



# 42<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING

## REPORT ANNEXES

14-17 November 2023

**42<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING  
OF THE  
NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION  
14-17 NOVEMBER 2023**

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**NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC  
FISHERIES COMMISSION**  
*Managing Fisheries in the North-East Atlantic*

**42<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF NEAFC  
14-17 NOVEMBER 2023**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**NAME**

**President** Skarðsá, Janet

**Secretariat**

**Secretary** Campbell, Darius  
Ásgeirsson, Hrannar Már  
Early, Anthony  
Hacker, Diane  
Heerde, Lauren van  
Lewsley, Rachel

**Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland)**

**Faroe Islands**

**HoD of DFG** Kunoy, Bjørn  
**Alternative HoD** Hansen, Hugo Lamhauge  
Sanderson, Kate  
Kristiansen, Andras  
Gaardlykke, Meinhard  
Djurhuus, Tóra  
Patursson, Gunnbrit  
Petersen, Ingibjörg  
Sigvaldsson, Herluf

**Greenland**

Døj, Iben Funch  
Boldreel, Emma  
Lund, Mads Rossing  
Nielsen, Claus E.

**NAME**

**EUROPEAN UNION**

HoD	Kisieliauskas, Mindaugas
Alternative HoD	Heck, Kerstin
	Arrhenius, Fredrik
	Augustynowicz, Adam
	Babcionis, Genadijus
	Banning, Rob
	Beijoco, Catarina
	Depickere, Paulien
	Derkacs, Ricards
	Einarsson, Sigurdur Steinn
	Fitzgerald, Brian
	Flynn, Niall
	Hübner, Stefan
	Ingvarsson, Einar Bergur
	Labanauskas, Aivaras
	Linderholm, Karin
	Lopez, Ivan
	Mahfoud, Nadia
	Mancebo, C. Margarita
	Märting, Kaire
	Näks, Liivika
	Nielsen, Lisbet
	Ogertschnig, Larissa
	Óttarsson, Yngvi
	Päädam, Ulvi
	Parlevliet, Diek
	Prieto, Irene
	Puhl, Rahel
	Remisz, Emil
	Richter, Uwe
	Rodriguez, Sebastian
	Sverdrup, Esben
	Szemioth, Bogusław
	Szumlicz-Dobiesz, Justyna
	Thorsteinsson, Baldvin
	Udrea, Nicolas
	van der Stelt, Dirk-Jan
	Vielmini, Ilaria
	Villauriz, Alicia
	Žudienė, Ieva

## NAME

### Iceland

#### HoD / VP

#### Alternative HoD

Ásmundsson, Stefán  
Pórðarson, Guðmundur  
Elvarsson, Bjarki  
Karlsdóttir, Hrefna  
Jónsdóttir, Erna  
Jónsdóttir, Jóhanna  
Pórsson, Þorvarður Atli

### Norway

#### HoD

#### Alternative HoD

Landmark, Vidar-Jarle  
Skoglund, Bendik  
Bakke, Gunnstein  
Bergan, Kristine Werdelin  
Frotvedt, Kristin  
Guri-Mæle, Breigutu  
Høines, Åge  
Maråk, Jan Ivar  
Monsen, Thord  
Østgård, Hanne  
Wangensten, Per

### Russian Federation

#### HoD

Kolochin, Kirill V.  
Belous, Ekaterina  
Bilchak, Elena  
Gerashchenko, Ilya.V.  
Khlivnoi, Vladimir  
Pukhova ,Oksana  
Shulaeva, Anna

**NAME**

**United Kingdom**

**HoD** Francis, Will  
**Alternative HoD** Sharples, James  
Bennett, Rebecca  
Faulkner, Colin  
Gatt, Ian  
Gibbins, Imogen  
Hackett, Michelle  
Keith, Shelia  
Locker, Arnold  
Machut, Marta  
Nash, Richard  
Park, Mike  
Reid, Lauren  
Ryan, Jack  
Sandell, Jane  
Vieira, Rui  
Watson, Joseph  
Windebank, James

**OBSERVERS**

**NAME**

**Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties**

**Bahamas** Hutchinson, Dwain (HoD)  
McNulty, Frank  
Durbazevs, Arie  
Isaksen, Gro Isadora  
Mol, Hans

**Panama** Bernal, Luis

**Inter-Governmental Organisations**

**FAO** Hidas, Eszter (NFIGD)  
Fagnani, Sarah (NFIDD)  
Mosteiro, Alicia (NFIFP)

**ICES** Miller, David  
Jennings, Simon  
Worsøe Clausen, Lotte

**NAFO** Represented by DFG

**OSPAR** Pattinson, Dominic

**NAME**

**Non-Governmental Organisations**

<b>BLUE</b>	Hughes, Jonny Finbow, Jasmine
<b>DSCC</b>	Gianni, Matthew Golder, Bronwen
<b>MSC</b>	Gislason, Gisli
<b>NAPA</b>	Auchterlonie, Neil
<b>PEW</b>	Steadman, Daniel Vandevelde, Jean-Christophe
<b>Seas at Risk</b>	Abril, Catarina

**For Information**

**MEETING**

Finance and Administration Committee (FAC)  
Joint Advisory Group on Data Management (JAGDM)  
Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance (PECMAC)  
Permanent Committee on Management and Science (PECMAS)  
WG on Fisheries Statistics (STATS)  
WG Future Development of NEAFC (WGFDN)  
AHWG on ERS-Implementation (ERS)  
AHWG on Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM)

**CHAIR**

Kate SANDERSON  
Suzana VODOVNIK  
Thord MONSEN  
Karin LINDERHOLM  
Erna JÓNSDÓTTIR  
Colin FAULKNER  
Thord MONSEN  
Gunnstein BAKKE

**42<sup>nd</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF NEAFC**

**WELCOME ADDRESS  
PRESIDENT JANET S. NØRREGAARD**

Welcome to all delegates and to all participants to the 42nd Annual Meeting of NEAFC. In particular welcome to the ones participating at this meeting for the first time.

A special welcome to the Icelandic delegation. It is good to see that you made it here. The forces of nature are on display at the moment in Iceland, and our thoughts are with you all, and in particular with the people in Grindavík.

I would also like to extend my best wishes for a speedy recovery to Vladimir Belyaev, who was not able to join us at this meeting due to health reasons.

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Following a difficult year in 2022 with no meetings in Committees and Working Groups, NEAFC work has almost managed to get back on track in 2023.

Albeit with a couple of cancellations of meetings, there have been meetings in most working groups and Committees, which we will hear from these next couple of days. I would like to use this opportunity to thank chairpersons and participants for all the work, and for efforts on all sides to make meetings possible. The efforts of our secretary need a special praise in this regard. Thank you!

This last year has seen major steps forward in global oceans governance. At the end of last year the Convention on Biological Diversity, of which all our parties are members, agreed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

This year the negotiations on an instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea were finally concluded. A negotiation that our Contracting Parties have been very actively engaged in for many years, as have our secretaries, past and present.

The issue of climate change impacts in our oceans has also been going up the agenda, as it urgently needs to do.

All these developments do not fundamentally change what NEAFC does, our focus remains the same; management of fisheries to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes. Nevertheless, there are new opportunities in these initiatives.

NEAFC is taking forward its existing ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management with new impetus, as I hope we will see in our interactions with ICES at this meeting.



NEAFC is also aiming to be one of the leading RFMOs in engaging with the Global Biodiversity Framework in developing Other Effective Area Based Conservation Management designations based on its existing strong measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems.

On our first post-COVID Collective Arrangement meeting with OSPAR this year we were able to discuss these developments, to see how our collaboration can help with more effective cooperation across our different competences in the same ocean areas.

I hope also we will see from the work of the Future Development of NEAFC group that NEAFC is very much thinking strategically about the challenges ahead and how it should best engage and communicate within this sphere.

In NEAFC we are also planning our next Performance Review to look at how we as an organisation meet our Convention's objectives.

On other important issues we still have not overcome the disagreements between coastal states on sharing arrangements on mackerel, herring, and blue whiting.

I am however encouraged to see that there have been many meetings between the parties this year and that further meetings are planned. The frequency of meetings does not necessarily mean there will be results, but the likelihood of reaching a positive result is higher when parties meet and exchange view on difficult matters, than when all retract to their own corners.

And to end on a very positive note, some of you will be aware that NEAFC has for many years been working on modernising our electronic reporting system. This is not just a matter of changing detailed IT systems, although it has involved a huge amount of detail. But it gives NEAFC much needed information on gear and activity, even haul by haul. It also comes with a new online interface that helps national inspectors and the secretariat instantly see all the data about individual vessels activity in the high seas.

We hope that we at this meeting will agree on the actual roll out of the system amongst our parties from January onwards. This will be a great achievement.

Finally, I wish to thank everyone for being her today, and I wish you all success in your work at this year's Annual Meeting of NEAFC.

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## **CONTRACTING PARTIES – OPENING STATEMENTS**

### **NEAFC Annual Meeting, 14-17 November 2023**

#### **DENMARK (IN RESPECT OF THE FAROE ISLANDS AND GREENLAND)**

##### **Opening Statement by Denmark in respect of Faroe Islands and Greenland (DFG)**

Madam President, distinguished Representatives and Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Faroe Islands and Greenland are pleased to be present in London at this the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission.

We would like to thank the President and other Contracting Parties for good cooperation since the last Annual Meeting. We view the work conducted by NEAFC and through cooperation amongst its Contracting Parties as crucial in achieving sustainable management of fisheries in the North-East Atlantic, which is of the utmost importance for the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Concerning the pelagic stocks significant challenges continue to remain on how to share these stocks amongst the relevant coastal states, the result being that the total catches of these stocks are higher than what is scientifically recommended. This is a most unfortunate situation, and an untenable position for us all. Indeed, although achievements and progress have been made towards consensus positions, there is an increasingly urgent need to reach a compromise, particularly on the sharing arrangement for Norwegian Spring-Spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) Herring. The Faroe Islands and Greenland are committed to continue efforts with a view to finding mutually acceptable solutions that include all Coastal States, to ensure a long-term sustainable management of the pelagic stocks.

We would also like to convey our appreciation to the Secretary and all the members of the secretariat for their outstanding efforts in arranging this and other meetings, and for ensuring a sensible and pragmatic compromise under extraordinary circumstances, that has allowed the smooth conduct of business in most committees.

