



REPORT

42nd ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION

14-17 November 2023



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FINAL REPORT

1	OPENING OF THE 42ND ANNUAL MEETING	3
2	WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT AND OPENING STATEMENTS	3
3	ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND APPOINTMENT OF RAPPORTEUR	4
4	ESTABLISHMENT AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMITTEES, ETC.	4
5	STATUS OF RATIFICATIONS OF THE AMENDED NEAFC CONVENTION	4
6	STATISTICS ON QUOTA UPTAKE AND VESSEL ACTIVITY	4
7	REPORT FROM THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE, PECMAS	5
8	REPORT BY THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE OF ICES	5
9	SCIENTIFIC ADVICE AND MANAGEMENT MEASURES	6
9.1	PELAGIC <i>SEBASTES MENTELLA</i> IN THE IRMINGER SEA	6
9.2	PELAGIC <i>SEBASTES MENTELLA</i> IN ICES SUB-AREAS I AND II IN THE REGULATORY AREA	6
9.3	NORWEGIAN SPRING SPAWNING (ATLANTO-SCANDIAN) HERRING	9
9.4	MACKEREL	9
9.5	ROCKALL HADDOCK	10
9.6	DEEP-SEA FISHERIES	10
9.7	AREA MANAGEMENT	11
9.8	OTHER	13
10	REPORT FROM THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE, PECMAC	15
11	THE NEAFC SCHEME OF CONTROL AND ENFORCEMENT	19
11.1	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME	19
11.2	POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS FROM PECMAC	19
11.3	POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS FROM JAGDM	19
11.4	A AND B- LISTS OF IUU VESSELS	19
11.5	OTHER	19
12	COOPERATING NON-CONTRACTING PARTY STATUS	22
12.1	POSSIBLE RENEWAL OF COOPERATING NON-CONTRACTING PARTY STATUS	22
12.2	POSSIBLE NEW GRANTING OF COOPERATING NON-CONTRACTING PARTY STATUS	23
13	REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NEAFC (FDN)	23

13.1	THE NEXT NEAFC PERFORMANCE REVIEW	24
13.2	WORKING GROUP OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECM)	24
14	REQUEST FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVICE	25
15	REPORT FROM THE FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE	25
16	REPORT FROM THE JOINT ADVISORY GROUP ON DATA MANAGEMENT, JAGDM	26
17	REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES STATISTICS, WGSTATS	27
17.1	PROPOSALS FROM WG STATISTICS	27
17.2	OTHER	27
18	RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER REGIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS	27
18.1	OBSERVER REPORTS	27
18.2	OTHER	28
19	RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA.....	28
20	COLLECTIVE ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN COMPETENT INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS	30
21	ANY OTHER BUSINESS.....	30
22	ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS.....	31
23	ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS	32
23.1	ANNUAL MEETINGS 12-15 NOVEMBER 2024 AND 11-14 NOVEMBER 2025	32
23.2	MEETINGS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF NEAFC	32
24	PRESS STATEMENTS AND OTHER REPORTS OF NEAFC'S ACTIVITIES	32
25	CLOSURE OF THE 42ND ANNUAL MEETING.....	32

42nd ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION

1 Opening of the 42nd Annual Meeting

AM 2023-00, AM 2023-02

1.1 The President, Janet Skarðsá, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), opened the meeting, welcoming all to the 42nd Annual Meeting of NEAFC. All Contracting Parties were represented.

2 Welcome address by the President and opening statements

AM 2023-73, AM 2023-74, AM 2023-75, AM 2023-76, AM 2023-77, AM 2023-78, AM 2023-79, AM 2023-80, AM 2023-81, AM 2023-83, AM 2023-84, AM 2023-85, AM 2023-87, AM 2023-89, AM 2023-104.

2.1 The President made her opening address.

She welcomed all participants to the 42nd Annual Meeting, noting the particular challenges of those attending from Iceland where volcanic activity was high. She also wished a speedy recovery to the Deputy Head of the Russian Federation delegation, Mr Vladimir Belyaev, who had been unable to attend due to ill health.

2.2 The President noted that, following very few meetings in 2022, NEAFC had managed to get Committees and Working Groups better on track in 2023. This had been achieved through the efforts of Chairs and the Secretariat.

2.3 The President noted the major steps forward in global oceans' governance in the year up to the Annual Meeting with the agreement on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the finalisation of negotiations on an instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. She noted that NEAFC would continue with the same focus on management of fisheries to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes, but that there were opportunities for NEAFC to engage in the developments, guided by strategic thinking ongoing at the Future Development of NEAFC Working Group.

2.4 In this context, the President looked forward to the Annual Meeting making decisions to develop other effective area based conservation measure designations based on its existing strong measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.

2.5 She encouraged the Parties to continue their efforts on reaching agreement on sharing arrangements on mackerel, herring, and blue whiting at the coastal States negotiations.

2.6 And finally, the President welcomed the news that, following many years of work on modernising its electronic reporting system, the meeting of NEAFC would agree on the actual roll out of the system amongst the Parties from January 2024.

2.7 Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom made opening statements. Opening statements were also made by observers from Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (Bahamas and Panama), intergovernmental organisations (the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and OSPAR)

and Non-Governmental Organisations (the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, the Marine Stewardship Council, the North-East Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group, the Pew Charitable Trusts and Sciaena/Seas at Risk).

3 Adoption of the agenda and appointment of rapporteur

AM 2023-01

3.1 The agenda was adopted in the form that had been circulated before the meeting (document AM 2023-01), no items were identified under AOB.

3.2 The Secretary was appointed as rapporteur.

4 Establishment and arrangements for Committees, etc.

4.1 Arrangements were made for the Finance and Administration Committee and PECMAS to meet in the margins of the meeting.

5 Status of ratifications of the amended NEAFC Convention

AM 2023-11

5.1 The Secretary presented a report by the depositary government on the status of the amended NEAFC Convention (document AM 2023-11). The Secretary explained that the Depositary had noted that there were no updates to the Convention in the last year, so the situation remained unchanged on the entry into force of the amendments to the Convention. The amendment adopted in 2004 would not enter into force unless the Contracting Party which had lodged an objection to the amendment would lift that objection.

5.2 The President noted that it was regrettable that the situation appeared to be unchanged in the 10 years since the objection had been lodged.

5.3 The Russian Federation explained that the situation regarding ratification of the amendment had not changed. The process to reconsider the objection continued domestically and the Secretariat would be notified if there was any update.

6 Statistics on quota uptake and vessel activity

AM 2023-32 Rev2, AM 2023-36

6.1 The Chair of WG STATS, Erna Jónsdóttir, Iceland, explained that the WG had not met but had concluded its business by correspondence. The Chair presented tables containing final catch statistics for 2022 in document AM 2023--32 Rev2. The tables containing the provisional monthly catch statistics for 2023 up to and including August, were presented in document AM 2023-36.

6.2 NEAFC adopted the final catch statistics for 2022 and noted the provisional statistics for 2023. In response to a query from Norway, the Chair explained she would look with the Secretariat at clearer labelling of stocks in the tables.

7 Report from the Permanent Committee on Management and Science, PECMAS

AM 2023-06, AM 2023-20, AM 2023-95

7.1 The Chair of PECMAS, Karin Linderholm, European Union, presented the reports of the Committee from 2023. She explained that the Committee had met three times in 2023, with the first meeting virtual and the second face to face, with a short meeting also held in the margins of the Annual Meeting (documents AM 2023-06, AM 2023-20, AM 2023-95). At its third meeting, PECMAS had agreed to elect Bjarki Elvarsson (Iceland) as vice-Chair and to re-elect Karin Linderholm (European Union) as Chair of PECMAS for a further year. The Chair underlined the good cooperation with ICES, noting that a virtual bilateral meeting had been held between ICES and NEAFC in 2023. The Chair outlined the discussions held at the meetings of PECMAS. Apart from the regular items, discussions had included updates on special advice requests, ecosystem-based fisheries management, other effective area based conservation measures and on climate change. No proposals for recommendations were expected from PECMAS this year, instead they would be proposed by Contracting Parties.

In discussion,

7.2 Contracting Parties thanked the Chair for the Committee's work, noting the discussions on issues of international prominence, including climate change. The mix of one virtual and one physical meeting was noted as a useful model. The Pew Charitable Trusts, on behalf of several NGO observers also welcomed work developing in PECMAS on defining ecological objectives and on options for an ecosystem approach

7.3 The President thanked the Chair for her reports; they were noted by the Annual Meeting.

8 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

AM 2023-54

8.1 Lotte Worsøe Clausen of ICES presented the report of the Advisory Committee (AM 2023-54) on behalf of Mark Dickey-Collas, the Chair of the Advisory Committee of ICES (ACOM) who was unable to attend. The President asked ICES to pass on NEAFC's sincere thanks to Mark Dickey-Collas for his work given he was finishing his role as ACOM Chair.

8.2 The report presented an overview of ICES clients and its advisory areas (both EEZ and High Seas). ICES explained that it had concluded an MoU with Greenland and Faroes. It described its advice production cycle, the 10 principles for ICES advice and approaches to fisheries advice including on best available science, maximum sustainable yield and ecosystem-based management.

8.3 More specifically ICES was aiming to help NEAFC in developing its higher-level objectives on biodiversity. It illustrated the use of an FAO tool to help assess the implementation of ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) under NEAFC. The presentation included current outputs from ICES that could be used for operationalising EBFM.

In discussion,

8.4 The Contracting Parties underlined the importance of ICES work as a valuable partner to NEAFC. The Parties also warmly thanked Mark Dickey-Collas for his contribution.

8.5 The meeting noted the presentation with thanks.

9 Scientific advice and management measures

AM 2023-56, AM 2023-57, AM 2023-58, AM 2023-59, AM 2023-60 Rev1, AM 2023-61 Rev1, AM 2023-64, AM 2023-67.

Advice under this item is covered by the relevant document for each sub-item.

9.1 Pelagic *Sebastes mentella* in the Irminger Sea

AM 2023-62; AM 2023-68 Rev2; AM 2023-86

9.1.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.1 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice for *Sebastes mentella* in the Irminger Sea (document AM 2023-62). He explained there was no new ICES advice, as the advice that had been presented in 2021 covered 2022-2024. This meant the advice remained a zero catch in 2024 for both deep and shallow redfish stocks.

