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, document WG-VME 2018-03-02 is Annex 1 to this report.

2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteur
The agenda was agreed as circulated in document WG-VME 2018-02-01.

The Chair reminded the participants of the need to make further progress in the Working Group in order to come to a conclusion.

The Secretary was appointed as rapporteur.

3. Comments from CNCPs if available
No Comments had been submitted.

The Chair noted that there had been no correspondence on the working paper presented at the last meeting of the Working Group that Contracting Parties had taken home for consultation with their colleagues.
With the aim to move the discussion forward the Chair presented a paper (Doc. WG-VME 2018-03-03) which provided some potential routes towards a resolution of issues discussed at earlier Working Group meetings. This paper provided an alternative approach from that considered previously, that is to divide the Recommendation 19:2014 on VMEs into two parts, one focused on regulating fishing operations and one focused on setting out areas of closure. The Chair considered that such a division may helpfully align better with Articles 5 and 6, respectively, of the NEAFC Convention.

Contracting Parties welcomed the paper as another way to consider the issues initially raised by Norway and Russia at the Annual Meeting. Even if all parties did not agree on whether the Regulation 19:2014 in fact needed amending, the participants considered a reformulation that potentially could meet every party’s need would be worth exploring.

Several Contracting Parties did however desire to see the drafting provided by Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) also considered in any reformulation.

Iceland reminded the meeting of the many unresolved continental shelf claims, both before the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf and in disputed areas where no agreements were in sight. This would have to be taken into account in any redrafting of the recommendations.

The Chair noted the points raised by the Contracting Parties, but hoped nevertheless that a new text might deal with the differing perspectives. It was agreed that an informal group of ‘Chair and friends’ would develop a working document with draft amendments of Rec 19:2014, based on the approach suggested by the Chair. Such a document would have no formal status but be seen as a way of focusing attention on possible drafting to address the issues raised by Norway and Russia at the annual meeting in terms of change.

Following the work of the Chair and Friends, the Working Group considered a working paper which annotated Recommendation 19:2014 with 3 categories: A, Articles common to both categories B and C; B, Articles that manage fishing activities to protect VMES/the Conduct of bottom fishing [Convention Article 5] and; C, Articles that protect VMEs through prohibitions on fishing/closing/closed bottom fishing areas [Convention Article 6 where relevant, Convention Article 5 in the Area].

Following a brief discussion, Norway agreed to compile a further working paper with specific draft amendments to include the former text from Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) and the categorisation above. The working paper included a re-ordering of the original text according to the categorisations, but a division of the original Recommendation into two was no longer considered necessary.

The participants welcomed the working paper as providing more concrete drafting proposals as to the issues raised by Norway and the Russian Federation at the annual meeting. The European Union suggested some additional changes to the draft definition of the Regulatory Area. Nevertheless no positions were being taken before further consultation. Any remarks expressed were considered as preliminary and not prejudging any formal position to be taken both on the process and on the content of the document.

The European Union underlined its view that opening the recommendation for changes might also open other issues and that it restated that it did not consider that changes to the text were required. In respect of the draft working paper, the European Union further pointed out that, should this be considered, there could be potential inconsistencies in terms of applying different legal bases and thus different legal regimes to similar activities in the same geographical areas. With reference to a proposed new article on area closures and redefinitions (8bis), the European Union expressed doubts.
whether limiting the right of initiative of Contracting Parties to submit amendments to a NEAFC recommendation would be appropriate and in line with the NEAFC Convention.

The Chair concluded that the working document should be circulated at home administrations in preparation for an additional future meeting of the Working Group VME.

5. Final conclusions from the WG on VMEs and coastal States
No conclusions at this stage

6. Draft proposal to Annual meeting
No proposal at this stage

7. Communication of progress so far to external stakeholders
It was noted that, where needed, it could be stated that the working group was still in progress in constructive dialogue towards a potential joint proposal to Annual Meeting

8. Any other business
8.1 Including marking of documents for publication
It was agreed that there were no sufficiently mature documents to be identified as final documents at this meeting.

9. Report of the meeting
The draft report was circulated on 21 May 2018. The final report was adopted through correspondence on 1 June 2018.

10. Closing of the meeting
The Chair noted agreement of a further meeting of the Working Group was required. 
**The date of the next meeting was agreed as Monday 22 and Tuesday 23 October 2018.**

Contracting Parties were reminded to register their delegation for the next meeting well in advance of the meeting date to facilitate the work of the Secretariat and to ensure they were copied in to all documents.

The Chair thanked participants and the Secretariat for their active participation and good progress made in the drafting, and wished all a safe journey back home.