We welcome the progress of the important on-going work of the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC, underpinning our joint efforts to ensure that NEAFC remains a leading RFMO and that this organisation considers the developments on the global stage when it comes to fisheries management. One such milestone development was the conclusion of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ) negotiations earlier this year, which will promote coherence and coordination, but not undermine relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies such as RFMOs. The agreement therefore puts the onus on NEAFC to both engage in international work including the nominations of OECMs in line with the CBD 30x30 target. We are pleased with the progress on these as well as progress on the terms of reference for the Performance Review reflecting Contracting Parties' objectives and ambitions and are keen not to lose momentum.

We also welcome the advice from the Ad hoc Working Group on ERS, on the implementation date for a new ERS following successful tests. The advice reflects considerable work over several years, for which the chair and members of the AHWG ERS are to be commended. Successfully transitioning to the new ERS within the allotted two-year timeframe will require further work, to which we will also contribute.

We have a full agenda ahead of us this week and we are looking forward to working constructively with all Parties to ensure a successful 2023 Annual Meeting.

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## **EUROPEAN UNION**

### **Opening Statement of the European Union**

Dear Ms President, Distinguished Representatives of the Parties, Observers, colleagues!

The European Union would like to thank the like-minded Contracting Parties for the excellent work and cooperation throughout 2023. The result of that cooperation is a number of proposals on conservation and control that are co-sponsored by several Parties.

The extraordinary situation in Europe however, due to the war, continues to affect also our organisation.

The European Union would like to underline the importance of independent peer-reviewed scientific advice from ICES, as prescribed by the Convention, underpinning our decisions in NEAFC. We strongly encourage all like-minded Parties to work closely with ICES so they can fulfil their tasks requested by NEAFC.

In NEAFC we are looking forward to an ambitious and thorough performance review and we hope to be able to agree to the terms of reference at this Annual Meeting.

Regarding OECMs we are pleased to see that in NEAFC we are prepared to take an important step in fulfilling the Convention on biodiversity objectives by nominating the closed VME areas as OECMs. We are also looking forward to continue this work together with OSPAR, our important partner organisation in the North East Atlantic, in 2024.

We are proud to make NEAFC the first RFMO to use the electronic reporting system. The EU will start using that system as from January next year. I would like to thank all colleagues involved, who have brought that objective to fulfilment, for their dedicated work.

On control aspects, we look forward to further progress on transshipments. Transshipments are high risk operations and we need to make sure that our control authorities have the necessary information to monitor those operations.

Regarding Irminger Sea redfish, we would continue with further tightening the measures. This is needed to ensure that the Contracting Parties do not contribute to high level unsustainable operations for a stock with zero catch advice.

I would like to thank the NEAFC Secretariat for their very good work done throughout the year. We very much appreciate that we have such a good team in the NEAFC Secretariat.

The European Union is prepared to work with all like-minded Contracting Parties to ensure a very good outcome of this NEAFC Annual Meeting.

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## **ICELAND**

### **Opening Statement by Iceland**

Madame President, dear colleagues and observers

I would like to start by thanking the President, the other Contracting Parties and the Secretariat for good cooperation and valuable work since the last Annual Meeting. These continue to be unusually challenging times, as was noted by the EU and others who spoke before me. However, we have largely been able to keep the organisation functioning this year. Given the important role that NEAFC has for conservation and management in the North-East Atlantic, this is to be welcomed.

Madame President

NEAFC has demonstrated over the years that it can be a leading RFMO – an organisation that leads the way rather than an organisation that prefers to follow others. This can be challenging and requires us to cooperate well. Thankfully, we more often than not manage to do that. Attention is often and rightfully given to our shortcomings, but our track-record in breaking new ground on various issues demonstrates that we also often work well together and achieve good results.

Of course, one sometimes wonders if the good cooperation, with largely fruitful results, tends to apply to everything apart from the issues that matter the most. Disagreements about sharing arrangements for the biggest fisheries managed by NEAFC continues to be a dark stain on our collective reputation. We may have a very good and advanced RFMO together, with well-functioning processes for most things. But we all know that the one thing that we are failing to agree on is something that should be the core of this organisation. It is very far from being a minor detail.

The fact that these issues are largely dealt with by coastal State consultations, and not really in NEAFC, does not give us a free pass. The same parties are represented in the coastal State consultations, largely by the same people and with mandates from the same political leaders. Iceland has for several years been taking initiatives to try to find new ways of approaching these

issues, in order to see if a new approach will work better than the previous one that was not fruitful. We do note that there seem to be positive noises coming from at least some of the coastal State consultations. I can assure you that Iceland will continue to push for a resolution on these issues and that Iceland will do its best to demonstrate flexibility and rationality to contribute to a solution. We certainly hope that we will have finalised all coastal State sharing arrangements by the time we meet again at next year's Annual Meeting.

Madame President

On a happier note, it should be noted that NEAFC has been a leading RFMO when it comes to the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and the management of deep sea fisheries. Our area management is effective and comprehensive, and we have a clearly set out NEAFC approach for deep-sea species. We amended our Convention some years ago to make it clear that NEAFC does not only focus on the target fish stocks but also has an important role when it comes to conserving the wider marine ecosystem and conserving marine biological diversity. These have thankfully not been empty words, but something we have acted on.

The good work we have already done in this context is not the end of this journey. We have in the last few years been emphasising particularly the issue of conservation of biodiversity – where the States gathered here have agreed targets in other international fora for covering 30% of the ocean with MPAs and OECMs. For NEAFC, it is OECMs that are particularly important and Iceland would like to welcome particularly the good work of both the WG on OECMs and of PECMAS on this issue. We have already received useful advice from ICES which will hopefully make it possible for us to take decisive action at this meeting.

It is clear that the so-called 30-by-30 target will not be achieved without significant contributions by RFMOs. This is another opportunity for NEAFC to be a leader. We must ensure that we strike a good balance between two aims. Firstly, to ensure that we demonstrate that RFMOs can make significant contributions in this and secondly to ensure that the contributions are genuine – based both on good science and on genuine conservation of biodiversity. There remains a risk that RFMOs will either not engage in achieving this target or that they will end up nominating ill-founded OECM areas that will undermine the whole concept of RFMO playing the important role they must play in this. Leadership by NEAFC can set an important precedent and prevent these negative results.

The scientific advice we have received allows us to move forward with a very good balance in this. The areas we have a basis for nominating as OECMs are far away from being sufficient to reach 30% of the high seas of the North-East Atlantic, but they are nevertheless a significant contribution and good start. Iceland hopes that we can reach an agreement at this annual meeting to have NEAFC take an important step in this. Some may feel that as an RFMO we should not focus too much on issues like conservation of biodiversity, but it is the position of Iceland that NEAFC has a responsibility to act and thereby demonstrate its commitment to being progressive on environmental issues.

It is relevant in this context that NEAFC also remains a major contributor to the North-East Atlantic remaining a global leader in cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination among international organisations with complementary legal competences. We remain committed to continuing the cooperation under the Collective Arrangement with OSPAR – and through it to build cooperation with a number of other international organisations.

Madame President

As you may have noted, I decided to focus on very few issues this opening statement – thereby saying a bit more about them than if I was commenting on most of the issues that are likely to be discussed at this Annual Meeting. However, there are thankfully many different things happening to improve many different aspects of our organisation. I will not list them all here, but rather try to be active in the discussions as they arise at this Annual Meeting. However, I would like to particularly emphasise that it seems to be now genuinely just around the corner that the long-awaited ERS system will be fully functional. We still have work to do, domestically and jointly in NEAFC. However, I'm confident that all issues will be resolved successfully, resulting in an important system that we can be proud of and that will once again demonstrate that NEAFC is certainly a world leader regarding control issues.

Madame President, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to end this opening statement by expressing my hope that we will have constructive discussions this week that will lead to this being a fruitful meeting.

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## **NORWAY**

### **Opening Statement by Norway**

Madam President, distinguished delegates, observers, ladies, and gentlemen,

Norway is pleased to be part of the 42nd annual meeting of NEAFC, and once again to be back in London.

First of all, we would like to thank the President and other Contracting Parties for their work over this year.

We would also like to extend our thanks to the Secretary and his staff for their excellent work throughout the year and in preparing for this meeting. The NEAFC Secretariat has once again demonstrated their commitment to NEAFC, and its Contracting Parties, and we highly appreciate their efforts.

NEAFC's work is still affected by the extraordinary situation Europe now finds itself in.

However, due to the considerable efforts made by the Secretariat, NEAFC subsidiary bodies have managed to hold ordinary meetings this year. Although today's practice, where one contracting party is represented by the Secretariat, is not an optimal solution, it still is an improvement from last year.

The work of NEAFC contributes to sustainable fishing in international waters of the North-East Atlantic, and we should do what we can to make this work as effective as possible.

Therefore, I would like to thank colleagues in these subsidiary bodies for the work they have done during this year, and look forward to hearing their reports and adopting proposals.

Unfortunately, also this year it is necessary to point out that the Coastal States are yet to reach new, overall sharing agreements on the major pelagic stocks.

Norway continues to be ready to engage in this work, for all three stocks, and look forward to welcoming the parties to Oslo at the end of this month for continued talks on herring. Amongst the three stocks, this is the one we should be most concerned about. Hopefully, we will be able to continue the progress we have made towards a new sharing agreement during that meeting and, if necessary, another meeting in December.

Turning to the business at hand, Norway regret that NEAFC has not been able to adopt a recommendation for redfish in the Norwegian Sea. We look forward to discuss the issue again. It is now time for a solution to this, so that we can move forward on stock management here in the North-East Atlantic.

I also have to mention that we, during this year, have had discussions on the procedures for objections in NEAFC, both in the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC and in an ad hoc expert group.

We hope that it will be possible to return to this. The NEAFC Convention is, in our view, out-dated, compared to other RFMO-conventions, needs to be modernized and the number of objections to NEAFC recommendations is too high.

This leads on to a completely unrelated subject: why do we call our decisions “recommendations”? And yes, I know that is the term used in the Convention. But these recommendations are legally binding for the parties to the Convention, and using this term means that we are under-communicating the importance of the decisions taken by the Commission.

President, I hope that we can find time during this week to come back to this seemingly un-important question. In our age of communication and appearance, it might be, however, of some importance what words we use.

The EU mentioned the important work done on OECMs, in their opening statement. I hope we can move this work forward during the annual meeting, and we are prepared to work with colleagues on this.

Finally, there is the issue of the NEAFC performance review. Thorough work on the terms of reference has been done by the Secretary and by the Chair of the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC (FDN). Ten years have passed since the last Performance Review. I hope that by Friday, we will have agreement on terms of reference for a review panel, and can start preparation on the next step in this important process.

Norway is looking forward to the work we shall be conducting during this Annual Meeting, Madam president, in order to achieve the best possible result for sustainable fishing.

Let us make this year's annual meeting a joint success.