In discussion,

9.2 While two Contracting Parties noted that the long-standing advice was for no directed fishing, ICES was asked what the plans for new advice were and what support was needed. ICES explained that it did not have catch information for the stock, even though a possible survey by Germany and Iceland was planned. A full assessment was therefore not possible. It was noted that NEAFC could provide catch data nevertheless.

9.3 The Russian Federation stated that it did not support the ICES concept of two stocks, on which there was no new information. It re-iterated that studies should continue, using more information to develop the advice (see document AM 2023-86).

9.1.2 Relevant reports

9.1.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.4 The European Union presented its joint proposal with Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom for a Recommendation on management measures for the protection of redfish in the Irminger Sea in 2024 (AM 2023-68 Rev2). It explained that, compared to the current Recommendation, the proposal included a new element to prevent refuelling and support services to vessels involved in the fishery. Iceland explained that it did not aim to target the right to fish under an objection, but rather to uphold the long-standing advice from ICES.

9.5 In a vote, the five Contracting Parties voting supported the proposal (see note at item 21 AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal for a Recommendation on management measures for the protection of redfish in the Irminger Sea in 2024 (AM 2023-68 Rev2) was therefore adopted.**

9.2 Pelagic *Sebastes mentella* in ICES Sub-areas I and II in the Regulatory Area

AM 2023-62, AM 2023-92 Rev1

9.2.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.6 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice for *Sebastes mentella* in sub-regions I and II (document AM 2023-62). The last ICES advice for this stock had been an advice for 2021 and 2022 given in 2020 which showed the biomass had increased above reference points while the fishing pressure was low. Due to the suspension of participation of Russian experts in the work of ICES, it had not been possible for ICES to give a new advice in 2022. A working group from the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research and the Russian institute VNIRO had assessed the stock in 2022 and given advice for 2023 and 2024.

9.2.2 Relevant reports

9.2.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.7 Norway explained that the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research and the Russian institute VNIRO had provided advice on redfish according to the benchmark models and methodology from ICES. The catch advised for 2024 was no more than 70 164 tonnes, in line with which the Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission had set a TAC. The quantity suggested for the Regulatory Area in Norway's proposal (document AM 2023-92 Rev1) was for a catch of up to 4 139 tonnes.

9.8 A Contracting Party explained that while there was an MoU with ICES on production of advice, there was no information in the document that the Joint Commission followed the same scientific approach in developing advice on the stock, therefore it had doubts. Another Contracting Party added that other parties should be involved in the development of such advice and proposals, if they related to the High Seas. It urged Norway to engage with other Parties fishing the stock in the High Seas. This was strongly supported by the Contracting Party commenting earlier. Further views indicated other Contracting Parties could support a proposal, but with an idea of continuing consultations.

9.9 Norway explained that the proposal was based on a report from a NEAFC working group that discussed this stock when there was a moratorium on it. The stock was now in a good shape and still growing. It had provided an updated proposal with changes to include an earlier start date of the fishery, a minimum mesh size, and no reference to compatible measures within national jurisdiction. Norway said that it would consider coming back next year with a call for a meeting to discuss the issue. This could look at newer information that could go towards an update of the distribution report for the stock. It pointed out however, that it could not promise that there would be such a meeting, given Norway was not the only coastal State for this stock.

9.10 The European Union made the following statement:

“Taking into account that Norway has indicated that there had not been consultations on management of this stock between the coastal state and the fishing Party (the EU); Taking into account that Norway announced that they would convey a meeting in the beginning of 2024 for such consultations; Taking into account very close and good cooperation between the European Union and Norway in a wide range of areas; Taking into account the need to allow the processes to resolve the outstanding issues between the EU and Norway to take place; The European Union would like to ask Norway not to proceed with adopting measures by postal vote, to allow both Parties to come to an agreement. This would imply that there would be not vote at this stage. We would hope that Norway would be willing to accept this important and cooperative request by the European Union”

9.11 In a vote, the proposal from Norway (document AM 2023- 92 Rev1) received four votes in favour (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Norway, Iceland, and the United Kingdom) and one vote against (the European Union) (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal for a Recommendation on the management of *Sebastes mentella* in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (ICES Sub-Areas 1 and 2) in 2024 (AM 2023-92 Rev1) was therefore adopted.**

9.12 Norway thanked the Parties that supported its proposal and repeated that it would consider calling a meeting with other coastal States to further discuss the fishery.

9.3 Blue whiting

AM 2023-57, AM 2023-94, AM 2023-97

9.3.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.13 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on blue whiting advice (document AM 2023-57). He explained that there had been a benchmarking exercise on the stock. Two strong year classes were coming into the stock which should lead to an increase in biomass and a healthy fishery in the coming years. While the biomass was above reference levels, the mortality (F) was above FMSY. The advice was for a 12% increase in catch against that advised in 2022, one of the highest levels of catch ever advised for the stock. Nevertheless, this represented a reduction of 8% against the actual catch taken in 2023 given that the total allocations exceeded the TAC. Under the long-term management strategy advised catches in 2024 were to be no more than 1 529 754 tonnes.

9.3.2 Relevant reports

9.14 The United Kingdom had chaired the coastal states negotiations and hoped to table a proposal.

9.3.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.15 The President invited proposals, underlining that the increase in advised catch offered a rare opportunity to achieve agreement on allocations in line with the TAC.

9.16 Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) introduced a proposal (AM 2023-94) which proposed a TAC for 2024 in accordance with ICES advice, with a cap on percentage of catch in the Regulatory Area.

9.17 The European Union and Iceland tabled a counter proposal (AM 2023-97) which proposed a TAC for 2024 in accordance with ICES advice, also with a cap on percentage of catch in the Regulatory Area. The European Union explained that, as long as total allocation was not agreed between the relevant Contracting Parties, no allocation or quota should be set out for the Regulatory Area.

9.18 The United Kingdom, as chair of the coastal States negotiations on blue whiting explained that parties had worked hard on finding agreement. The United Kingdom said it would not be voting on the proposals put forward at the meeting.

9.19 Both proposals were put to the vote (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of the Russian Federation vote).

9.20 The proposal from Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), document AM 2023- 94, received two votes in favour (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) and Norway), two votes against (the European Union and Iceland) and one abstention (the United Kingdom). Therefore, the proposal for a Recommendation on the management of blue whiting in the NEAFC Regulatory Area in 2024 was not adopted.

9.21 The proposal from the European Union and Iceland (document AM 2023- 97) received two votes in favour (the European Union and Iceland), two votes against (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) and Norway) and one abstention (the United Kingdom). Therefore, the proposal for a Recommendation on the management of blue whiting in the NEAFC Regulatory Area in 2024 was not adopted.

9.4 Norwegian spring spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) herring

AM 2023-58, AM 2023-43

9.4.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.22 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on Norwegian spring spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) herring (document AM 2023-58). He explained that surveys had been fairly consistent in showing the stock slowly decreasing. No report for the Barents Sea had been included in 2022/23. Only one year class was significant in maintaining biomass and as these older fish (year 7) decreased, the stock biomass would also shrink. Recruitment had been poor since 2015. Thus, F had been slightly above F_{MSY} and Spawning Stock Biomass slightly above precautionary limits but likely to go below these by 2024. Following the long-term management plan the advised catch was for no more than 390 010 tonnes: a 24% reduction against advice for 2023 and 44% less than the estimated catch in 2023.

9.4.2 Relevant reports

9.23 When putting forward its proposal (document AM 2023-43), Iceland (as chair of the relevant coastal States) explained that all coastal States had put an emphasis on making progress in their negotiations on herring. It hoped that the two meetings planned before the end of the year could agree allocations to avoid a collapse of the stock.

9.4.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.24 The President noted that the proposal tabled by Iceland was a roll-over of the previous year's recommendation, with the ICES advised catch. **The proposal for conservation and management measures for herring for 2024 (document AM 2023-43) was adopted by consensus.** It was noted that the measures were not fully comprehensive, as they did not include allocation among the Contracting Parties.

9.25 The European Union tabled the following statement with regard to the recommendation:

9.26 "The EU agrees with the proposed recommendations on management measures for Norwegian Spring-Spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) herring in the NEAFC Regulatory Area for 2024. The EU would like to take this opportunity to recall that recent and comprehensive scientific evidence unequivocally illustrates the occurrence of Atlanto-Scandian herring in the EU waters (namely EEZs of Denmark and Sweden). As mentioned in the agreed records of this year's Coastal States consultation on Atlanto-Scandian herring management measures, the EU presented in October this evidence to the Coastal States for Atlanto-Scandian herring to be acknowledged as holding the same status. We look forward to continuing constructive discussions in the Coastal States forum over this scientific evidence in the coming weeks, rapidly allowing the EU to work jointly with all Coastal States on ensuring the sustainability of Atlanto-Scandian herring."

9.5 Mackerel

AM 2023-59; AM 2023-42

9.5.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.27 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on mackerel (document AM 2023-59). He explained that ICES had met in 2023 to discuss the structure of stock. It had concluded that there was a single stock, albeit with varying characteristics experienced in different areas. Thus, the stock was not considered to have separate components with differing management approaches, nor were seasonal or local closures advised. While recruitment was fairly positive for the stock, biomass had been declining over several years although it was still above reference levels. Fishing mortality was at about F_{MSY} . Catch advice for 2024 was for no more than 739 386 tonnes, which was similar to the year before, but a reduction of 36% compared to estimated catches in the last year.

9.5.2 Relevant reports

9.28 Iceland had chaired the coastal States meetings on mackerel and tabled the proposal on the stock.

9.5.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.29 The proposal from Iceland (document AM 2023-42) was tabled. **The proposal for conservation and management measures for Mackerel for 2024 (document AM 2023-42) was adopted by consensus.** It was noted that the measures were not fully comprehensive, as they did not include allocation among the Contracting Parties.

9.6 Rockall haddock

AM 2023-60 Rev 1, AM 2023-45

9.6.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.30 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on Rockall haddock covered by document AM 2023-60 Rev 1. He explained that no new advice had been produced and it remained as it was in 2023 at no more than 4 078 tonnes. The advice was currently based on a category 3 assessment, but it was hoped that benchmarking in 2024 would return it to category 1. A survey in 2022 indicated a big year class of age 1 were coming into the fishery, with potential for higher catches in the future.

