Mr. President, distinguished delegates, observers, ladies and gentlemen,

Norway is once again pleased to be here in London attending an annual meeting of NEAFC. Let me start by thanking the President and the Parties for the good cooperation this last year, and not least the Secretary and his staff for their excellent work throughout the year and in preparing for this meeting. We have some interesting days ahead of us, and Norway is committed to work constructively to find acceptable solutions on all issues.

As always there has been important work undertaken by all the subsidiary bodies of the Commission. We are looking forward to their reports and their proposals that I am sure will improve further the performance of NEAFC.

Unfortunately, the allocation issue concerning the major pelagic fish stocks remains unchanged. The lack of overall agreements also impacts deliberations here in NEAFC. However, we must remain hopeful that solutions can be found.

Since the idea of taking steps to at least reduce the overfishing of these stocks came up, we have been giving this much thought. We would have hoped that it could be possible to move forward along this line. All involved parties contribute to overfishing of one or more of the stocks, by overshooting the last agreed sharing.

As we are now coming up to the period of the year when we are setting our national quotas, it should be pointed out that it would be a positive signal for future discussions on these issues, if those that are overshooting on two or all of the stocks, on a unilateral basis would align themselves with those that have restricted themselves to do so on one stock only, also on a unilaterally basis.

This would be a decision that shows indeed that statements of concerns over the situation, actually are real.
At last year’s annual meeting, NEAFC took a major step towards the implementation of the new ERS and we are pleased to see that the technical preparations on introducing ERS FLUX in NEAFC is moving in a positive direction. However, essential elements are still missing, causing unfortunate delay in the implementation. We expect that the FLUX system is sufficiently flexible to include already agreed elements, as well as new elements which are deemed necessary. Furthermore, we encourage PECMAC and the Implementation Group to accelerate the work on the second version of the ERS implementation document, so that all Parties will be in a position to implement the new ERS as soon as possible.

The issue of granting status as co-operating non-Contracting Party has in the last years created much debate within NEAFC. During these discussions, questions related to the objective of the CNCP system has been raised, including whether the purpose of the system could be served in other ways, in particular for States not carrying out any activities in the Regulatory Area. Norway has thus proposed that PECMAC is requested to evaluate the system of CNCP status.

A review of NEAFC’s VME Recommendation was conducted this year, concluding that the Recommendation in general is effective in its aim to protect VMEs. Still, PECMAS has suggested to improve the Recommendation. In this regard, Norway has tabled a proposal aiming to ensure an effective follow-up procedure of the actions suggested by PECMAS.

RFMOs have to adjust to changing needs and expectations. Both within the UN system and in other RFMOs, there are many meetings, initiatives and processes with relevance to NEAFC. NEAFC has been innovative and future-looking by taking many actions that later has become so-called best practices. In recent years, the pressure on RFMOs has increased even more and many processes in other international foras will impact their work. Norway is proposing to revitalize the Working Group on the Future of NEAFC by using it as a link between the international arena and the Commission. In this way, we believe NEAFC will be better suited to respond to inputs and recommendations deriving from international processes, and thereby continue its role as a leading and modern RFMO.
Through many of these meetings and processes, Norway also see that RFMOs are often incorrectly criticized of being unable to respond to the challenges they are faced with. We believe that one of the reason is due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the work carried out in the RFMOs, with the key words being communication and transparency. As a step to improve NEAFCs transparency, Norway is pleased that PECMAC has proposed to amend to the Scheme providing for the publication of authorized vessels lists on the NEAFCs website. Furthermore, we also believe that it is time to revisit the role of observers in NEAFC, including how to simplify procedures for observer applications, and we have tabled a proposal for the Future Working Group to consider this.

Finally, Norway looks forward to working with all Parties in order to achieve the best possible result for NEAFC and to make this Annual Meeting a success.

Thank you, Mr. President.