Thank you, Madam President.

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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**  
**Opening Statement by the Russian Federation**

Madam President,  
Distinguished Delegates, Observers, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to represent the Russian Federation at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of NEAFC. On behalf of the Russian delegation, I would like to extend our thanks to President and the Secretariat for running the NEAFC business throughout the year and in organizing this meeting.

For Russia, NEAFC is an important forum to address challenges in managing the marine living resources in the Northeast Atlantic and to achieve fair agreements aiming at the long-term sustainability of marine stocks and their habitats.

As Contracting Parties, we all share the responsibility in maintaining the role and credibility of NEAFC as a leading regional fisheries management organization and responding adequately to international requests for improved management.

With that in view, we should place a high priority on applying a constructive approach and demonstrating the willingness to compromise to have in place a management mode for the pelagic stocks of the North-East Atlantic. Due to overlapping claims of the fishing nations, overfishing remains a major issue for the entire pelagic complex. As a Coastal State, Russia is particularly concerned about the declining state of the herring stock. We have always kept a strong focus on the sustainable management of this stock, abiding by the existing arrangements and protecting juvenile herring distributed in the Russian waters. We also find it regrettable that the Coastal States still lack the comprehensive agreement on the blue whiting and mackerel stocks.

Unfortunately, this year has been difficult for us as a Contracting Party.



First of all, we have practically been “left out” from ICES and the problem is not that it affects fishermen and fisheries, but it prevents free exchange of data and scientific advice. Our work within PECMAS would be more effective for the benefit of all Contracting Parties if Russia participated in the work of ICES.

Secondly, certain problems for our fishermen have been created artificially, including the adoption of provisions to prohibit landings, transshipments, and storage, as well as the closure of a number of ports, thus preventing Russian vessels from fishing in the NEAFC Regulatory Area.

We regret that such decisions have been taken. Mainly because of this, the issue of the Irminger Sea redfish stock remains still unresolved for us. You are aware of our position on the status of the stock as well as of our proposals for management measures. You are also aware of the data we presented on the two exploratory surveys that have not been considered.

We are supportive of the work of NEAFC on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and the work towards a more coordinated approach to the protection of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction in the light of the recently adopted UN BBNJ Agreement.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the important work undertaken by the subsidiary bodies of NEAFC and its Working Groups and to emphasize the need for Russia’s involvement in their meetings and discussions on the fully-fledged and equitable basis.

Madam President, the delegation of the Russian Federation, as before, is committed to work cooperatively with all NEAFC Contracting Parties on the meeting agenda in the spirit of openness and mutual respect.

Thank you.

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**UNITED KINGDOM**  
**Opening Statement by the United Kingdom**

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

The UK is pleased to be attending this, the 42nd Annual meeting of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, and we look forward to playing an active role in the discussions.

I would like to extend our thanks to the NEAFC Secretariat for their excellent work in organising this meeting. We know how much effort goes into this, and as usual we are proud to be part of an organisation that shows such professionalism in how it organises itself.

To the substance of this year's discussions. The decisions we take in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations are fundamental to managing our oceans, their ecosystems and our fisheries sustainably. This year's decisions are no exception, as is how we develop as an organisation more widely. Whilst all issues in front of us this week are important, I'd like to take the opportunity to highlight a few in particular.

First, the UK believes it is important that NEAFC commits to improving its understanding of how climate change impacts upon NEAFC regulated stocks and the related marine environment. We face no bigger threat than climate change, and NEAFC is not immune to its impacts. It is right that we progress work on this, and we hope to put forward a proposal for this in the coming days.

Second, this year we will be discussing NEAFC's work to recognise area-based management measures as Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs). The UK continues to support this work and we look forward to discussing how NEAFC can demonstrate leadership in taking this forward.

Third, there are a number of proposals on the table to improve control and enforcement – getting this right is a critical part of sustainable fisheries management – including for those fisheries that we agree to set the TAC at zero - and so we are pleased to co-sponsor several. We are also happy to see proposals to extend measures to protect vulnerable species such as deep sea sharks and rays and hope we can agree to extend protection to porbeagle.

Last, but by no means least, we need to recognise the major pelagic stocks. Although their management is conducted mostly within the framework of the coastal State consultations, there is clearly a link with NEAFC, not least due to the increasing amount of fishing in international waters. We have proposals that recognise the Total Allowable Catches, but we know that we need comprehensive sharing agreements to adhere to these limits. We are not scheduled to discuss these issues in detail this week, but it remains crucial we make progress as we meet in the coming weeks and months as coastal States.

With that, we wish everyone a productive meeting and hope we can find ways forward on the important issues in front of us.

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**COOPERATING NON-CONTRACTING PARTIES – OPENING STATEMENTS**

**The Commonwealth of the Bahamas  
Opening Statement by the Commonwealth of the Bahamas**

Mdm President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, may I express our sincere appreciation to the Secretariat for extending the invitation to attend the 42nd Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission as observers.

The Bahamas maintains close cooperation with the Commission and undertakes to demonstrate full compliance to the Scheme provisions. As a responsible Flag State and a CNCP to NEAFC our firm position remains to not only follow the existing requirements but also move forward in implementing the additional voluntary control and reporting measures addressing the direct transshipments of the Convention species independent from where it takes place.

The Bahamas continues to promote and assist in the global efforts to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. We will investigate and act upon every occasion should a Bahamian ship be alleged in involvement in such practices anywhere in the world.

In line with our historic position the Bahamas do not seek to engage in fishing in the NEAFC Convention Area. The Bahamas Registry also does not offer registration for international fishing vessels, fish factories and fish processing vessels independent of their area of operations.

May we also thank the Secretariat for their helpful and efficient cooperation in assisting the Bahamas to remain fully compliant to the Convention provisions and the Scheme requirements.

Finally, Mdm President, distinguished delegates we wish every participant a constructive and fruitful work during the meeting.

**Dwain Hutchinson MBA, AFNI**

**BMA Managing Director and CEO**

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**PANAMA**  
**Opening Statement of Panama**

The Republic of Panama expresses its interest before the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, to renew its participation status as an Active Co-Operating Non-Contracting Party by 2024.

For your consideration, Panama would like to present the constant progress in terms of the strengthening of the applicable regulations, improvement of the administrative and technical structure of the entities related to fisheries monitoring, as well as the implementation of new processes and exceptional technological tools in the region, in reference to the control and traceability of the origin and destination of fishery products, applicable to the entire Panamanian fishing fleet of international service; these actions include, among others:

A Fisheries Monitoring Center, with 25 operators in permanent control where risk assessments of operations that will be subsequently authorized or denied are carried out, as well as the registration of information from those activities or operations of catch, transport, supply activities, unloading in port and other related activities that are carried out in all RFMOs where the Panamanian fleet participates.

In September 2023, Panama has carried out the progressive launch of four official digital platforms for monitoring the activities of the operational fleet in all RFMOs including NEAFC, be these: the new transshipment platform E-TRA for the authorization, monitoring and control of transshipment activities, E-LAND for the registration of landings of fishing and fishing related activities vessels in authorized national ports or in ports of third countries, as well as of foreign flag vessels, in authorized national ports; E-CATCH for the submission of requirements and validation of catch certificates, in compliance with EU Regulation 1005/2008; and finally E-SEG for the management and monitoring of movement alerts issued by catching vessels and fishing related activities.

The creation of a Commission to evaluate cases of possible infractions, the resumption of inspections on board vessels and a new regulation that establishes the requirements for transshipments, which includes, among other conditions, having certain knowledge of the origin of the fish product on board the donor vessel, prior to the transfer activity on board Panamanian refrigerated cargo vessels; these actions become new control frameworks to ensure compliance with domestic and international regulations.

These and other ongoing actions generate additional monitoring alternatives to the electronic reporting and monitoring processes established by the NEAFC.

In order to achieve the renewal of the status of Active Co-Operating Non-Contracting Party in the Commission, Panama remains at the disposition of the Commission, has submitted the requirements requested based on Article 34b of the Scheme with the intention that refrigerated cargo vessels continue to operate in the Zone, will seek the compliance of the fleet under domestic and Commission regulations while retaining the responsibilities and

obligations as a Flag State, and has responded to the additional inquiries submitted by the members on its application and if its participation is approved, commits to make the payment of the fee for the rights to be granted by 2024.

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## **OBSERVERS FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS OPENING STATEMENTS**

### **FAO**

#### **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

President, distinguished delegates from NEAFC Contracting Parties (CPs), Observers, NEAFC Secretariat,

Since the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Session of NEAFC, FAO has advanced work with regards to international and regional processes.

Following the endorsement of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment in September 2022 by the FAO Committee on Fisheries, FAO embarked on a series of Regional Workshops focusing on the Guidelines, which were co-funded by the European Union. Four of them took place during 2023 covering Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Southwest Pacific and Asia, for a total of more than 60 countries and 150 participants. A fifth workshop for Europe is to be held between 11-15 December 2023, in 3 weeks time, in Madrid. We are glad to note the NEAFC Secretariat's registration to it and would like to encourage NEAFC contracting Parties to do so as well.

The Voluntary Guidelines have brought about three key elements: 1) definitions of transshipment and landing, 2) transshipment and landing declarations including the minimum international requirements, and 3) a process to follow including licensing, pre-notification, reporting, monitoring and control of transshipment operations. We look forward to hear about the possible implications for NEAFC CMM on transshipment and port State control, particularly considering the intrinsic connections of transshipment operations with port State measures. The guidelines will be key in supporting the implementation of Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) particularly when taking decisions to allow port entry or use, specifically in connection with the Advance Request of Port Entry (ARPE).

2023 has also seen the Fourth Meeting of the Parties (MOP) to the PSMA, a high engagement meeting with actionable results including: 1) the endorsement of the Bali Strategy for an efficient implementation of the Agreement; 2) a decision to launch the Global Information Exchange System (GIES) operationally by the end of 2023, and I hereby announce that the launch date is scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> November, next week; 3) the commitment to monitor implementation of the Agreement through a dedicated statutory working group; 4) the green light for an amended self-assessment questionnaire for the Parties and a new questionnaire for the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and Arrangements (RFMO/As); 5) an agreement to compile a list of decisions by the Parties as part of the Bali Strategy; and 6) the need to look into the Programme of Work and Financial matters of the PSMA in all subsequent Meetings of the Parties, to mention the most prominent ones.

Following work and coordination among PSMA Secretariat and NEAFC Secretariat on preparations for an automatic connection between the electronic Port State Control (e-PSC) of NEAFC and the GIES of PSMA, FAO would like to encourage NEAFC CPs to move ahead with the specific Task Force as recommended by PECMAC so as to be in a position to connect both systems at the earliest opportunity.