9.6.2 Relevant reports

None

9.6.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.31 The United Kingdom introduced its joint proposal with the European Union (document AM 2023-45). It explained that this was a rollover of the previous recommendation on a haddock box restriction on gear in order to protect juveniles as the advice seemed to indicate the protection was effective.

9.32 **The proposal for conservation and management measures for Rockall haddock for 2024 (document AM 2023-45) was adopted by consensus.** Following the adoption of the recommendation, Iceland explained that while it had not objected to the measure, there was no TAC in place yet. Accordingly, it encouraged coastal and fishing States to react to the clear ICES advice on total catch, in order to achieve measures that were comprehensive.

9.7 Deep-sea fisheries

AM 2023-25 Rev.1; AM 2023-28 AM; 2023-61 Rev1

9.7.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.33 David Miller (ICES) introduced what he described as an information dense report on deep seas stocks (AM 2023-61 Rev1), starting by setting out the NEAFC categories used for the advice. Many stocks had earlier year's advice already in place for 2023.

9.34 For Roundnose grenadier in the oceanic Northeast Atlantic and northern Reykjanes Ridge (ICES divisions 10.b and 12.c, and 12.a.1, 14.b.1, and 5.a.1) advice was for 459 tonnes in each of 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027. For blue ling it was advised that a category 2 (no directed fishery) advice remained in place. This was for each of the years 2024 to 2027. For rapidly expanding fisheries (category 3), ICES had looked at alfonsino, but it was not clear if the fishery was still expanding. ICES noted in this context that it had no formal definition of what rapidly expanding was, although it could describe what aspects needed to be taken into account to assess this. Historic catches were not a good guide as these were often unsustainable fisheries. ICES was working with FAO on how to assess data limited stocks and had included the issue of defining rapidly expanding fisheries in that work. ICES also

listed the stocks under management in EEZ (category 4). Of these, only the black scabbard fish had noteworthy catches within the Regulatory Area. Finally, ICES updated the Annual Meeting that recruitment in blue ling remained low and therefore the current closed areas for the protection of spawning aggregations should be maintained.

In discussion,

9.35 The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition noted the very slow recovery of the relevant stocks. It questioned the TAC set out by ICES for roundnose grenadier when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) had described this species as critically endangered. It urged Contracting Parties to set a zero TAC in this light. ICES explained that a benchmark exercise could address the TAC for the stock, but currently there was no good survey data. Catches remained well below the TAC. Iceland commented that given the separation between management/policy and science within NEAFC, it would not like to see any aim to influence the independent scientific advice because of IUCN views. In response to a further request for clarification from the Pew Charitable Trusts on its new conservation advice, ICES explained it now included a section in its advice sheets. This looked at other factors apart from fishing that could affect a stock. The section could also point to other organisations for further reading without this directly affecting the advice. Examples so far were limited to eel, salmon and basking shark. The United Kingdom commented that advice was advice, if a party wanted to deviate from that and follow more precautionary approaches it was free to do that in its management decisions.

9.7.2 Relevant reports

9.36 The Secretariat presented its annual overview of bottom fishing and deep-sea fish catch data (document AM 2023-25 Rev.1). It noted the data limitations before describing the pattern of fishing for deep sea species in the Regulatory Area. The Secretariat also described the process related to, and incidence of, warnings of potential contraventions of bottom fishing regulations. Of these warnings most related to warnings prior to the expansion of the existing bottom fishing area (BAR1), in the Regulatory Area, while one related to an ICCAT vessel misreporting to NEAFC.

9.37 The Annual Meeting noted the report of the Secretariat.

9.7.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.38 Iceland presented its joint proposal with the European Union (document AM 2023-28) for a rollover of the measure for protection of blue ling. This was to extend the protection of spawning sites to the end of 2027.

9.39 The proposal for a recommendation on regulatory measures for the protection of blue ling (document AM 2023-28) was adopted by consensus.

9.8 Area management

AM 2023-39, AM 2023-56, AM 2023-66

9.8.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

9.40 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (document AM 2023-56). The presentation covered both the recurring advice on VME and a special request to ICES for advice related to other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM). In terms of the VME, ICES advised that no addition to, or extension of, the existing closed areas was needed. In a clarification ICES explained that VME habitat records were based on unequivocal observations of VME. The term VME indicator was used for less equivocal information from modelling or bycatch. As in previous years it advised that any bottom fishing occurring in the closed areas would affect ecosystem integrity. It also noted that better data on fishing gear would

improve the provision of advice. ICES also reported on bottom fishing activity based on NEAFC VMS data, but again noting much of the data did not have any fishing gear registered.

9.41 In response to a question from an NGO on the issue of VMEs known or likely to occur, ICES explained that it had done a benchmarking exercise including this issue in 2022. While this work addressed issues of VME habitats, indicators and relative risk, the poor gear information from NEAFC meant that currently habitats were still key aspect used in advice to NEAFC. The Secretariat pointed out that decisions at the AM on implementation of the ERS in 2024 should start to address the issue of gear reporting.

9.42 ICES then presented its advice related to NEAFC aims to designate OECMs based on its existing areas closed and restricted to bottom fishing to protect VMEs. It described the process, including expert workshops, to develop the advice. The first part of the advice was on the existing long-term biodiversity/ecosystem benefits of the areas closed and restricted to bottom fishing. On these, ICES had concluded that both closed and restricted areas provided long term biodiversity/ecosystem benefits, as long as the measures were in place. These benefits included the biodiversity attributes set out in the guidance under relevant CBD decision (and matching CBD Ecologically and Biologically Significant Area features and FAO guidance). It noted, however, that the long term benefits might not be sustained in any restricted area if exploratory fishing started. The presentation included a table listing the biodiversity attributes against the various closures and areas covered by Recommendation 19:2014. ICES added that it was currently expanding coverage of the analysis to NEAFC RA 4 (in the Central Arctic Ocean).

9.43 On potential maximum fishing depth against which NEAFC could assign conservation benefits of the measures in restricted areas, ICES advised a maximum depth of around 1 400 m. This maximum depth would cover 99.9% of bottom fishing activity, based on ICES (not NEAFC) data. The consideration on maximum depth was not restricted by current management but more by technological and economic considerations which were unlikely to change in future years. In its presentation ICES illustrated the effect of different depth cut offs, and the linear relationship between depth and area covered. In a clarification it explained that biodiversity benefits had been assessed for the whole of the area covered by the recommendation, not just for those areas shallower than 1 400m.

In discussion,

9.44 A Contracting Party thanked ICES for the clear advice. It noted that 1 400 m would seem a useful limit given not much fishing activity was likely beyond this depth. In its view this meant that NEAFC could demonstrate that measures in place had a biodiversity benefit given a 1 400 m isobar, as opposed to a general benefit at all depths across all of the restricted areas. It underlined however, that the measure of stopping bottom fishing applied equally to both restricted and closed areas.

9.45 In response to a query from an NGO, on the impacts of other fishing activity near the closed and restricted areas, ICES explained that benthic-pelagic coupling was out of the scope of its advice. It added that while there was work on the coupling of source and sink populations, this was not helpful to this particular advice. It noted, in addition, that the work in ICES on 'nearby' activities had focused more on the issue of buffer zones and the difference in where a vessel was and where its gear was. The Pew Charitable Trusts urged the Contracting Parties to be cautious in their approach, including if there was adequate work to characterize specific biodiversity attributes in restricted areas at depths above the 1 400 m isobar and the extent to which an area that could be subject to exploratory fishing satisfied the CBD OECM criteria. In response, a Contracting Party explained that should a restricted area be opened to fishing this would mean the OECM (as a living document) would fall aside. It reiterated its view that the measures in place were the same between restricted and closed areas, the

difference was more about scale, hence the need to limit the assertion of benefits in the wider restricted areas.

9.8.2 Relevant reports

9.46 Bottom fishing had been covered by the earlier Secretariat presentation of document, AM 2023-25 Rev.1.

9.8.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.47 The Russian Federation presented its proposal for a technical correction to Recommendation 19:2014 on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems (document AM 2023-39). It explained that this was a technical correction that followed the change in borders of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction under the 2010 agreement between Norway and the Russian Federation on their EEZ and the 2023 Recommendation to amend the existing bottom fishing area in BAR1. It reminded the meeting that the proposal had also been discussed at PECMAS 2 2023. Norway noted it was supportive of the proposal as a natural progression of its proposal last year and the subsequent amendment to Recommendation 19:2014. Another Contracting Party underlined its strength of feeling on coastal State rights and the need for delineations not to encroach on national jurisdiction. It added that within the Barents Sea there remained a small correction pending to the existing bottom fishing area that had earlier been considered within national jurisdiction.

9.48 In a vote, three Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Iceland and Norway) with two abstaining (the European Union and the United Kingdom) (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal on a technical correction to Recommendation 19:2014 on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems (AM 2023-39) was therefore adopted.**

9.49 The European Union then presented its proposal to amend Recommendation 19:2014 for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems with regard to an existing bottom fishing area in Hatton Bank (document AM 2023-66). It explained that some of its fishing activities in the Hatton Bank (in the region of area HAR 4 under the current recommendation) had not been assessed in the original exercises under Recommendation 16:2008 and subsequently by PECMAS in 2011 to identify existing fishing footprints to inform the recommendation on protection of VMEs. It explained its proposed revision of the existing bottom fishing area to reflect this earlier data did not impinge on the existing closed areas which would be unaffected. Another Contracting Party considered that the evidence was provided very late and needed further consideration. The European Union explained that the 2005 to 2007 data had been submitted on time but had been lost in the analysis, as confirmed by a later Secretariat assessment following the 2017 AM.

