OPENING STATEMENT
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
37th NEAFC Annual Meeting
London, 13-16 November 2018

Mr President, distinguished delegates.

FAO is very pleased to once again attend the annual meeting of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, a leading Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) with which FAO enjoys a close working relationship.

Over the past year, not only has NEAFC continued to actively participate in the FAO-led ABNJ Deep Seas Fisheries Project, which is entering its fifth and final year, but has also continued to generously contribute to FAO’s capacity development work on combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing worldwide. FAO is also very grateful to NEAFC for hosting at its premises in London this year the meetings of the Working Group on the FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) and the Working Group on Information Exchange (established under the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures - PSMA). I would also like to recognise FAO’s growing collaboration with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), particularly in co-chairing the Working Group on Fishing Technology and Fish Behaviour; a mini-symposium on “Responsible Fishing Technology for Healthy Ecosystems and Clean Environment” to be held in April 2019 will be sponsored by FAO.

FAO would like to take this opportunity to inform delegations of developments in some areas of work of particular interest to NEAFC. Starting with the issue of discards, I am pleased to inform you that the third FAO global assessment of fisheries discards is currently under review and will be published in the coming months. This study used the ‘fishery-by-fishery’ approach and is based on 530 discard rate records compiled from different sources (observer programmes, peer reviewed estimates, grey literature, etc). This publication may be of special interest to NEAFC Contracting Parties, given that FAO major fishing area 27 is the second major contributor to annual discard levels.

Turning to the subject of combatting IUU fishing, FAO is very encouraged by the rising number of Parties to the PSMA, which currently stands at 56. As Secretariat to the meetings of the Parties (MOPs), FAO has worked to follow up on various conclusions of the first MOP held in Oslo, Norway in 2017 and is now preparing for the second MOP to be held in Chile in 2019 which is expected to focus on the rules of procedure for meetings, information exchange options, terms of reference of the funding mechanisms in support of developing States Parties, and the process to review the implementation of the Agreement. Supporting developing countries in the implementation of the PSMA, complementary instruments and tools remains a key area of FAO’s work. Currently, FAO’s global capacity development programme comprises six projects funded by the European Union, Norway, Korea, Sweden and the USA, supporting approximately 35 countries over the programme’s five-year period.
At the thirty-third session of FAO’s Committee on Fisheries (COFI), FAO launched the public version of the Global Record on 9th July 2018. This first public version\(^1\) contains one-third of the global eligible fleet (with Unique Vessel Identifiers or IMO numbers) provided by 51 countries. The European Union, Iceland and Norway (NEAFC Contracting Parties - CPs), and Canada (NEAFC Cooperating Non-Contracting Party - CNCP), have already contributed to this global initiative to fight IUU fishing through increased transparency and traceability of the information. Additionally, Panama (NEAFC observer), a relevant flag State in terms of transshipment operations, has also contributed with data. The Global Record information system will be testing and implementing FLUX (Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange) for the Vessel Domain during 2019, first with the European Union and later with selected RFMOs, including NEAFC, as a channel to facilitate data submission by States.

FAO has published a “Global Study on Transshipment and IUU fishing: Regulations, practices, monitoring and control”\(^2\) and, following COFI’s instructions, will proceed with conducting more in-depth studies on this matter and we look forward to NEAFC’s additional technical contribution to these studies. FAO is also developing “Technical guidelines on methodologies and indicators for the estimation of the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing”. Volumes 1 (Global Review of Studies) and 2 (Guiding Principles and Approaches) have been published.

Finally, I would like to refer to FAO’s work to address the issue of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) which is a significant component of marine litter. The United Nations has called for a significant reduction of marine litter by 2025 and fisheries play a crucial role in achieving this target. The thirty-third session of COFI endorsed the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear, considered to be not only an important tool for minimizing ALDFG and ghost fishing, but also support efforts to combat IUU fishing. FAO is in the process of developing a global programme that will act as a framework for capacity development projects supporting the implementation of these Guidelines and other measures to prevent and reduce ALDFG, as well as addressing other environmental issues that impact the sustainability of fishing operations.

FAO wishes you successful deliberations over the course of this week and we look forward to continue working closely with NEAFC, its CPs and CNCPs in the implementation of international fisheries instruments, mechanisms and tools.