ICES statement at the 38th Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission

ICES in its capacity as an intergovernmental marine science organization serves as the scientific advisor to the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), as outlined in the Convention on Future Multilateral Cooperation in North-East Atlantic Fisheries.

In this capacity ICES is continuously working to uphold the credibility, quality assurance, and transparency of its scientific advice, through peer-reviewed best available advice. As required by its advice requesters ICES is continuously working towards advice that includes ecosystem considerations;

- To provide evidence on the interactions between ecosystems and fisheries, in the context of other activities, as well as
- To provide evidence on species and habitats biodiversity, including scenarios for trade-offs between different management objectives

ICES is also continuously working towards improving the communication of its scientific advice.

ICES works together with NEAFC within all of the above areas. On an annual basis we are providing recurrent scientific advice on nearly 70 stocks, and through our existing and upcoming ecosystem and fisheries overviews, we are making advice operational for ecosystem-based fisheries management and ecosystem-based management. This includes our recurrent advice on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems, and the potential overlap with fisheries activities in the vicinity of such habitats, as well as our data and information contribution to the workshop recently arranged on Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) in the North-East Atlantic. Our Advisory Committee Chair, Mark Dickey-Collas will during your annual meeting present the above advice and activities.

An important part of the advice creation is the dialogue between ICES and NEAFC. We are very pleased with the cooperation, and find that this is reflected in the revision of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between NEAFC and ICES. A MoU which is also referring to the large number of initiatives that ICES has invested in, to quality assure our advisory products, from data quality, on-line portals, to full methodological description of the assessment, data used, and advice procedure for each stock.

This dialogue with the recipients of ICES Advice is part of the legitimacy, but also a necessary component in a situation where ICES advises an increasing number of requesters, and needs to ensure that we can show how stocks with shared interests are being dealt with across advice requesters.

The dynamics in biodiversity, driven by human activities and climate change means that we are dealing with a non-stable situation that needs continuous observations and assessments. ICES works with impacts and projections for future impacts on ecosystems, and has provided advice on the effects of climate change on the distribution of species and their vulnerability to increasing sea temperatures.
With the NEAFC regulatory area covering Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, including the Central Arctic Ocean, NEAFC and ICES are in a prominent position to show how peer-reviewed scientific evidence, elaborated with an arms-length to decision-makers, are used to meet, conservation, management, and sustainability goals.

Our partnership serves as valuable example that can be communicated in other fora, in other regions, as well as at a global level within UN. And it ensures that our member countries can build on the work that they are already carrying out in the North-East Atlantic, and can work together with other countries to adapt this to other initiatives, such as the on-going discussion on a new legal instrument under the Law of the Sea Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), and the 2018 Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, and the associated pilot study that ICES, PICES, and NOAA will carry out on data management and data sharing in the Central Arctic Ocean. And that given the experience we have together, as marine scientists and decision makers, respectively that we can give input to the 2021-2030 UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, on both what we are doing, and what more we need to do in order to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

ICES is looking forward to the continued cooperation with NEAFC, providing best available evidence for use in conserving and optimizing utilization of fishery resources, and for protecting the marine environment in the NEAFC Regulatory Area.