9.50 The proposal from the European Union (document AM 2023- 66) was put to a vote. It received five votes in favour (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Norway, Iceland and the United Kingdom) (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to amend Recommendation 19:2014 for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems with regard to an existing bottom fishing area in Hatton Bank (document AM 2023-66) was therefore adopted.**

9.9 Other

[AM 2023-47 Rev.1](#), [AM 2023-48 Rev.1](#), [AM 2023-49 Rev.2](#), [AM 2023-64](#), [AM 2023-67](#), [AM 2023-72](#) [AM 2023-88](#)

9.9.1 Report by the Advisory Committee of ICES

Elasmobranchs and Chimaera

9.51 David Miller (ICES) presented the ICES advice on sharks, deep sea sharks, rays and chimaera (document AM 2023-64). On porbeagle ICES explained that a zero TAC had been in place since 2010.

Landings were near zero, but discarding could be taking place at levels higher than anticipated. The advice had been produced last year based on a conservative 1/3 MSY approach which was for catches not to exceed 231 tonnes in 2024. For basking shark there was new advice this year, with a continuation of zero catch advised from 2024 to 2027. ICES advised that measures should be put in place to ensure incidental catches were recorded, including size and weight information, and any dead bycatch landed to improve data. ICES noted that there were quite a few species of deep sea shark included in the NEAFC prohibition of targeted fisheries. Of these 4 were covered by ICES advice. Leafscale gulper shark and Portuguese dogfish, while often confused with each other, had no landings reported since 2010. Both were advised for zero TAC for the years 2024-2027. Kitefin shark was also advised for zero TAC in the same years. No advice had been requested for Blackmouth dogfish or the chimaera which did not have reliable data in any case. For spurdog the advice had been produced last year (with a TAC of 17 855 tonnes in 2024) noting measures were already in place at NEAFC. New advice would be produced next year. In passing ICES commented that the genus names for some of the deep sea rays in NEAFC's scheme/measures would need updating.

In discussion,

9.52 ICES explained it was in dialogue with ICCAT on porbeagle, given the potential overlap on measures. A Contracting Party commented on the good news on the recovery for the porbeagle, but that it was content for the measures to be maintained, including in light of the potential overlapping competences with ICCAT. It considered there was a potential discussion to be had with ICES on the mismatch between NEAFC establishing measures based on umbrella terms, such as 'deep sea sharks', while ICES advice was provided on a stock by stock basis for only some of the relevant species.

9.53 At this point Lotte Worsøe Clausen (ICES) provided an update to the meeting on the work on bird bycatch (document AM 2023-67). ICES had produced advice in September 2023 which set out the elements that needed to be in place to provide the information that NEAFC needed. Given ICES was not getting any data on bycatch from NEAFC Contracting Parties, it had focused instead on identifying areas with higher risk of interactions between fishing and birds, as well as identifying those species of birds that may be at higher risk. It then proposed a three-step approach to improve the data including high resolution fisheries data, a pilot study to improve knowledge, and establishment of a long-term monitoring programme.

9.54 A Contracting Party thanked ICES for the advice, welcoming a plan to address the issue. It hoped that now the ERS would be implemented this could help in looking at sub areas and gear types that were more relevant.

9.9.2 Relevant reports

None

9.9.3 Recommendations on management measures

9.55 The European Union presented a proposal by the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom for a recommendation on measures for Basking shark from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-47 Rev1). It explained that this was a roll-over of the previous recommendation, noting measures were in place in national administrations too. It also underlined the importance of providing available data to ICES.

9.56 The proposal for conservation and management measures for Basking shark in the NEAFC RA from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-47 Rev.1) was adopted by consensus.

9.57 The European Union presented a proposal by the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom for a recommendation on measures for deep sea rays from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-48 Rev1). It explained that this too was a roll-over of the previous recommendation.

9.58 The proposal for conservation and management measures for Deep Sea Rays in the NEAFC RA from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-48 Rev.1) was adopted by consensus.

9.59 The European Union presented a proposal by the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom for a recommendation on measures for deep sea sharks from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-49 Rev2). It noted that ICES had provided information on some of the species, but several were data limited. In proposing to extend the protection for the next 3 years the European Union reminded the meeting of the joint request for ICES advice made with OSPAR in 2019 and the planned work under OSPAR on deep sea sharks which could help provide data.

9.60 The proposal for conservation and management measures for deep sea sharks in the NEAFC RA from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-49 Rev.2) was adopted by consensus.

9.61 The United Kingdom introduced a proposal by the European Union and the United Kingdom for a Recommendation on measures for porbeagle in 2024 (document AM 2023-72). It explained that it would like to see the ban on targeted fishing extended given the small tonnage of catch advised by ICES and in light of the ICCAT provisions on the species.

9.62 The proposal for conservation and management measures for porbeagle in the NEAFC RA for 2024 (document AM 2023-72) was adopted by consensus.

9.63 Seas at Risk welcomed the recommendation on porbeagle on behalf of itself and the Blue Marine Foundation.

9.64 The United Kingdom introduced its proposal on measures for chimaera from 2024 to 2027 (document AM 2023-88). It explained that this was a rollover of the previous recommendation for a ban on targeted fisheries, but also included the six chimaera species added to the NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement in the previous year.

9.65 The proposal for conservation and management measures for chimaera in the NEAFC RA from 2024-2027 (document AM 2023-88) was adopted by consensus.

9.66 The FAO explained at this point that the deep-sea fisheries project under the Common Oceans Program, funded by the Global Environment Facility, included deep sea sharks and chimaera. ICES was involved in the project, and it would be very useful to receive any bycatch data from Contracting Parties at the most specific taxonomic level.

9.67 The European Union suggested that PECMAS and the Statistics Working Group could look at how they could undertake to help provide such data.

10 Report from the Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance, PECMAC

AM 2023-05, AM 2023-13, AM 2023-23, AM 2023-33, AM 2023-91

10.1 The Chair of PECMAC, Thord Monsen (Norway) introduced the work of the Committee over 2023.

10.2 He explained it had been another difficult year, with much of the work being carried out via correspondence, with thanks to the Secretariat in supporting. The first meeting of PECMAC was scheduled from 18th to 20th of April, although all agenda items were closed by 19th April and the

meeting was adjourned. The Secretary received a letter from the Russian Federation on the 20th of April in which it reserved its position on each of the PECMAC agenda items, considering them open for subsequent decisions at the next PECMAC meeting in the autumn. This was reflected in the report of the meeting (AM document 2023-05). The subsequent meeting, PECMAC 2, was cancelled and items were progressed by correspondence where this was possible.

10.3 In terms of progress a new vice-Chair, Xosé Tubio (European Union) was elected. PECMAC would in the future include an item on use of new MCS technologies such as Artificial Intelligence. In order to ensure harmony amongst MCS developments in the North-East Atlantic, the Secretariat was invited to observe at the coastal States' MCS working group of the pelagic stocks.

10.4 The PECMAC meeting had discussed a proposal related to article 14 of the Scheme to make fishing activity data available to all parties irrespective of inspection presence in the RA. This was now being tabled at the AM by some Contracting Parties. The Chair underscored that such developments would entail complementary changes in NEAFC IT systems which due to the lack of meetings, had not yet been discussed in depth at PECMAC. In particular, the Commission would need to be aware that the proposal would create undefined capacity and resource demands at the time of the ERS launch. Guidance was also needed on implementation, for instance on 'make available as soon as possible'. The Chair hoped that the Commission would accept that following the first step in making the data available via the ERS user interface with further clarity established, for instance by written procedures.

10.5 On PECMAC work with JAGDM, the Chair noted that ongoing work at JAGDM on harmonising the Master Data Register could lead to changes in presentation of Annex 1 of the NEAFC Scheme.

10.6 The Chair reminded the Annual Meeting that the Flag State Performance self-assessment initiated by the Commission in 2017 for 2020 was now well overdue. Given one Contracting Party report was still outstanding, he asked for guidance on whether to continue to wait or prepare a report based on what had already come in.

10.7 The Chair then listed a series of issues that PECMAC had been unable to properly address at meetings. This was due to the relative hiatus over the last two years, which had forced it to rely on written procedures which were inefficient and difficult to progress. These were as follows:

- As series of editorial corrections and clarifications for the 'New' and 'Transition' Schemes to ensure that everything is ready for ERS to be implemented.
- The cooperation between NEAFC and FAO on connecting the electronic Port State Control (PSC) system and the FAO Global Information Exchange System (GIES). There had been a plan to continue this work through a task force under PECMAC, which has been unable to be established. However, the NEAFC and FAO Secretariats had continued to exchange information in this regard. After mapping the relevant 'denials' data for possible exchange, the NEAFC Secretariat would work towards sending 'dummy data' into the FAO GIES testing environment. This was to confirm if establishing electronic connection was possible or not by using the current data fields in the electronic PSC for denials. Furthermore, the continued work included the need for NEAFC to develop an electronic rather than PDF version of the port state inspection (PSC 3) forms. This would then enable NEAFC parties to report directly from the E-PSC rather than having to report individually in 2025.
- The 2023 change to the Scheme on transshipments, combined with an apparent increase in transshipment in the Convention Area, meant that a more efficient means to handle authorisations for transshipments was required. This would now be done via the NEAFC website. The Contracting Parties bound by the 2023 change would thus need to designate a list of users

as well as contacts for receipt of notifications. The Secretariat would be following up with Contracting Parties.

In discussion,

10.8 A Contracting Party reminded the meeting that all were parties to the FAO PSMA, therefore the exercise to join up with the GIES should be seen as a technical rather than a policy exercise. Two Parties underlined that they looked to the Secretariat to interact with FAO on behalf of NEAFC, with written procedures as necessary.

10.9 Another Contracting Party indicated it was content with a step-by-step approach for implementation of data sharing via the User Interface to inspectors under Scheme Article 14. It noted that a formal decision such as a recommendation was the better option for starting the implementation of the ERS.

10.10 On the flag state review, several Parties considered that to avoid an outdated report, NEAFC needed to move on, even if not all Parties had submitted their individual reports.

10.11 The Russian Federation underlined it had not been able to participate in PECMAC 1 2023, given a hybrid facility was not provided. It had submitted a reservation on all items of the meeting and statement had been provided to the PECMAC report (see AM document 2023-91). It suggested that the follow up on the 2023 recommendation on transshipment provided an example of the need to make appropriate preparations before the adoption of proposals. Finally, it noted that since there had been no PECMAC meetings/or one it had been able to attend since 2022 there had been no opportunity to present the Russian Federation flag state review. It also re-iterated its view that the United Kingdom should present a separate report from the European Union. The United Kingdom and the European Union responded that the United Kingdom report had been properly represented within the European Union report as it was a Member State at that time. It was also noted that the Chair had called for a face to face meeting of PECMAC 1 2023.