On this occasion, FAO would like to, once again, thank the Government of Iceland for financing the development of GIES with now confirmed additional funds, and the support of the European Commission through the Help Desk and capacity development support to countries.

FAO is already progressing on an automatic connection with IOTC electronic Port State Measures (e-PSM) which is expected to take place before the end of 2023 and well ahead of the Fourth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE) scheduled for March 2024 in Panama. Considering that all NEAFC CPs are Parties to PSMA, it would be very timely to ensure participation of all CPs to that meeting.

2024 looks promising for further advancements on fisheries sustainability including 1) the Fifth Meeting of the FAO/ILO/IMO Joint Working Group on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and related matters scheduled for 8-12 January in Geneva; FAO calls upon all NEAFC CPs to participate in the 5<sup>th</sup> JWG meeting to discuss on the intersection of IUU fishing, safety, environmental and labor matters and recalls that the JWG operates under new Terms of Reference providing recommendations to the governing bodies of FAO, ILO and IMO; 2) the First Meeting of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management to be held virtually from 15-19 January; 3) the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries to be held in Rome in early July 2024; and 4) the Regional Coordination Meetings for the PSMA to focus on monitoring the implementation of the Agreement and the operationalization of GIES.

Furthermore, I would like to inform you that FAO is planning to conduct a global study on vessel tracking in response to a request by the FAO Committee on Fisheries to address the subject. Initial preparations are underway in close collaboration with Norway and we look forward to NEAFC's contribution.

FAO would like to thank NEAFC for the ongoing engagement in the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN), including through its Executive Secretary serving as current co-chair of the RSN, as well the direct support and participation of the Executive Secretary in two events FAO held this year, namely the side event organized on the occasion of the 2023 UNFSA Review Conference in May, as well as the International workshop on climate change held in October.

FAO recognizes the important role that RFB's have in helping countries achieve the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The GBF aims to reduce 'threats' to biodiversity and ensure 'people's needs are met' from sustainable use of renewable resources. As such, fisheries have an important role to play in conserving ocean biodiversity and contributing to human well-being. The sustainability of natural resources is becoming extremely important and involves many actors working across different sectors. Within this context, improved actions and synergies at the global and regional levels are essential. The GBF includes a number of crucial targets that aim to conserve biodiversity globally, including Target 3, which calls for 30% of the planet to be conserved in protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures or OECMs, by 2030. FAO applauds NEAFC's work to determine

how it can contribute to this target in a meaningful way through the recognition of OECMs under the jurisdiction of NEAFC. We encourage NEAFC to continue this work and to document its decision-making process and final determination on which area-based fisheries management measures meet the OECM criteria. FAO believes that other RFBs can learn from NEAFC's valuable experience as they move forward with discussions on how they too can contribute to the CBD's global biodiversity targets. In particular, we note that FAO is organizing a workshop on OECMs, which will include an opportunity for NEAFC to share its OECM experience with other RFMOs and RFBs.

Finally, Chair, NEAFC is a valued partner of the second phase of the Global Environment Facility funded and FAO-led project entitled Deep-Sea Fisheries Under the Ecosystem Approach, which runs from 2022 through to 2027. FAO looks forward to the ongoing constructive partnership with NEAFC and in particular, leveraging NEAFC's specialized expertise in fisheries research and management, to advance the work of the project to deliver sustainable deep-sea fisheries and reduce impacts on biodiversity.

Thank you President, I wish you all a successful meeting.

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**ICES**  
**ICES Opening Statement**

Opening Statement was not submitted

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**OSPAR**  
**Statement by OSPAR**

Madam President, distinguished NEAFC Contracting Parties, Observers, and colleagues, I look forward to joining year's NEAFC Annual Meeting on Thursday.

OSPAR's main deliverable this year was the publication of its Quality Status Report 2023 - OSPAR-OAP (Prod). This represents a significant achievement for OSPAR Contracting Parties and provides the most authoritative assessment to date of the status of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. The results of the QSR 2023 highlight the progress that has been made in monitoring and assessing the status of the North-East Atlantic and provide a strong evidence base for decisions on managing the marine environment. The overarching message from the QSR 2023 is that collective trends continue to point towards declining biodiversity and continued habitat degradation across many parts of the OSPAR Maritime Area, even though measures have been put in place. It is



clear that additional measures are required in order to change the trajectory from one of nature decline to one of nature recovery and that existing measures need to be more effective.

The results of the QSR also highlights the continued importance of working with others to achieve shared objectives. This type of collaboration is now enshrined in the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) that was adopted earlier this year.

This year also saw the welcome return of meetings under the Collective Arrangement. NEAFC's and OSPAR's collaborative efforts through this unique process provides a potential model for the greater collaboration and coordination envisaged under the BBNJ Agreement. It was evident from the discussions at the Collective Arrangement meeting that the BBNJ Agreement has given welcome added impetus to our shared efforts. As agreed, both NEAFC and OSPAR should explore how to expand and develop the Collective Arrangement as a regional platform to help implement the BBNJ Agreement in the North-East Atlantic. The Collective Arrangement meeting also provided a helpful opportunity to share experiences on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures and I am very excited by the agreement to work on a joint policy-level narrative that to communicate how our respective organization's action contribute to protection of the marine environment and increase the visibility and understanding of our respective measures.

Looking ahead, OSPAR will, in line with the objective in our North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030, be taking forward work on development of a practical approach for regional-scale ecosystem-based management. Something that will again require good cooperation with NEAFC and other partners such as ICES.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the NEAFC Secretary for his attendance at several OSPAR meetings over the year and helping to ensure that NEAFC's work is properly accounted for in OSPAR activities. His engagement on the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin MPA and relevant QSR assessments and finding ways to ensure that they are accurate and reflect the latest advice has been particularly helpful.

Dominic Pattinson  
Executive Secretary  
OSPAR Commission

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## **OBSERVERS FROM NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS OPENING STATEMENTS**

### **BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION BMF Opening Statement**

Opening Statement was not submitted

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### **DEEP SEA CONSERVATION COALITION DSCC Opening Statement**

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer to the 42nd annual meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). We have been present as an observer at NEAFC since 2014, and as a participant in other observer delegations since 2007.

In June of this year the members of the United Nations welcomed adoption of the High Seas Biodiversity Treaty. The Treaty demonstrates the commitment of governments to protect and prioritize the health of our ocean by acting individually and collectively “as stewards of the ocean in areas beyond national jurisdiction”. Members of NEAFC are already aware of their obligations to protect biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction from the damaging impacts of deep-sea bottom fishing pursuant to the commitments made through the series of Sustainable Fisheries resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly since 2004. In expectation of ratification of the High Seas Treaty, the DSCC will continue to call for an end to bottom trawling on seamounts and similar deep ocean topographical structures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain. We call on NEAFC to urgently deliver on its members commitments and legal obligations to manage high seas fisheries to prevent damage to deep-sea biodiversity and, in so doing, help pave the way for successful implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

In this context we would like to raise the following issues and recommendations:

#### **1. Prohibit bottom trawling on seamounts and other submarine features**

We reiterate our recommendation from previous years that all seamounts and the Mid Atlantic Ridge should be closed to bottom trawl fishing. Recognizing that isolated seamounts are designated as VME elements in Annex 5, Recommendation 19:2014 (as amended), and that bottom trawling on

seamounts will very likely cause significant adverse impacts (SAIs) on VMEs, NEAFC should prohibit the practice through closing all seamounts and related underwater features to bottom trawling and manage any fisheries in these areas using static gear on a highly precautionary basis.

Scientific information has made it clear that it is not possible to manage bottom trawl fishing on seamounts to prevent damage to deep-sea corals, sponges and other VME related species (Victorero 2023, Goode et al. 2020, Pitcher et al. 2019, Watling and Auster 2017). This is in fact the gist of ICES advice in 2012<sup>1</sup> which stated that a strategy for the regulation of bottom fisheries in areas of steep slopes, seamounts, and in new

fishing areas should require the fishery to demonstrate that it does not cause adverse impacts on VMEs as opposed to allowing bottom trawl fishing on these features and trying to manage impacts with a move-on rule.

Moreover, the closing of all seamounts and related underwater features to bottom trawling will bring NEAFC better into line with the new commitments NEAFC Contracting Parties have agreed to as a result of the last review, in 2022, by the UN General Assembly on the implementation of provisions of previous UNGA resolutions related to the management of bottom fisheries on the high seas.

These new commitments are established in resolution 77/118, including the following in bold in paragraphs 211 and 212 of UNGA resolution 77/118:

**"211. Recognizes the need for further progress with regard to obtaining more biological information on the species that comprise vulnerable marine ecosystems, including their associated and dependent species, the assessment of significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems, and protecting and conserving biodiversity, including beyond vulnerable marine ecosystems, as well as the consistent application of the [FAO] Guidelines.**

**"212. Calls upon, in this regard, States, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements and those States participating in negotiations to establish a regional fisheries management organization or arrangement competent to regulate bottom fisheries, to identify and overcome barriers to the implementation of the relevant paragraphs of General Assembly resolutions 64/72, 66/68 and 71/123 such as data availability, especially with regard to baseline data and the spatial distribution and connectivity of vulnerable marine ecosystems, including their associated and dependent species, while recognizing the importance of international collaboration for this purpose, further recognizing that effective management of bottom fisheries is crucial to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector"**

## **2. NEAFC and ICES Advice**

In relation to current ICES advice, we encourage NEAFC to reiterate its request ICES to provide advice on areas where VMEs are 'likely to occur', as called for in UNGA resolution 61/105 and subsequent UNGA resolutions, and as established in the 'objective' (Paragraph 1) of Recommendation 19:2014. As indicated in the ICES advice to NEAFC this year and by ICES during the

<sup>1</sup> ICES General advice: Review of NEAFC bottom fisheries regulations. Special request, Advice June 2012

meeting of PECMAS in October, ICES has only supplied advice to NEAFC on the presence of “bonafide” VME habitats – and, apparently, none have ‘seen’ in the past year.

Decisions on whether bottom fisheries can be managed to prevent significant adverse impacts in areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur, or to close these areas altogether to one or more methods of bottom fishing, are the purview of NEAFC as laid out in Recommendation 19:2014. ICES should once again be explicitly instructed to provide information on areas where VMEs are likely to occur – including VME elements – in addition to areas where VMEs are known to occur, areas which ICES refers to as ‘bonafide VMEs’, and to take into account paragraphs 211 and 212 of UNGA resolution 71/118 mentioned above.

