1. **Opening of the meeting by the Chair**

The Chair, Vidar Landmark, Norway, opened the meeting and welcomed delegates.

All Contracting Parties were present at the meeting.

The list of participants is noted as document WG-VME 2019-01-02 of the meeting.

2. **Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteur**

The agenda was agreed as circulated in document WG-VME 2019-01-01.

The Secretary was appointed as rapporteur.

In his introductory comments the Chair recapitulated the discussions at the Annual Meeting 2017 that had led to the set-up of the Working Group and the progress at the 4 meetings in 2018. The previous meetings had evolved from a Chair’s working paper, via a paper on topics for discussion to an informal working document on Recommendation 19:2014, developed at the last two meetings of 2018. The Annual Meeting 2018 had noted the Chair’s report on the work of the Group and agreed that it should continue the examination of the issues under its existing mandate. The working document circulated to Contracting Parties at the last WG VME meeting of 2018 had been subject to continued internal consultations in preparation for the first meeting of WG VME in 2019.

3. **Feedback from Contracting Parties on a working document developed at WG on VMEs 4 and circulated with the Report of that meeting.**

Working Group VME discussed the working document that had been circulated with the report of the last meeting. The working paper included informal proposals for amending and restructuring Recommendation 19:2014 to help resolve the balance in views on setting out the legal competence of NEAFC and the rights of coastal states.
The working group continued with suggested amendments to the informal joint working document through further rounds of drafting. This helped to clarify some of the options as well as developing specific drafting on establishment of a review panel related to some of the proposed alternative amendments.

4. Final conclusions from the WG on VMEs and coastal States

In light of further clarifications resulting from the new drafting, the Working Group came to a conclusion that for the moment Contracting Parties were unable to find agreeable drafting to set out the balance in views on the legal competence of NEAFC and the rights of coastal States. It was decided therefore that no further examination of drafting options on the issue was merited for the present by the Working Group. The planned future meeting of the Working Group on March 12-13 was therefore cancelled.

5. Draft proposal to Annual meeting

While no further meetings were planned, it was agreed that the status of the Working Group on VME should be ‘on hold’ for the present. Contracting Parties were invited to reflect on their positions and may nevertheless want to consult with each other informally in the run up to the 2019 Annual Meeting. If the Heads of Delegations to WG VME considered a Working Group meeting was merited in the light of any developments at any point they should contact the Chair.

6. Any other business

6.1 Including marking of documents for publication

No formal documents were tabled at the meeting.

7. Report of the meeting

The draft report was circulated on 08 February 2019. The final report was adopted through correspondence on 22 February 2019.

8. Closing of the meeting

The Chair thanked delegations for their efforts made in the task set out for the Working Group. He wished delegations a safe journey home.