10.12 The Annual Meeting thanked the Chair and the Secretariat for their efforts in PECMAC. It noted the report, including the concern on how to progress work, as well as the issue of no Chair being available for the flag state review.

10.13 The PECMAC Chair then presented the 2022 NEAFC Compliance Report (document AM 2023-23). He explained that this had been assembled by written procedure from reports from Contracting Parties and active Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties (CNCP). He detailed that the number of notifications in 2022 (762 Contracting Party vessels) reflected the longer-term averages. CNCP vessel numbers (81 notified) were at the highest level in 10 years. 18 transshipment messages were received in 2022 with no infringements related to Article 13. However, activity in 2023 had multiplied most likely related to restrictions on use of ports. The report indicated that not all Contracting Parties were complying with the Scheme requirements on inspection presence in the Regulatory Area. All port state landings benchmarks had been met in 2022 apart from one party with respect to frozen landings. The Chair noted that some Parties had asked the Secretariat to circulate a template for a mapping exercise to understand how serious infringements were handled by the different administrations. Finally, noting that all the infringements in 2022 related to PSC, the Secretariat had been asked by some Parties to prepare a draft guidance document for industry to help them in understanding the Scheme requirements.

In discussion,

10.14 One Contracting Party noted the findings of the report emphasising the need to look at how transshipments were controlled in light of increasing activity and in light of the relevant FAO guidelines. Another Contracting Party noted in response to an issue raised, that while only 18 of the TRA messages

were from the Regulatory Area, the other information would be considered under national legislation. It noted also that there was a high level of rejected messages from two Contracting Parties that may need follow-up, as well as the increased number of infringements against Articles 22 and 23 of Scheme (entry, landings and transshipment at port) notwithstanding that article 23 was amended last year.

10.15 The Annual Meeting adopted the 2022 NEAFC Compliance Report (document AM 2023-23)

10.16 Advice to the Commission on implementation of ERS from AHWG ERS implementation

10.17 The Chair of PECMAC introduced document AM 2023-33 as well as noting the report of the only Ad hoc ERS-Implementation Group meeting held in 2023 (document AM 2023-13). He reminded the Commission that it had agreed in 2017 to implement an Electronic Reporting System (ERS) based on the UN/CEFACT “Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange” (FLUX). The agreed framework for this implementation, including a transition period, was subsequently set out under Recommendation 19:2019. He reported that under that framework, the Ad hoc ERS-Implementation Group via correspondence, was advising that the criteria agreed to implement the new system and initiate the transition period had now been met. Thus, the Commission was advised by the Group that the new Electronic Reporting System based on the FLUX should be implemented and set into production by NEAFC on the 15th of January 2024. This date would also be the start of the agreed two-year transition period.

10.18 The Chair added that from the date above, the new Scheme and adopted transition scheme would enter into force. He noted also that the new and transition scheme had been amended to reflect the relevant recommendations adopted after the new and transition scheme was adopted in 2018. Furthermore, the NEAFC Scheme would during and after the transition period be applied with reference to Recommendations 16:2018 and 19:2019.

10.19 Finally, the Chair explained that in accordance with Recommendation 19:2019, the Ad hoc ERS Working Group would continue its work and follow the implementation through the transition period and will raise relevant issues to PECMAC and the Commission as appropriate.

10.20 The Chair congratulated NEAFC Parties and Secretariat on finally reaching this milestone. Contracting Parties joined the congratulations.

10.21 A Contracting Party noted the presentation of document AM 2023-33, it asked for confirmation of its understanding that, following the conclusion of testing and implementation between the European Union Member States and the Secretariat in accordance with the agreed criteria, that all the necessary steps to trigger the implementation procedures set out in Recommendation 19:2019 had now been completed. If so, it asked the Commission to confirm its decision.

10.22 The Annual Meeting noted the report of the Chair, and accordingly confirmed its decision that:

The new Electronic Reporting System (ERS) based on the FLUX UN/CEFACT Standard shall be implemented and set into production by NEAFC on the 15th of January 2024. This date will also be the start of the two-year transition period. Furthermore, from this date the ‘New’ Scheme and ‘Transition’ Schemes, as adopted by Recommendation 19:2019 including later amendments, will enter into force. The NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement during and after the transition period will be applied with reference to Recommendations 16:2018 and 19:2019.

11 The NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement

AM 2023-24, AM 2023-37, AM 2023-44, AM 2023-50, AM 2023-51, AM 2023-52, AM 2023-53, AM 2023-63 Rev.1, AM 2023-69, AM 2023-70 Rev1, AM 2023-101

11.1 Implementation of the Scheme

11.1 See above.

11.2 Possible adoption of proposals from PECMAC

11.2 No proposals were proposed.

11.3 Possible adoption of proposals from JAGDM

AM 2023-37; AM 2023-44

11.3 The Secretariat, on behalf of the JAGDM Chair, introduced two proposals from JAGDM 2023.

11.4 The first proposal was set out in document AM 2023-37. This was a proposal by JAGDM to extend the number of characters allowed in the NEAFC Scheme Annex IX C 1). This covered the increased numbers of characters required in the Scheme annex related to monitoring, inspection and surveillance (see also agenda item 11.5 and document AM 2023-51).

11.5 **The Annual Meeting adopted the Proposal on Extending the Number of Characters Allowed in NEAFC Scheme Annex IX C 1) as proposed by JAGDM (document AM 2023-37).**

11.6 The second proposal by JAGDM was to update Annex VIII 4) of the Transition Scheme to align it with the recently adopted transshipment reporting requirements (document AM 2023-44).

11.7 This aligned the new and transition Schemes with regard to transshipment reports.

11.8 **The Annual Meeting adopted the Proposal on Updating Annex VIII 4) of the Transition Scheme as proposed by JAGDM (document AM 2023-44).**

11.4 A and B- lists of IUU vessels

AM 2023-24

11.9 The Chair of PECMAC introduced document AM 2023-24 which proposed to update the NEAFC IUU A-list to the IUU B-list (confirmed) as set out under article 44 of the Scheme and based only on updates from other RFMOs. The Chair detailed the changes to the lists. These changes had been agreed by PECMAC by correspondence.

11.10 **The Annual Meeting adopted the updated NEAFC IUU lists (AM 2023-24), as proposed by PECMAC.**

11.5 Other

AM 2023-50; AM 2023-51; AM 2023-52; AM 2023-53; AM 2023-63 Rev.1; AM 2023-69; AM 2023-70 Rev.1; AM 2023-101

Article 14 of the NEAFC Scheme – fishing activity data

11.11 The European Union introduced document 2023-50 on behalf of the Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. This was a proposal to amend Article 14 of the NEAFC Scheme to make fishing activity data available to all parties irrespective of inspection presence. This would also have the effect of ensuring the same level of information was shared between parties regardless of whether they were under the New Scheme or Transition Scheme.

11.12 The proposal to amend Article 14 of the NEAFC Scheme (document 2023-50) was adopted by the Annual Meeting by consensus.

NAF character limit increase – Annex IX C1 of the NEAFC Scheme

11.13 The European Union introduced document 2023-51 on behalf of the Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. This was a very similar proposal to that of JAGDM in document AM 2023-37. The European Union explained that some current limitations in NAF characters did not allow communication of the required notification and authorisation data, hence the need to extend these for both NEAFC and NAFO purposes in Scheme Annex IX C1).

11.14 The proposal on a NAF Field Character Limit Increase in Scheme Annex IX C1) (document 2023-51) was adopted by the Annual Meeting by consensus.

Prior notification of entry (Port-State Control Forms) under Annex XV of the NEAFC Scheme

11.15 The European Union introduced document 2023-52 on behalf of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. This was a Proposal to include information of receiving vessels in the prior notification forms (Port-State Control Forms PSC1 and PSC2) used in the NEAFC PSC system.

In discussion,

11.16 A Contracting Party queried the necessity of the proposal given the information should already be available, and complications may arise from cancelled or more complex transshipment operations. The European Union explained that the FAO Guidelines indicated that transshipment was a high-risk activity and therefore needed close monitoring.

11.17 In a vote, five Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom), (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to include the information of receiving vessels in the Port-State Control Forms under Annex XV of the Scheme (document 2023-52) was thus adopted.**

Art. 18 of the NEAFC Scheme - Inspectors

11.18 The European Union introduced document 2023-53 on behalf of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. This was a proposal to address situations where an inspection party boarding a fishing vessel was made up of inspectors from more than one party, during joint deployments. To allow for this the proposal was to amend Article 18 of the Scheme to increase the potential number of inspectors from two to four.

11.19 After consultations, the proposal to amend Article 14 of the NEAFC Scheme (document 2023-53) was adopted by the Annual Meeting by consensus.

Article 13 of the NEAFC Scheme – Communication of Transshipment and Port of Landing

11.20 Norway introduced document 2023-63 Rev1 on behalf of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom. This was a proposed amendment to Article 13 of the Scheme on communication of transshipments. Norway explained this was a technical change to expand the scope of the changes intended by Recommendation 11:2023 (which applied to fisheries resources caught in the Regulatory Area, regardless of the area where the transshipment took place) to include fisheries resources caught outside the Regulatory Area and transhipped within the Regulatory Area. It noted also a small editorial change on the numbering of 1.c.

In discussion,

11.21 A Contracting Party queried the necessity of the proposal, given it implied an acceptance of weakness of national measures to address the issue. Furthermore, it felt there was insufficient risk-assessment provided to PECMAC without discussion amongst all Contracting Parties. Therefore, it felt this added requirements without significant benefit to conservation of resources.

11.22 In a vote, five Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom) (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to amend Article 13 of the Scheme on Communication of Transshipment and Port of Landing (document 2023-63 Rev.1) was thus adopted.**

Annex I of the NEAFC Scheme – addition of stocks

11.23 The European Union introduced document 2023-69 on behalf of the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom, a proposal to amend Annex IA and IB of the scheme. It explained that in order to ensure misrecording of catches for stocks was deemed a serious infringement, they needed to be listed in Annex 1A of the Scheme. Therefore, it proposed to add capelin and horse mackerel to Annex 1A. It also proposed to move haddock to Annex IB, also with the addition of some of the stocks listed in the ICES-NEAFC MoU.