### 3. 5-year review of Recommendation 19:2014

It is important that NEAFC prepare for, and schedule sufficient time for, the five-year review of Recommendation 19:2014 scheduled for 2024. Amendments to the Regulation should include updating it to ensure full and effective implementation the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions related to the management of bottom fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdiction including the relevant paragraphs in UNGA resolution 77/118 adopted in 2022. In addition to paragraphs 211 and 212 above, the following commitments should be incorporated into the regulation of bottom fisheries: (new text agreed in bold in the paragraph below):

UNGA resolution 77/118:

"213 (a) To use, as applicable, the full set of criteria in the [FAO] Guidelines to identify where vulnerable marine ecosystems occur or are likely to occur, as well as for assessing significant adverse impacts on such ecosystems, **including their associated and dependent species;**

"213 (c) **To ensure that the precautionary approach is applied, including in the utilization of impact assessments to inform management decisions and consideration of significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems, including their associated and dependent species;**

"216. Encourages, in this regard, States, regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements with the competence to manage deep-sea fisheries, and States participating in negotiations to establish such organizations or arrangements to continue to improve the best available science, carry out further marine scientific research to address the remaining knowledge gaps, in particular with regard to fish stock assessments **to improve understanding of the connectivity of populations of deep-sea fish species** and to base and update conservation and management measures on the best available scientific information, in accordance with international law, as reflected in Part XIII of the Convention;

"218. Calls upon States, individually and through regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, to take into account the potential impacts of climate change and ocean acidification in taking measures to manage deep-sea fisheries and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, **including by identifying areas, based on scientific information, where deep-water species and vulnerable marine ecosystems are likely to better survive such impacts, and establishing measures to support their resilience;**"

#### **4. OECMs proposals for VMEs**

The DSCC is still developing a position on OECMs in the marine environment. We listened with interest to the OECM discussion at PECMAS and agree with some of what was discussed – for example, that the restricted fishing areas should not be considered OECMs. In regard to the VME closed areas however, while they do provide genuine conservation, in some cases that conservation value may be undermined or compromised by factors such as:

- the impact of pelagic fishing or fishing of deep-water species in the water column which may degrade the VMEs where there is benthic-pelagic coupling, or
- unknown VME connectivity: i.e. where source and sink populations of deep-sea habitat forming VME indicator species such as cold-water corals have not been identified

In addition, and more importantly, we are concerned that designating areas already closed to protect VMEs as OECMs will detract from fulfilling the political commitments and legal obligations contracting parties to NEAFC have undertaken to protect all VMEs from significant adverse impacts of bottom fishing on the high seas. As one of the former heads of delegation to NEAFC said during the first of the reviews of the bottom fisheries regulations adopted by NEAFC, full implementation of the UNGA resolutions is unfinished business. While NEAFC has made progress more remains to be done.

#### **5. Deep-sea species**

The DSCC once again emphasizes our concern over the setting of any TAC for roundnose grenadier, as opposed to prohibiting the catch of this species. The roundnose grenadier is an IUCN Red List Critically Endangered species, meaning that experts consider it to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild (Iwamoto 2015). As we indicated during the October 2023 meeting of PECMAS, we continue to have difficulty with the ICES advice on roundnose grenadier. We recommend zero TAC for the roundnose grenadier and call on ICES to incorporate the best available science into their advice process. We also urge NEAFC Contracting Parties to apply a precautionary approach, as required under UNFSA. Similarly, we agree with the urging of other Observers that NEAFC maintain the precautionary position taken in 2023 for Porbeagle and retain its Prohibited status into the foreseeable future.

#### **6. NASCES**

In light of the decision of the majority of NEAFC parties to expand the conservation objectives of the NACES MPA, the DSCC supports the call for NEAFC to initiate a programme of work in support of seafloor protection across the full area of the NACES MPA. Our comments above on comprehensive VME protections and ICES VME advice set out the expectations we would expect NEAFC to adhere to initiating that action.

## 7. Conclusion

The 2021 UN World Ocean Assessment II, in Volume 1, Chapter 7L: Seamounts and pinnacles, concluded that “Fishing, especially bottom trawling, constitutes the greatest current threat to seamount ecosystems”. That this is still the case, a full seventeen years after the adoption of UNGA resolution 59/25 and fifteen years after resolution 61/105, makes it clear that it is time to finally put an end to the practice of trawling on seamounts.

The clear choice facing NEAFC Members in 2023 is between continuing to delay the closure of all seamounts to bottom trawling, or to apply the precautionary approach and protect all seamounts and VMEs from SAIs. The latter is a clear obligation under the UN Fish Stocks Agreement – an obligation which requires that “the absence of adequate scientific information shall not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures” to meet established conservation objectives and obligations.

In 2023, as States move to sign and ratify the High Seas Treaty; begin the process of working toward meeting the biodiversity conservation commitments adopted by COP-15 of the CBD; and look to address the emerging threat of deep-sea mining, it is time to acknowledge that bottom trawling on seamounts and associated features must end. Already parties to CCAMLR and NAFO have closed all seamounts to bottom

trawling. The DSCC estimates that fewer than twenty vessels flagged to a handful of countries are still bottom trawling on seamounts in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans – all outliers in a sector that is increasingly recognizing its responsibility to help protect and preserve the ocean for common good. If NEAFC does not take decisive action to effectively conserve and protect VMEs and biodiversity from the impacts of deep-sea trawling on seamounts it will be operating contrary to the UNGA resolutions and other international commitments to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

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**MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (MSC)**  
**MSC Opening Statement**

**Mr President, distinguished delegates, and observers!**

*Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) **vision** is that the world's oceans teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations. And our **mission** is that use of our ecolabel and fishery certification program contribute to the health of the world oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practice.*

*The objective of NEAFC is to ensure the **long-term conservation and optimum utilization of the fishery resources** in its Convention Area, providing sustainable economic, environmental and social benefits.*

***The objective of NEAFC, and I believe all the contracting parties is to ensure long-term conservation and optimum utilization of the fishery resources and that aligned with the MSC vision and mission.***

At NEAFC annual meeting in 2014 there were a presented "Report of the Performance Review Panel 2014". In the report it was confirmed that in many aspects NEAFC is globally among leading RFMO's. However, it was no surprise that it was also identified challenges. In the report it says: ***".....while they usually (coastal states) agree on how much should be caught, the Coastal States and Contracting Parties sometime disagree on how to share that catch among themselves."***

And later in the report it says:

***"The reasons for the lack of agreement on resource sharing are many and complex. Quota allocations are influenced by historical participation in fisheries, environmental effects on the distribution and abundance of stocks and other factors. However, these issues are neither unique to NEAFC nor unresolvable."***

In previous mentioned report from 2014 it is also said:

***"The contracting parties participating in NEAFC are some of the most sophisticated in the world in terms of fishing capacity, control and enforcement, administration, and scientific expertise. Thus, it is inexcusable that these contracting parties cannot come up with workable solutions that result in catches consistent with the advice they seek from independent experts"***

*As output of this 2014 review, then it were created a working group with the objective to write quantitative allocation criteria. However, that WG ended without delivering that product. A quantitative allocation criterion has not yet been created, and still there is an impasse among NEAFC states to agree on sharing of the 3 pelagic. The current development of the stock status of those are worrying and maybe the states needs more tools, like quantitative allocation criteria in hand, to be able to reach an effective sharing agreement.*

Both in 2022 and in 2023 there has been numbers of coastal states meeting on approach to enter a sharing agreement on the mackerel, AS herring and blue whiting. Entities like NAPA, MSC and others have been raising the awareness on this issue. MSC has sent letters, created press materials, and had a seminar in London in June 2023 which were well attended with good presentations and following debates. This and other initiatives raised needed media attentions on this subject.

Ladies and gentlemen! The above-mentioned “*Report of the Performance Review Panel*” is now 9 years old and lets all hope that there will be processed an effective sharing agreement before this report reach its 10 years anniversary. MSC would welcome to get those fisheries again certified against our global fishery standard *and celebrating this the new time in management of the 3pelagics in NEA.*

**We all share the same vision of ensuring sustainable harvest from our ocean.**

We look forward to spending these days with you at the NEAFC annual meeting 2023.

Gísli Gíslason  
MSC Program Director, North Atlantic  
[gisli.gislason@msc.org](mailto:gisli.gislason@msc.org)

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**THE NORTH ATLANTIC PELAGIC ADVOCACY GROUP’S (NAPA)**  
**NAPA Opening Statement**

**TOP LEVEL ASKS**

**Agree sustainable catch shares**

The Coastal States should prioritise resolving the allocation issues around these stocks.

**Follow the scientific advice**

The Coastal States should ensure that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed the scientific advice.

**Commit to long-term management**

Multi-annual management should be the underlying approach by default.

**Cap on catching in international Waters**

Further overfishing could be constrained by a cap on catches in international waters.



## AGREE SUSTAINABLE CATCH SHARES

### What's the issue?

Since 1996, there have only been four years (2006-2009) where North East Atlantic Coastal States have been in agreement on the allocation of stock total allowable catch (TAC) for three commercially important North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries (Figure 1).

A 'good' allocation mechanism will ensure that no participant (or State in this case) is worse off from acting cooperatively. In the case of international fisheries, successful allocation agreements must also be capable of being self-enforcing as there is no third party to ensure enforcement.

The frequent failures of Coastal States to agree on allocations were highlighted by the First (2006) and Second (2014) NEAFC Performance Reviews.

The second review recommended that NEAFC agrees on and applies objective criteria for determining allocations.

In 2015, NEAFC agreed to establish a Working Group on Allocation Criteria.

In 2017, several NEAFC members acknowledged that the task was a very ambitious one, and agreed that there did not seem to be value in continuing with formal meetings of the working group in 2018.

At the 2019 Annual Meeting, it was agreed to discontinue the Working Group on Allocation Criteria.

To date, no collective allocation mechanism has been agreed.

