The earliest date for closing a condition in overlapping fisheries shall apply to all overlapping fisheries. The CAB will now in the months to come harmonies the timeline for all certificate for all 3 species. The earliest timeline on AS herring is elapsing, and earliest timeline for blue whiting and mackerel is 2020.

Newest Ices advice on mackerel shows that biomass is now below trigger point. The CAB for these 4 certificates are now looking into if that will require revised score on principle one for the fisheries of mackerel. It will be interesting to see the revised score, most likely in early 2019. On worst case scenario then the certificates can become suspended.

Loss of MSC certification implies that fisheries no longer are publicly recognised against well known independent certification program for fisheries sustainability, potentially negatively affecting the reputation of fisheries and their management. The MSC standards were specifically referred to in the preparatory papers for the development of the UN Sustainable Development Goal nr 14, “life below water”. Many companies and governments have SDG related targets and objectives, and MSC certification offers a credible impartial tool to governments and companies to demonstrate they meet their ambitions to contribute to a healthy planet for future generations. Loss of certification would reduce progress against the SDGs. Clearly, in the case of suspensions, nor fisheries authorities, nor the seafood industry, not the MSC would not benefit, and the environment would remain subject to too high fishing pressure.

The situation on the 3 pelagic are worrying. There is need of leadership by the NEAFC member states to find a way to agree on sharing mechanism in those fisheries. It is sad that out of last 22 years then there has only been 4 years where all 3 pelagic has been in total agreement. In other words, 18 years out of last 22 years, there has been at least one or more of the 3 pelagic not in agreement. It does not look like that the coastal states can reach an agreement now in year 2018. Ladies and gentlemen, I believe we all agree that current situation is very unfortunate and Mr. President I would like to end this opening statement by referring once again to the 2014 NEAFC” Report of the Performance Review Panel” where it says:

“The contracting parties participating in NEAFC are some of the most sophisticated in the world in terms of fishing capacity, control and enforcement, administration, and scientific expertise. Thus, it is inexcusable that these contracting parties cannot come up with workable solutions that result in catches consistent with the advice they seek from independent experts”

Lets hope next 22 years will be years of successful sharing management for all NEAFC stocks.