11.24 In a vote, five Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom), (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to amend Annex 1 of the Scheme (document 2023-69) was thus adopted.**

Article 28 of the NEAFC Scheme – infringement procedures

11.25 The European Union introduced document 2023-70 Rev.1 on behalf of the European Union and the United Kingdom, a proposal to amend Article 28 of the Scheme on infringement procedures. It explained that the proposal addressed the case under the PSC regulations where neither the port State nor flag State followed up on an infringement at a port. The proposed change to the Scheme would allow a port state to follow up on an infringement unless it informed the flag State of its intentions to transfer the proceedings.

11.26 In a vote, five Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom), (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to include the amended Article 28 of the Scheme (document 2023-70 Rev.1) was thus adopted.**

11.27 A Contracting Party congratulated the Parties on good cooperation providing for a number of proposals being adopted at the meeting. Another Contracting Party was of the view that bringing proposals to conclusion by a majority was not a solution, given the need for a dialogue between the Parties to make the organisation function. Its view was that the Parties were selective about what issues were discussed and it felt there had not been cooperation between all the Parties on MCS.

Article 34b of the NEAFC Scheme – Active CNCP fee.

11.28 The European Union introduced its proposal to amend Article 34b of the Scheme (document 2023-101). This was an amendment with regard to the fee which an Active CNCP must pay when granted the status of active CNCP. It explained this reflected the increase to reporting duties for the Secretariat related to transshipments involving CNCP vessels. The increase would apply to active CNCP status in 2025 (so, applications in 2024).

11.29 In discussion, a Contracting Party considered that as the proposal involved financial matters it should be considered further and also be discussed at FAC.

11.30 In a vote, five Contracting Parties supported the proposal (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom), (see agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote). **The proposal to include the amended Article 34b of the NEAFC Scheme (document 2023-101) was thus adopted.**

12 Cooperating non-Contracting Party Status

12.1 Possible renewal of cooperating non-Contracting Party status

AM 2023-12, AM 2023-15; AM 2023-16, AM 2023-17, AM 2023-18

12.1 The Chair of PECMAC explained that there had been an initial discussion at PECMAC 1 2023 of Active CNCP applications for renewal by Bahamas and Panama. Due to the cancellation of PECMAC 2 2023 clarifications had been exchanged between applicants and Contracting Parties via correspondence. However, in the absence of PECMAC 2 there had been no final decisions made on the granting status.

In discussion,

12.2 The European Union explained its position; that over many years it had observed that the activities of the CNCPs were difficult to control and inspect. Furthermore, its view was that MCS knowledge in the CNCPs was low and indicated that they had challenges to implement the requirements. Therefore, it was difficult for it to accept granting of active status in 2024. The United Kingdom said that, although it had concerns, it did not see enough evidence on lack of compliance to vote against granting active status.

The Bahamas

12.3 Relevant documents for the application of Bahamas were AM 2023-15 and AM 2023-17 and its annexes.

12.4 The Bahamas noted that it fully shared the concerns expressed by the two Contracting Parties. The current situation was challenging for reasons outside the control of the Bahamas, including a noticeable increase in administrative requirements for both the CNCPs and the NEAFC Secretariat. Nevertheless, it stated it was continuing to report against all requirements. It would in two weeks be adding voluntary provisions to cover all NEAFC resources at a global scale and continue its efforts to comply with all measures.

12.5 The proposal to renew the status for the Bahamas was put to a vote. Three Contracting Parties voted in favour (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Norway and the United Kingdom), one voted against (the European Union), while Iceland abstained. See agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote. The proposal was carried. **It was therefore agreed to renew the Active co-operating non-Contracting Party status of the Bahamas for 2024.**

Canada

12.5 On the basis of an application (document AM 2023-12) under article 34a of the Scheme of Control and Enforcement, the Secretary recommended to the NEAFC Commission the status of Canada as a General cooperating non-Contracting Party to NEAFC be granted for the year 2024. The proposal to renew the status for Canada was agreed by consensus. **It was therefore agreed to grant the General co-operating non-Contracting Party status of Canada for 2024.**

Panama

12.6 Relevant documents for the application of Panama were AM 2023-16 and AM 2023-18.

12.7 The proposal to renew the status for Panama was put to a vote. Three Contracting Parties voted in favour (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Norway and the United Kingdom), one voted against (the European Union), while Iceland abstained. See agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote. The proposal was carried. **It was therefore agreed to renew the Active co-operating non-Contracting Party status of the status of Panama for 2024.**

12.2 Possible new granting of cooperating non-Contracting Party status

No applications

13 Report from the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC (FDN)

AM 2023-09; AM 2023-10; AM 2023-22; AM 2023-55; AM 2023-71; AM2023-90

13.1 The Chair of the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC (FDN), Colin Faulkner (United Kingdom), introduced its reports to the Annual Meeting (documents AM 2023-09; AM 2023-10; AM 2023-22, AM 2023-55; AM 2023-71; AM 2023-90). The Chair explained that there had been 6 meetings of FDN in 2023. FDN had undertaken a very full agenda over the year, and he thanked the Heads of Delegation for their expertise and knowledge and the efforts of the Secretariat. He noted the following in particular:

- Four of the meetings were related to finalising the Terms of Reference for the regular Performance Review of NEAFC. The Chair explained that these were very near to being finalised and he expected the work to start in 2024 with the aim of a report in 2025, although the timing was not yet final. A list of panellists would also be concluded soon.
- FDN had considered the issue of objections under the Convention. This had included setting up an experts group on the objections procedure. There were no conclusions on this issue, but the discussions had been useful and fruitful.
- FDN would be coming back in 2024 to the developments related to the new instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea (the BBNJ).
- Development of an organisational strategy and a planned refresh of the NEAFC website was in progress.
- OECMs had been usefully progressed together with PECMAS and the OECM Working Group, to be considered at the meeting under a separate sub-item.
- The issue of observers being allowed to FDN meetings had been discussed and was to be finalised by Heads of Delegation at the Annual Meeting.

In discussion,

13.2 Several Contracting Parties thanked the Chair for excellent chairing and noted good progress in discussions which offered more opportunity for strategic discussions. One of these areas was engagement on international issues, including those raised at UN Fish Stocks Review Conference in the summer. The proposed inclusion of observers was welcomed, citing the good experience at PECMAS and the benefits of greater transparency. Progress on the Performance Review was also welcomed, a Contracting Party noting the importance of having external expertise reviewing NEAFC's

work, now for a third time. On objections several Parties indicated they were happy to continue discussing this.

13.3 The Pew Charitable Trusts, on behalf of Blue Marine Foundation, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, North-east Atlantic Pelagic Advocacy Group and Seas at Risk, urged the meeting to cover mismanagement of pelagic stocks and the NEAFC relationship with coastal States in the upcoming Performance Review. It also regretted that the Terms of Reference had not been circulated more widely for comments. It considered the expertise of observers was valuable to the FDN discussions.

13.4 The Annual Meeting noted with thanks the reports setting out the work of FDN. Following further discussion at Heads of Delegation, the meeting confirmed that observers would be allowed to attend future meetings of FDN under the NEAFC Rules of Procedure 34.

The Pew Charitable Trusts thanked the parties for the decision on behalf of the NGO observers.

13.1 The Next NEAFC Performance Review

13.5 The President explained that, as the meeting had been informed by the Chair of FDN, the working group had been developing a way forward for NEAFC's next Performance Review. She informed the meeting that a draft Terms of Reference were very near to conclusion and had been submitted to the NEAFC Heads of Delegation. The Heads of Delegation hoped to conclude the discussions on the Terms of Reference in due course, alongside the process to identify the panellists to undertake the Performance review.

13.2 Working Group Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures (OECM)

AM 2023-07; AM 2023-34 Rev.1; AM 2023-35; AM 2023-100

13.6 The Chair of the Working Group OECM, Gunnstein Bakke (Norway) briefly introduced the report of the Working Group (document AM 2023-07 and AM 2023-35). He then moved to the substance of the options proposed by the Working Group on potential NEAFC OECMs (in concert with FDN and PECMAS). Document AM 2023-34 Rev.1 set out the details of the development of the proposals with two templates set out in the annexes. Annex 1 set out a finalised template for an NEAFC OECM based on areas closed to bottom fishing under NEAFC's Recommendation 19:2014 on protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME). Annex 2 set out a template based on areas restricted to bottom fishing in the same Recommendation. The Chair explained that there were ongoing discussions on the restricted areas.

In discussion,

13.7 A Contracting Party agreed that there was a positive and clear case for the closed areas to be recognised as an OECM, while the restricted areas needed more work. Another Party agreed that the restricted areas needed more work but noted that NEAFC now had the advice on the 1 400m isobar and only needed to know the biodiversity benefits of the relevant areas above this isobar. This was to avoid overstating benefits in the restricted areas.

13.8 OSPAR explained that it was also working on OECMs. It thanked NEAFC for its input on this subject to the OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on MPAs. OSPAR was currently developing its understanding of existing international guidelines to apply in the OSPAR context. It also looked forward to the development of the joint narrative on area-based management agreed with NEAFC.

13.9 The Pew Charitable Trusts reiterated their opposition to the VME bottom restricted fishing areas being considered as OECMs. Their view was that areas with VMEs identified should then be closed. If other biodiversity attributes were identified, then these would need to be characterised and other measures considered to ensure OECMs were designated according to the criteria of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

13.10 In a further development at the meeting, Iceland tabled a proposal (document AM 2023-100) on behalf of Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), Iceland and Norway. This was to propose to report the OECM based on VME closed areas to the Convention on Biological Diversity. On restricted areas the document set out a request for more advice from ICES based on the polygons identified above 1 400 m isobar which would open a way to further discussions at PECMAS on how to proceed. The proposal also included the finalisation of the joint narrative with OSPAR as part of the OECM reporting process.