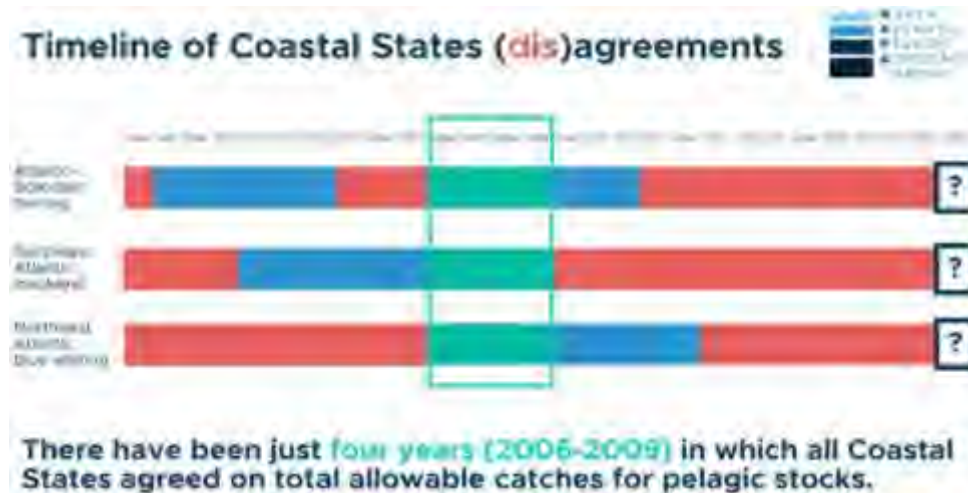
We acknowledge that fisheries negotiations by their very nature are complex. Achieving satisfactory resolutions is a daunting task.

Frequently, dispute resolution mechanisms are used in fisheries negotiations, and have been incorporated into a number of fisheries agreements.

Dispute resolution mechanisms can be described as structured processes that address disputes or grievances that arise between two or more parties that aim to reach a consensual agreement that will accommodate their needs. Dispute resolution mechanisms may incorporate conciliation, conflict resolution, mediation, and negotiation.

Success will be founded on cooperation, with agreed processes and procedures for TAG-setting and quota allocation that can respond to shifts in stock distribution and biomass. This should be coupled with quota trading and exchange mechanisms to balance quota availability with need (with built-in review periods), strong implementation and enforcement of regulations, an effective and responsive dispute resolution procedure, and supported by a strong science–policy interface

Figure 1: Status of Coastal States Agreements (1996-2023)



### What are we calling for?

Coastal States to urgently agree and employ an allocation mechanism for North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and blue whiting.

NEAFC to re-establish the NEAFC Working Group on Allocation Criteria as a first step.

A dispute resolution mechanism should be utilised to facilitate successful negotiations. The NEAFC Guidelines for Coastal State Consultations in the North East Atlantic provides for a variety of dispute settlement avenues, but the weakness is the non-binding nature and apparent reluctance by the Coastal States to employ them.

It is recommended that the Coastal States adopt NEAFC Guidelines for Coastal State Consultations in the North East Atlantic in their discussions, and both the Coastal States and NEAFC employ a secondary, compulsory binding dispute settlement system if agreement is not reached

## FOLLOW THE SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

### What's the issue?

Since 2009, the combined unilateral TACs agreed for each stock have significantly exceeded the scientific advice.

Currently, due to a lack of political agreement, the TACs for North East Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and blue whiting are 130-140% of the scientific advice.

As a consequence of this, and in the absence of a long-term management strategy, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certificates in this region for these fisheries were suspended.

This greatly impacted supply chain companies who had made public commitments to sourcing sustainable seafood.

## What are we calling for?

Coastal States should ensure that the overall catch for each stock does not exceed the scientific advice.

## COMMIT TO LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

### What's the issue?

Fishing can be said to be sustainable when it can be carried out over the long term at an acceptable level of biological and economic productivity, without leading to ecological changes that reduce options for future generations.

The current approach with North East Atlantic pelagic fisheries is one of taking decisions year-to-year, often in crisis management mode.

A longer-term strategy is urgently needed, but without a clear framework for making management decisions, negotiations are often contentious, reactive, and focused on short-term performance.

An alternative approach, known as “harvest strategies” or “management procedures” is the preferred approach for longer-term fisheries management.

Harvest strategies are pre-agreed frameworks for making fisheries management decisions, such as setting quotas.

As well as adhering to best practices of modern fisheries management, consistent with the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the Food and Agricultural Organization Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, harvest strategies are an essential component of the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative’s (GSSI) benchmarking tool.

Responsible members of the supply chain, including NAPA members, are continually increasing their sourcing from fisheries certified by schemes that are internationally recognised by the GSSI.

Accordingly, sourcing may be impacted should long-term management plans not be implemented.

Commitments to sustainable fishing have also been made by all Coastal States involved in North East Atlantic fisheries through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, SDG 14 on ‘life below water’. SDG 14.4 states:

- By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting, and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics.

### **What are we calling for?**

Implementation of harvest strategies, which incorporate precautionary harvest control rules for setting catch limits, a periodic review process, and any necessary mechanisms to transition from previous arrangements to a new system.

## **CAP ON CATCHING IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS**

### **What's the issue?**

There has been an increase in the percentage of mackerel and herring caught from international waters in the last decade.

It has been proposed, by the UK Government (NEAFC, 2020) and the Blue Marine Foundation that a cap on catches in international waters could act to 'contain' the fishery and limit the ability to overfish.

NEAFC has employed this method before; in 2002, a cap on the international catch of many, though not all, deep-water species taken in bottom trawl fisheries in international waters was set.

The North West Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) also employs caps on international catches to manage the cod fishery; there is a 5% cap of catches in the NAFO regulatory area.

### **What are we calling for?**

A NAPA analysis suggests that a cap on catching in international waters could act to constrain further overfishing.

In recognition of the impact that fishing activity in international waters has on the long-term health and sustainability of Northeast Atlantic mackerel, NAPA considers that such fishing effort should be restricted, and to further request that a cap of 20% is implemented such that no single Coastal State can catch more than 20% of its allocation in international waters. NAPA considers that such measures should increase the likelihood that catch levels will be in line with scientific advice.

## **CONTACT**

Neil Auchterlonie

NAPA Project Lead

[neilauchterlonie@btinternet.com](mailto:neilauchterlonie@btinternet.com)

Aoife Martin

NAPA Chair

[aoife.martin@seafish.co.uk](mailto:aoife.martin@seafish.co.uk)

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## THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

### PEW Opening Statement

The Pew Charitable Trusts welcomes the opportunity to participate as an observer to the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC). In this year's meeting, **we encourage NEAFC to make further progress on adopting an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and to continue focusing on fulfilling both biodiversity and sustainable use policy ambitions.**

**Embedding environmental considerations into fisheries management has never been more critical.** The need for urgency is underscored by the conclusions of the 2023 Quality Status Report of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) Commission (to which most NEAFC parties are also signatories), particularly its “concerns” regarding “the need to better integrate ecosystem function into fisheries management”.

In addition, we urge NEAFC members to use the upcoming performance review to address the need for fundamental governance reform, improved pelagic species management and enhanced observer access. These improvements should strengthen collaboration between members, observers, scientific advisers, and OSPAR, and provide greater resilience to the region's fisheries and ecosystems.

To do this, they should:

**1. Agree ecological objectives to support the implementation of an ecosystem approach, underpinned by a clear, comprehensive scientific advice request**

We welcome parties' ongoing discussion of the most feasible means to implement an ecosystem approach within NEAFC. At the 2023 meetings of the Permanent Committee on Management and Science (PECMAS), parties showed “support for starting work on a path towards ecosystem objectives” and explained that the WG Future Development of NEAFC (FDN) was “developing an organisational strategy for NEAFC which could include relevant biodiversity/ecosystem objectives”.

**Adoption of such objectives presents an opportunity for NEAFC to become a standard bearer in the region, potentially catalysing complementary objective setting within Coastal States and other multilateral Northeast Atlantic fisheries fora.**

We are encouraged by these developments, given the importance of ecological objective setting in driving scientific advice and, ultimately, management actions. As outlined in our previous representations to PECMAS, ecological objectives should be harmonised with OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy and its Common Indicators. **Parties should consider candidate objectives that reflect OSPAR priorities, such as enhancing fish community resilience, improving food web integrity and safeguarding areas of target species vulnerability.** A deeper cooperation with OSPAR would also ensure that NEAFC's ecosystem approach to fisheries is consistent with and contributes to cross-sectoral ecosystem-based management in the North-East Atlantic.

We also note the parties' intention to request a technical service from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to explore three possible options to implement an ecosystem approach. **We recommend that parties do not pre-suppose the outcome of such an appraisal and consider a “blended approach” that draws on the most viable and ambitious elements of each option.** We note that option B, the “intense monitoring of response indicators” – while clearly the most challenging to implement – provides an important opportunity to align with OSPAR's objectives and biodiversity monitoring frameworks, objectives that most parties are already committed to as OSPAR signatories.

2. Select candidate Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) with caution and suspend consideration of Restricted Bottom Fishing Areas as OECMs

This year has seen a changing landscape for NEAFC parties in which biodiversity protection has become a central obligation in international fisheries management. A month after last year's annual meeting, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was agreed; this so-called Paris Agreement for Nature aims to “halt and reverse biodiversity loss”. **As responsible authorities governing large scale exploitation of wildlife, fisheries managers like NEAFC have an outsized role to play in delivering its suite of goals and targets.** For Target 3, requiring that 30% of the ocean is effectively conserved and managed by 2030, Regional Fisheries Management Organizations play a particularly critical part, given the significant size of their areas of competency.

We urge parties to show clarity, ambition and diligence in identifying NEAFC's existing and future contributions to the GBF. This particularly applies to NEAFC's efforts to evaluate whether their existing spatial measures conform to the status of being Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), a contribution to Target 3 of the GBF, the “30 by 30” target for spatial protection. **NEAFC is among the first international high seas regulatory bodies to propose measures as OECMs and must confront the emerging risk that misguided, inappropriate interpretations of the 30 by 30 target could undermine its intention.** We have, in the past year, been highly critical of the haste with which this process has taken place within NEAFC and the resultant potential for measures whose scale and character does not conform to internationally approved OECM guidance.

We welcome the increased clarity offered by parties on this topic in October's PECMAS meeting. The consideration of two separate but highly inter-related spatial measures – Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) Closed Areas and Restricted Bottom Fishing Areas (RBFAs) – as OECMs has complicated this process. The proposal to identify RBFAs as OECMs represents a large proportion of NEAFC's Regulatory Area, that does not fit the CBD criteria (although the constraint imposed by parties of a 1,400m depth contour below which OECM area would not be considered has been helpful, reducing the scale of potential sites considerably).

Despite the depth constraint, it remains open to question whether areas where exploratory bottom fishing can take place subject to a consensus decision – regardless of their size – can be said to deliver long-term, sustained and in-situ biodiversity benefits. **Even despite the smaller area of 250,000km<sup>2</sup> of RBFAs now under consideration, we continue to oppose the candidacy of these areas as OECMs given that their management does not ensure sustained biodiversity outcomes.** **We urge the parties who have consistently objected to such areas being submitted at all to**

**continue to do so and the parties supporting RBFA as potential candidate OECMs to reconsider their position.** Should areas of RBFA be found to contain specific biodiversity attributes worthy of protection, we recommend the consideration of appropriate measures, such as protection as VME Closed Areas, before being considered as OECMs.