13.11 The Contracting Parties thanked the Chair of WG OECM for the work and Iceland for the further developments in the margins of the meeting. Two Contracting Parties thanked colleagues for working hard on understanding their concerns raised on restricted areas. That the closed areas were ready to be forwarded was welcomed, noting this had also been done within the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation recently.

13.12 The proposal set out in document AM 2023-100 on NEAFC OECMs was agreed by the Annual Meeting by consensus. The Annual Meeting also delegated the President, Chair of OECM Working Group and the Secretary to identify and apply the appropriate processes for reporting NEAFC OECMs to the CBD, as well as any editorial changes required to the templates.

13.13 The Pew Charitable Trusts congratulated NEAFC on its progress. It welcomed the fact that restricted areas were under a further process including ICES advice, given its views that the restricted areas did not fulfil the CBD OECM criteria. It also understood the wording of the proposal did not allow for the reporting of the restricted areas without significant further development. It reiterated its views on the need for biodiversity attributes to be characterised and the possible need for further measures for the OECM to be correctly identified. It looked forward to further discussions in 2024.

14 Request for scientific advice

AM 2023-96

Request to ICES for scientific advice

14.1 The Chair of PECMAS, Karin Linderholm (European Union) presented a proposal for an advice request for scientific advice from ICES (document AM 2023-96). This included the standard recurring advice request. In addition, two non-recurring requests were made. The first on options to support assessment of progress towards biodiversity and ecosystem objectives under an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. The second request was on advice ICES related to the 5 yearly assessment of the effectiveness of the Recommendation 19:2014 on protection of VME as set out in Article 10 of that recommendation. The Terms of Reference for the latter non-recurrent request would be agreed by consultation between NEAFC and ICES.

14.2 The Annual Meeting adopted the request for scientific advice from ICES as set out in document AM 2023-96. It also noted that the relevant advice request elements of document AM 2023-100 on OECM would be included in the non-recurrent request to ICES.

15 Report from the Finance and Administration Committee

AM 2023-14, AM 2023-93

15.1 The Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee (FAC), Kate Sanderson, Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), presented the Committee's work. She explained that the FAC had met in the margins of the meeting (see documents AM 2023-14 and AM 2023-93) and

welcomed the new Vice Chair, James Sharples (United Kingdom). This followed the departure of Jake Round from his role within the United Kingdom delegation, the Chair passed her good wishes to Jake. The Chair explained a significant part of the FAC discussions had been on the move of the NEAFC HQ from its current premises due to notice having been served by the landlord in order to redevelop the building. The one-off costs of a move, including a refurbishment would be significant. These could be drawn down from the General Fund, however other pressures such as the Performance Review could then bring the Fund down to its minimum level of 50% of the Commission's annual budget. The Secretariat would now be looking for a new premises. A delay to a move date of June 2025 agreed by the Heads of Delegation offered some savings but entailed some decisions to be made well before the next Annual Meeting. The Chair noted the finances were in good hands at the Secretariat and noted the summary of the finances was set out in document AM 2023-93.

The Annual Meeting:

- **Noted** the Audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022 and latest forecast of outturn for the accounts for 2023.
- **Agreed** the Draft budget for 2024 and took note of the draft budget estimate for 2025.
- **Agreed** to apply Article 17.4c of the Convention with reference to annual contributions from Contracting Parties.
- **Noted** that Contracting Party contributions should be paid in full no later than 1 April 2024.
- **Additionally noted** the points discussed and highlighted at the FAC meeting and in the report regarding the financial implications of the relocation of NEAFC headquarters in 2024/2025,

15.2 The President thanked the Committee, the Chair and the Secretariat for their report.

16 Report from the Joint Advisory Group on Data Management, JAGDM

AM 2023-03, AM 2023-04, AM 2023-29; AM 2023-30; AM 2023-31

16.1 The Secretariat presented the report of JAGDM on behalf of the Chair of JAGDM, Suzana Vodovnik (European Union). JAGDM had met 3 times in 2023 (documents AM 2023-03, AM 2023-04, AM 2023-29). The associated Security System Administrators (SSA) group had also met, with a second meeting happening after the Annual Meeting. JAGDM had discussed the standing and statutory items within its remit, including technical implications of recommendations, data exchange statistics for both NEAFC and NAFO, changes to the NEAFC Information Security Management System (ISMS) as well as specific items on technical changes to the NEAFC Scheme (and to the NAFO equivalent), the management of code lists and a new system for circulating Transshipment Authorisations via the website.

16.2 The output of these meetings was in the form of two scheme proposals (documents AM 2023-37 and AM 2023-44) earlier adopted under agenda item 11.3. Two proposals were also tabled by JAGDM for the ISMS as below.

Amendments to the ISMS

16.3 The NEAFC Secretariat introduced document AM 2023-30, a proposal from JAGDM for a Recommendation on and update to the ISMS Article 7.2 Information classification. This covered a new category of data type on transshipment information and another data type on public access to objections information, to implement the decision by NEAFC to make public information on objections to recommendations.

16.4 **The Annual Meeting agreed to adopt the proposal from JAGDM on the ISMS article 7.2, as set out in document AM 2023-30.**

16.5 The NEAFC Secretariat introduced document AM 2023-31, a proposal from JAGDM for a Recommendation on an update to ISMS Article 11 - Access Control. This covered changes to access control to provide for the new transshipment authorisations information.

16.6 **The Annual Meeting agreed to adopt the proposal from JAGDM on the ISMS Article 11, as set out in document AM 2023-31.**

16.7 **The Meeting thanked the JAGDM for the report and its detailed and highly necessary work.**

17 Report from the Working Group on Fisheries Statistics, WGSTATS

AM 2023-21 Rev1; AM 2023-98

17.1 Proposals from WG Statistics

17.1 The Chair of WGSTATS, Erna Jónsdóttir (Iceland), explained that the WG had not met but concluded its business by correspondence. It was proposing to amend the statistics recommendation, Recommendation 2:2011 to include the chimaera species added to the Scheme Annex IB last year. Some stock details had also been updated to match the FAO Aquatic Sciences and Fisheries Information System (ASFIS) List of Species for Fishery Statistics.

17.2 The Chair accordingly tabled document AM 2023-21 Rev.1 – a proposal from WG Statistics to amend Recommendation 2: 2011, as amended.

17.3 **The Annual Meeting adopted by consensus the proposal to amend Recommendation 2: 2011, as amended, as set out in document AM 2023-21 Rev.1.**

17.2 Other

17.4 The European Union presented a proposal by the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom to also amend Recommendation 02:2011 (Monthly Statistics). This amendment was to match the ICES-NEAFC MoU and the earlier agreement at the Annual Meeting to amend Annex IA and IB of the Scheme.

17.5 **The Annual Meeting adopted by consensus the proposal to amend Recommendation 2: 2011, as amended, as set out in document AM 2023-98.** (See agenda item 21 - AOB regarding suspension of Russian Federation vote).

18 Relationships with other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations

AM 2023-19; AM 2023-26; AM 2023-38; AM 2023-40; AM 2023-41; AM 2023-46; AM 2023-65;

18.1 Observer reports

18.1 The President set out the list of reports submitted by NEAFC observers at the meetings of regional fisheries management organisations. These were as follows: CCAMLR (AM 2023-65), ICES Annual Science Conference (AM 2023-46), NAFO (AM 2023-19), NAMMCO (AM 2023-26), NASCO (AM 2023-40), Pollock in the Bering Sea (AM 2023-38) and SEAFO (AM 2023-41). Since ICCAT was meeting in the same week as NEAFC, there was no report on ICCAT.

18.2 It was agreed that the Contracting Parties would provide observer reports to the Annual Meeting in 2024 in the following way:

CCAMLR – Norway
ICCAT – the European Union
ICES – Iceland
NAFO – Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland)
NAMMCO – Norway
NASCO – the European Union
Pollock in the Bering Sea – the Russian Federation
SEAFO – the European Union

18.2 Other

None

19 Relationships with other international fora

AM 2023-27 Rev.1

19.1 The Secretary presented the report (document AM 2023 -27 Rev.1) on relationships with other international fora. He noted that there were slightly fewer international oceans meetings attended in 2023 compared to the flurry of meetings in 2022, catching up from previous cancelled meetings. Nevertheless, there were some significant international milestones which would be described in the report. The Secretariat had attended a mix of face to face, hybrid and virtual format meetings over the year, thus saving some travel costs. As usual engagement involved highlighting NEAFC and its Contracting Parties' progress and developments. Sharing NEAFC's experience, expertise and knowledge was aimed at informing and strengthening other organisations' work on fisheries and oceans.

19.2 The information document provided a collation of short individual reports of the various fora attended the Secretariat, grouped as in previous years under global and regional oceans governance; enforcement monitoring control and surveillance and; science and information sharing. These included attendance/presentations at: the OSPAR Biodiversity Committee, a sub group on MPAs and another on the OSPAR Quality Status Report as well as the OSPAR Commission meeting; the reconvened 5th and final Intergovernmental conference on development of an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in ABNJ ('the BBNJ'); the Resumed Review Conference of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement; Fourth Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on Port State Measures; an Intersessional workshop of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative Global Dialogue; the First Meeting of the PSMA Strategy ad hoc Working Group; the IMCS Network 7th Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop; an FAO Workshop on Implementation of the Deep Sea Guidelines; the regular bilateral meeting between NEAFC and ICES; the FAO-GEF Common Oceans Deep Sea Project Inception workshop; a Meeting of ICES with Recipients of ICES Advice, MIRIA; the FAO Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) Steering Committee (Chaired by the Secretary); the Intersessional Meeting of the Aquaculture and Fishery Subject Groups of the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP); an International Conclave on Mainstreaming Climate Change into International Fisheries Governance and Strengthening of Fisheries Management Measures in the Indo-Pacific Region (Chaired by the Secretary as Co-Chair of the Regional fisheries bodies Secretariats' Network).

19.3 Highlights of the above meetings included opportunities to further NEAFC's work on OECMs and its collaboration with others on area-based management. The conclusion of the BBNJ negotiations with an agreed instrument had also provided a basis for discussion in several meetings on challenges and opportunities under the planned processes under the instrument. The Secretary also took note of various learning points on highlighting the work of RFMOs, in particular of NEAFC. Several agenda

items in the Annual Meeting, both technical/MCS more ecosystems-based, reflected collaboration with other organisations over the year, including FAO and OSPAR. Climate change was another opportunity for NEAFC to learn from the work of other regions.

In discussion,

19.4 Iceland noted that the Secretariat played an important role in international fora to learn and to share experience. NEAFC should therefore give guidance to the Secretariat. It encouraged the Secretary to input also to the FDN meetings where there was more detailed discussion. As guidance, Iceland suggested the work in 'the neighbourhood' was essential, such as OSPAR, but other organisations around the world were important too. For instance, recently formed RFMOs that have new approaches. Substantive issues for NEAFC were fisheries measures, deep sea fisheries, area-based management, MCS including the ERS. On BBNJ, it noted that the Secretary was there to support the parties without becoming a participant in negotiations. Iceland noted that not only the Secretariat, but the President also may be able to take up such opportunities. Iceland then listed key partners not only in the region but globally, especially partnerships such as the Sustainable Ocean Initiative that built bridges across the divides. FAO was highlighted in particular noting the GIES, the Committee on Fisheries and the new sub-Committee on Fisheries Management. The European Union, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom added their support to Iceland's views, including on the opportunity to go into more depth at the FDN and noting the Secretariat report was a document worth reading.

19.5 The FAO took the opportunity to highlight the FAO-Global Environment Facility project on deep sea fisheries. It explained the project included several RFMOs in addition to NEAFC and ICES. The project would last until 2027 and included work on data poor stocks, deep sea sharks and ecosystems. In the context of earlier discussions, it noted that it would be organising a symposium on ecosystem-based fisheries management for RFMOs in 2025. It was also working with ICES to assess rapidly changing data poor stocks for existing fisheries, for closed fisheries and for new or exploratory fisheries. In addition, it would support data collection on deep sea shark bycatch, (including identification of sharks) and spatial mapping of deep sea fisheries, and in relation to VME. Finally, the project included knowledge management and communication to highlight the good work of RFMOs globally. FAO informed the meeting that the project steering committee would meet in December 2023 and could include potential work on climate change.

19.6 OSPAR informed the meeting about its latest Quality Status Report (QSR) that was published in 2023. It appreciated the effort by NEAFC to highlight issues in the draft assessments but noted that connections between the fisheries and environment inputs could improve. The QSR had shown that where measures were put in place benefits were seen. However, collective trends in biodiversity and ecosystems in the North-East Atlantic were still downward. OSPAR viewed the QSR as a useful evidence base to deliver on shared objectives for a better environment. It thanked NEAFC for inputs to OSPAR processes, including on NACES MPA, noting that the links between the organisations were important to the credibility of the Parties around the world, with developments such as BBNJ only reinforcing this. ICES thanked the Secretariat for working closely with it on international issues.

19.7 The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition welcomed the involvement of the Secretariat in the global agenda on protection of biodiversity. It noted that at the UNFSA Review Conference there had been a detailed discussion on deep sea fisheries and ecosystems and urged the Parties to examine the UNGA resolution in this regard. The Pew Charitable Trusts also thanked the Secretariat for its report, linking the issues raised to the work ongoing at PECMAS on ecosystem-based fisheries management.

20 Collective arrangement between competent international organisations

AM 2023-08

20.1 The Secretary introduced document AM 2023-08. This was the aide-memoire of the meeting under the collective arrangement between NEAFC and OSPAR, the first held since the COVID pandemic. The report highlighted a productive meeting attended by representatives of other intergovernmental organisations such as FAO, ICCAT, ISA, NAFO and UNEP. Apart from the usual items where the organisations updated each other on relevant initiatives, data management, and their area-based management measures, there had been in depth discussions on key international developments. These had been in particular on ecosystem-based management, on the BBNJ instrument, and on OECMs. On the latter, OSPAR and NEAFC had agreed to develop a joint narrative that described how each organisation's area-based measures, each under its own competence, interacted with each other where these overlapped in the high seas. This narrative would be completed by the time of the next collective arrangement meeting planned for February 2024 and available to submit alongside OECM designations to the CBD. OSPAR had also informed NEAFC about a new work on deep sea sharks to identify key areas in the North-East Atlantic where deep sea elasmobranchs were at greatest risk.

In discussion,

20.2 Iceland expounded its view that the BBNJ made the cooperation between NEAFC and OSPAR all the more important, reflecting the competence and role of the two organisations in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The collective arrangement offered an opportunity to engage with others such as ISA to deliver a more holistic approach. Iceland wondered if at this stage the best path was to continue with trying to get other organisations to join the collective arrangement, or to conclude that it was better to accept the arrangement would just include two organisations and find other ways of inviting others to participate. Iceland encouraged other Parties to think about this. The European Union explained it subscribed to the cooperation with OSPAR in order that environmental aspects were built into decisions and there was joint understanding and solutions.

20.3 OSPAR agreed with the importance of the collective arrangement being underlined with the impetus offered by the BBNJ. This had added positivity and engagement to the latest meeting.

20.4 An NGO welcomed the cross sectoral approach inherent in the meeting but considered that it should be open to NGO observers.

21 Any other business

AM 2023-99; AM 2023-102

Payment of annual contribution and suspension of voting rights

21.1 During the Annual Meeting an issue arose related to Article 17.8 of the NEAFC Convention (the Convention on Future Multilateral Cooperation in North-East Atlantic Fisheries) which states that "A Contracting Party which has not paid by the date determined by the Commission its contributions for two years shall not enjoy the right of casting votes and of making objections under this Convention until it has fulfilled its obligations, unless, at the request of the Contracting Party concerned, the Commission decides otherwise". The Russian Federation had not paid its contribution for 2 years under the interpretation of the other Contracting Parties that 'paid' meant that the outstanding payments had reached the NEAFC bank account. The President explained that the Russian Federation had explained that they had done everything possible to make their payment, given until recently the international sanctions had prevented the transfer of funds. Once a UK licence related to the current international banking sanctions regime was provided payment had been initiated. The Secretariat had

also explained that, following a lengthy licencing process, the payment had been initiated by the Russian Federation on its request. However, the payment was currently being held at an intermediary bank to undergo a compliance process and had not yet arrived at the NEAFC account.

21.2 The President concluded that this meant that Article 17.8 of the Convention had been activated. The Russian Federation tabled a document (AM 2023-99) to explain it had requested that the other Parties decide otherwise on the suspension of voting and objection rights, but the other parties (Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom) had not done so. The President therefore concluded that the Russian Federation was consequently unable to vote or object – but these rights would be reinstated as soon as the payment was received; this did not affect any other aspect of their participation in the meeting. The Secretariat would advise all Parties if there was any change in status on the transfer of funds¹.

Climate Change

21.3 The United Kingdom presented its document on climate change (AM 2023-102). In light of the seriousness of climate change, its view was that NEAFC needed to highlight the issue. It therefore proposed to adopt a non-binding resolution to give more direction to the consideration of climate change in NEAFC's work. The proposed resolution directed PECMAS to include opportunities in its agenda for Contracting Parties to share examples of climate change mitigation and adaptation in fisheries, identify available scientific advice and gaps for collaboration, global best practice etc. It also added consideration of how to reduce the environmental impacts of NEAFC meetings themselves.

In discussion,

21.4 The European Union, Iceland and Norway agreed that it was important to make not just NEAFC activities more sustainable but also the fleets' activities. It was noted that concrete actions were not yet included but the resolution would act to trigger a process towards these. Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland) noted also that information from the advisory opinions from the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea could assist in the understanding of the way forward.

21.5 The proposal for resolution on climate change considerations for the attention of the NEAFC Permanent Committee on Management and Science as set out in document AM 2023-102 was adopted by consensus.

Extension of the Contract of the Secretary

21.6 The President introduced an item for AOB. She explained that the Secretary's contract followed a cycle of two 4-year terms which would finish in August 2025. This timing coincided with NEAFC facing significant undertakings such as the Performance Review and the move of the Headquarters. The Heads of Delegation, noting they were very content with the performance and professionalism of the Secretary, therefore had decided to extend his contract to August 2027. **The extension was agreed as a Decision of the Commission given it was an extraordinary deviation from the Rules of Procedure.**

22 Access to documents

22.1 Under the NEAFC policy on access to documents from NEAFC meetings, Contracting Parties were invited to indicate any document as needing to be marked as an exception from the policy. No documents were proposed.

¹ *Secretariat note: The contribution of the Russian Federation for 2022 was received at the NEAFC bank account on 27 November 2023.*

23 Arrangements for future meetings

AM 2023-103

23.1 Annual meetings 12-15 November 2024 and 11-14 November 2025

23.1 It was noted that NEAFC Annual Meetings were traditionally held during the second full week of November. Therefore the 43rd Annual Meeting would take place 12-15 November 2024 and the 44th Annual Meeting would take place 11-14 November 2025.

23.2 Arrangements were being made to hold the Annual Meeting in 2024 at the Holiday Inn London Regents Park Hotel, Carburton Street, London, W1W 5EE, circumstances at the time permitting.

23.2 Meetings of subsidiary bodies of NEAFC

AM 2023-103

23.3 It was agreed that the timing of meetings of subsidiary bodies of NEAFC in 2024 would be as presented in the calendar in document AM 2023-103.

24 Press statements and other reports of NEAFC's activities

24.1 It was agreed that the press statement from the meeting would be dealt with by the President and that the Secretary would support her in that task.

25 Closure of the 42nd Annual Meeting

25.1 In closing the meeting, the President noted with appreciation the efforts of the Contracting Parties to make sure the meeting was able to conclude its agenda successfully. She noted the meeting had reached a significant milestone in agreeing the start date of the ERS. The resolution on climate change was also a new departure for NEAFC. The meeting had also included in its stock recommendations a redfish stock that had not had an agreement in many years. She was also pleased to see the roll-over of protections for sharks, deep sea sharks, rays and chimaera. She was happy to note the extension of the Secretary's term with NEAFC, and finally, looked forward to an agreement on the Terms of Reference for the Performance Review.

25.2 The President thanked the Secretary and all the secretariat for going above and beyond in their hard work delivering for the Commission. She also thanked the technical staff and the hotel for all their help in providing a venue which ran smoothly throughout the meeting.

25.3 She wished all attendees a safe journey home.