NEAFC should also set out clearly how VME Closed Areas meet the OECM criteria, particularly where such areas have identified industrial, pelagic fisheries taking place in their water column, such as in the Rockall-Hatton plateau. **Any site with industrial fishing in its water column conflicts with OECM guidance from both the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The fact that those fisheries are the subject of ongoing overexploitation by the Coastal States in these spaces further complicates their case as OECMs.** In effectively decoupling the pelagic and benthic realms and ignoring impacts and ecological interactions between the water column and seabed habitats, NEAFC will send a signal to others globally regarding the standards required

of OECM candidate sites. In that regard, parties should approach the selection of VME Closed Areas as OECMs cautiously, keeping the GBF's intent in mind.

The GBF aims to “take urgent action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery”. NEAFC's contribution to that through Target 3 should ensure effective, long term biodiversity conservation that meets the criteria set out in the Convention on Biological Diversity decision on OECMs. **The GBF's aims cannot be achieved through creative accounting, nor by contributing areas towards the 30 by 30 target that have insufficient evidence of their biodiversity attributes and their effective conservation, or worse, the overexploitation of the wildlife present in those areas.**

### 3. Begin the process of protecting the seafloor of the NACES MPA

We appreciate the discussions around the expanded conservation objectives of the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) Marine Protected Area (MPA) in PECMAS. Unlike candidate OECMs, the site is an existing and confirmed contribution to GBF Target 3 within NEAFC's area of competency and parties should therefore do everything within their power to support its effective management.

With five of the six NEAFC parties having committed to extend the MPA's protection to encompass the seafloor through OSPAR, these same parties must begin the process of introducing complementary measures of their own. **We concur with the suggestion made in PECMAS that parties could seek ICES advice on this topic, but do not support delaying the development of such a request until the next NEAFC-OSPAR Collective Arrangement meeting.** The ICES review of the OSPAR pro-forma that supported this decision provides ample justification for the expansion. Parties should feel confident enough to develop a comprehensive scientific advice request that ensures that their own approach to benthic protection is harmonised with the MPA's management regime.

### 4. Commission a performance review that considers the need for major reform in Northeast Atlantic fisheries governance

We strongly encourage parties to address the need for fundamental reforms of fisheries governance in the Northeast Atlantic. This should focus on two aspects.

The first relates to the dire situation around widely distributed fish species management. While we welcome the momentum towards an ecosystem approach, such an approach cannot be delivered with a governance regime that is currently failing to prevent even single species overfishing. **The region's three largest commercially exploited fish populations – Northeast Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-scandian herring and blue whiting, which are among the most significant finfish fisheries in the world, can no longer be managed so opaquely, ineffectively and irresponsibly.**

While we acknowledge the various procedural and historical reasons why these three species are not managed through routine NEAFC processes, its parties have the power to change this. The current arrangement – where the bulk of management power rests with the informal Coastal States consultations – has seen the parties fail to agree sharing arrangements for any of these three species, thereby subjecting them to ongoing overexploitation. This led parties to miss their own deadlines to re-evaluate the management strategies for two of these species and make no progress in establishing an updated longterm management strategy for mackerel. **These repeated failures, and the declining status of Atlanto-scandian herring in particular, must force a change.**

The second aspect relates to observers to NEAFC and their contributions. Compared to other RFMOs and similar regional or international bodies, NEAFC provides for only limited cooperation in its fields of competence with observers, in particular with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Rules such as the requirement to apply each year for observer status to attend the annual meeting, or the decision to close some meetings to observers (e.g. Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC [FDN], Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance [PECMAC], and NEAFC-OSPAR Collective Arrangement meetings) prevent NEAFC from benefitting from valuable support and input from observers, and goes against normal practice in many other organisations. These restrictions to observer access also go against the principles of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention, 1998), which most of NEAFC parties signed. To remedy this, a simple first step would be to critically evaluate NEAFC's rules around observer status, and bring them in line with common practice in other international fora.

**We urge decision-makers to challenge the conventions in place and apply the leadership required to reform their management practices.** Reforming the Coastal States arrangements through greater alignment with NEAFC and developing more explicit and systematic participation of stakeholders should be at the core of the parties' priorities. These priorities should be central to the upcoming NEAFC performance review and standing agenda items at its annual meeting, until the current system is made more transparent and in line with international best practice.

*We wish all Parties a successful and productive meeting and look forward to continuing to progress towards sustainable, ecosystem-based fisheries management in the Northeast Atlantic.*

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## **Sciaena / SEAS AT RISK**

### **Seas At Risk Opening Statement**

Sciaena is a marine conservation NGO dedicated to promoting a healthy marine environment and an informed population engaged in conservation. We've monitored fisheries under the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) for over a decade, alongside measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NE Atlantic. As a member of the Seas at Risk observer delegation, we appreciate the chance to attend the 42nd Annual Meeting of NEAFC. However, we would like to reiterate our preference for maintaining the hybrid format, as it fosters greater participation and transparency, leading to more accountable decision-making. We strongly recommend consideration of this option in the future to uphold NEAFC's commitment to transparent discussion, and fulfilment of its transparency obligations under the Aarhus Convention.

#### **Not exceeding the scientific advice on fishing opportunities for 2024**

This year, we expect all decisions regarding fishing opportunities to align with or fall below scientific advice. Yet, we acknowledge the persistent disagreement on stock shares, that lead to the establishment of unilateral quotas, which in turn exceed the agreed TAC and/or scientific advice, resulting in overfishing. This particularly impacts three NEAFC-managed stocks: Atlantic mackerel, Atlanto-Scandian herring, and blue whiting. While commending the contracting parties for their progress in recent years, we underscore the importance of confirming that TACs will align with scientific advice. Urgently addressing allocation issues for pelagic stocks is crucial to prevent exceeding scientific advice, and forestall any unilateral quota increases.

#### **Precautionary management of deep-sea stocks**

The unique biological attributes of many deep-sea species, coupled with the ecosystems they dwell in, render them highly susceptible to over-exploitation. These are ill-suited for enduring continuous fishing pressure, whether intentional or unintentional, given their limited productivity and slow recovery potential. For such reasons, the scientific advice cannot be exceeded for deep-sea stocks. This is particularly relevant for deep-sea species that are recognised as vulnerable, threatened or endangered, such as the roundnose grenadier.

#### **Deep sea VMEs and protecting seamounts**

VME protection and the deep-sea habitats, including potential vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), are at significant risk of harm from deep-sea fishing. This damage can take centuries for the habitats to fully recover from, rendering them exceptionally high vulnerability and low resilience. Given these characteristics, it is essential to manage deep-sea species and habitats with significant precaution, emphasizing the critical importance of implementing an ecosystem-based approach to minimize the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem. Although Sciaena acknowledges NEAFC's leading role in the protection of VMEs, we urge the commission to improve VME assessment by adopting a precautionary approach to protect deep-sea topographical features, such as seamounts, which likely harbour rich and diverse ecosystems with deep-sea corals and sponges and, in parallel, incorporate principles to address the limitations of ICES' current data-driven methodology. In this particular regard, we encourage NEAFC to take steps to add the Josephine seamount to its list of areas closed to bottom fishing in the very near future.

Moreover, Sciaena calls on NEAFC to close the entire Mid Atlantic Ridge and all the seamounts in the NEAFC regulatory area to bottom trawling, as it is well established that it is not possible to manage the activity in order to prevent damage to the deep-sea species and ecosystems that inhabit these areas.

### **Preserving the integrity of the 30 by 30 objective**

Sciaena would like to stress the importance of being cautious when designating VME Closed Areas as OECMs, and reiterates its opposition to classifying Restricted Bottom Fishing Areas as potential OECMs. The recent WG-OECM meeting report from October 30th highlighted concerns about insufficient evidence that these areas meet the required criteria and pre-conditions to be classified as OECMs.

Despite introducing a 1,400m isobath constraint for OECMs, there appears to be an effort to justify their inclusion in the 30 by 30 initiative by finding minimal biodiversity attributes in these areas. Thus we suggest that Restricted Bottom Fishing Areas containing VME indicator species should be first categorised as VME Closed Areas. On the other hand, if these areas contain non-VME biodiversity attributes they should thoroughly be assessed to ensure the protection of biodiversity before being contemplated as potential OECMs.

In conclusion, many questions remain unanswered in progressing Restricted Bottom Fishing Areas to potential OECMs. The report does not fully cover concerns about cross-sectoral nature in candidate selection or whether VME Closed Areas where unsustainable pelagic fishing takes place should be considered as candidate OECMs. It is essential to consider the global precedent at stake and ensure that the right OECM candidates are identified.

NEAFC's approach, as the first RFMO to do so, should prioritise meeting CBD criteria to avoid undermining the credibility of the 30 by 30 objective. Approving areas as conservation actions without understanding their biodiversity attributes or mitigating threats would maintain the status quo and does not effectively address the biodiversity crisis.

### **Moving towards an Ecosystem-Based Approach to Fisheries Management**

With the Northeast Atlantic region facing growing impacts of climate change, the significance of effective fisheries management in safeguarding robust and resilient marine ecosystems becomes increasingly vital. Hence, we advocate for NEAFC to actively embrace an Ecosystem-Based Approach to Fisheries, as explicitly outlined in the convention. A crucial initial step in this direction would involve adopting ecological objectives as part of a comprehensive roadmap for implementing the ecosystem approach. This roadmap should be collaboratively developed with key stakeholders, including ICES, OSPAR, and others. It should consider various factors such as the impact of fishing activity on fish populations, sensitive species, and the overall ecosystem. Additionally, the roadmap should address prey-predator relationships and the effects of climate change on natural mortality and recruitment.

### **Other relevant aspects**

It is crucial to adopt a sincere precautionary approach, as outlined by the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, for the stocks falling under NEAFC's jurisdiction. This entails that when data and information are uncertain, unreliable, or insufficient, NEAFC should implement a more cautious management approach, prioritising the protection of vulnerable or data-limited stocks and habitats.

Globally assessed as Vulnerable and Critically Endangered in the Northeast Atlantic, the porbeagle has seen a significant decline in its population size after decades of unregulated fishing. Classified as a Prohibited Species under EU Council Regulation 2023/194 and exempt from the EU Landings obligation, the porbeagle should not be subject to any fishing, whether intentional or incidental. The ICES advice for Porbeagle, last updated in 2022, remains unchanged. Thus, Sciaena calls on NEAFC to keep the management considerations for this species untouched at this year's annual meeting.

We encourage NEAFC to consider additional spatial measures that can aid in the conservation of pelagic species, namely for mackerel. Such measures play a crucial role in maintaining the health of stocks and ecosystems and align with the shift towards an ecosystem-based approach in fisheries management.

Sciaena also advocates for contracting parties to assign a more significant role to PECMAS. Working closely with ICES, PECMAS should serve as the *fora* for discussions and planning concerning the science developed for the stocks and areas under NEAFC's jurisdiction.

We also advocate for NEAFC to cultivate a more profound and efficacious collaboration with OSPAR, specifically in addressing environmental challenges within the North East Atlantic. This collaborative effort is imperative to guarantee that fisheries do not contribute further to the deterioration of marine ecosystem health.

Finally, Sciaena believes RFMOs must acknowledge that the decisions taken under their auspices have far reaching consequences for stakeholders around the world, be they fishers, but also consumers, workers, retailers, or the general public. Therefore, we encourage NEAFC to take positive steps towards transparency and accountability, namely in the context of the upcoming performance review of the organisation

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Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office

Treaty Section  
Legal Directorate  
Rm. WH.2.143  
King Charles Street  
London, SW1A 2AH

[www.gov.uk/fcdo](http://www.gov.uk/fcdo)

Diane Hacker  
North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission  
44 Baker Street  
London  
W1U 7AL

18 September 2023

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Dear Diane,

**Convention on Future Multilateral Co-operation in North-East Atlantic Fisheries:  
annual update**

Thank you for your email of today requesting an update to the status of the Convention and its amendments, for which the United Kingdom is depositary.

I confirm the position since last year's update is unchanged.

The latest status list for the Convention is available on our website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/convention-on-future-multilateral-co-operation-in-north-east-atlantic-fisheries-london-18111980>

I have reproduced the details for the amendments in the attached Annex.

Yours sincerely,

Kulwant

Kulwant Dulai  
Treaty Information Manager







# 8. Report of ICES

Lotte Worsøe Clausen

Head of Advice Department

[www.ices.dk](http://www.ices.dk)



Science for sustainable seas





# ICES advisory area

- National waters
- International waters
- Working with NAFO, OSPAR, HELCOM, GFCM, NAMMCO, EIFAAC in expert groups



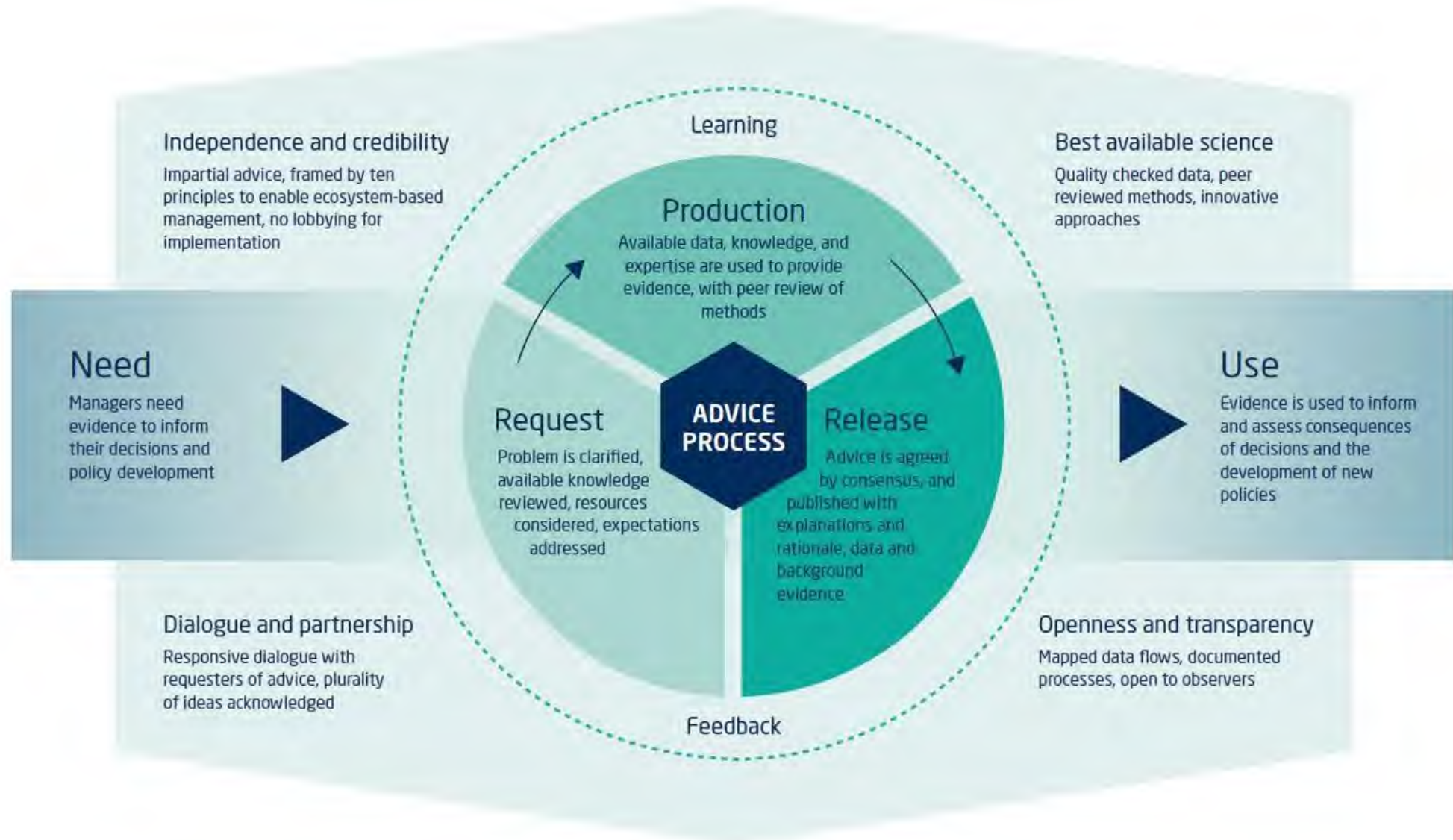
## Key requesters of advice

ACOM/Advice has a strong, mutually appreciative working relation with all requesters based on openness and trust.

And we're adding MoUs.



# Production of ICES advice



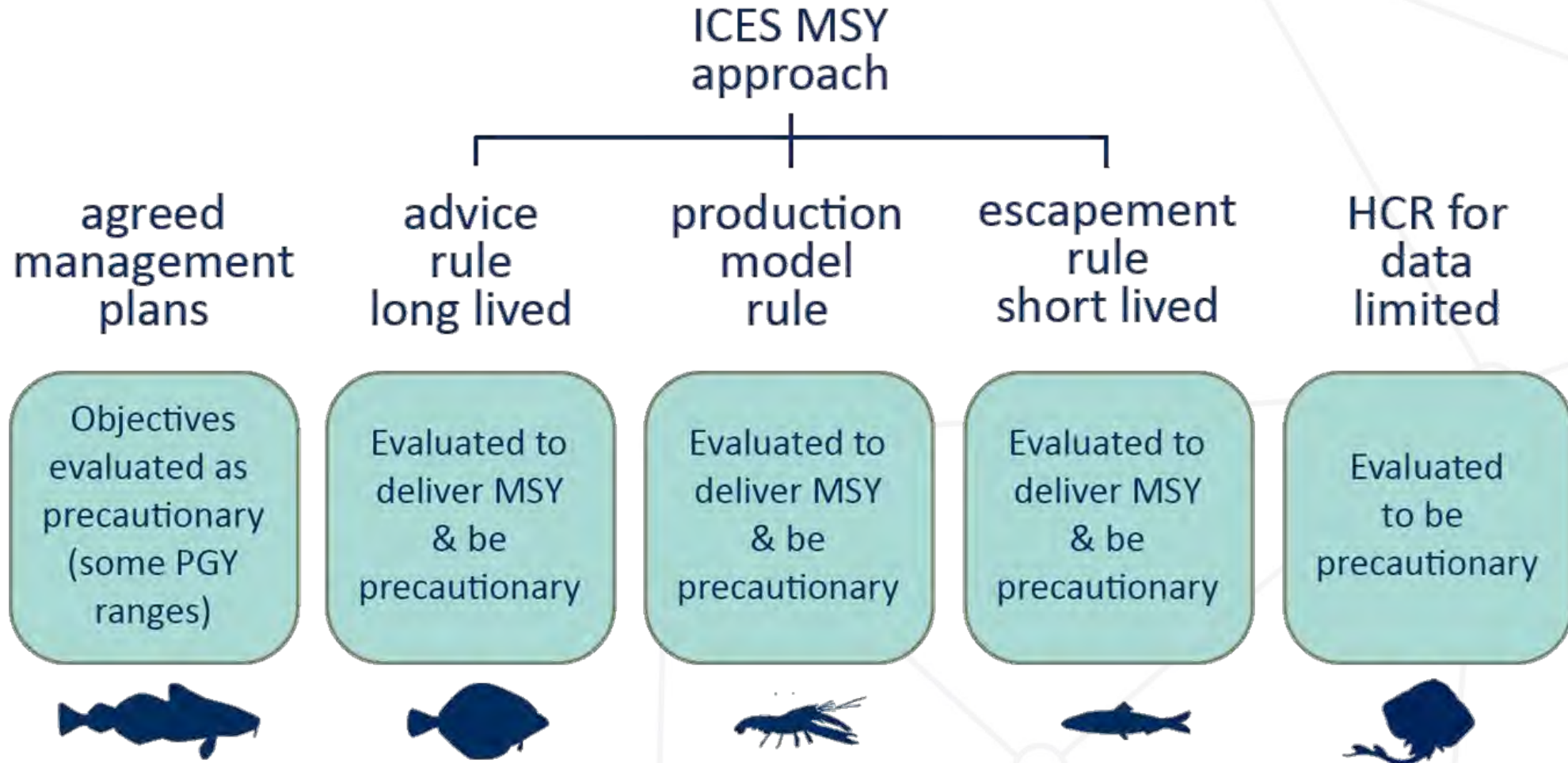
# 10 Principles for ICES advice

Recently published:

- Stakeholders engagement strategy
- Guidelines on request formulation



# ICES approach to fisheries advice



@DickeyCollas

- 280 stocks ≈ 8 million tonnes annual catch

- 90% of fisheries catches in Northeast Atlantic & Baltic Sea

# ICES Advice to NEAFC delivered in 2023

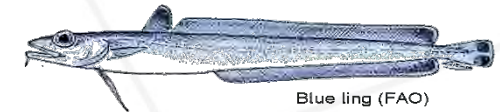


## Recurrent advice:

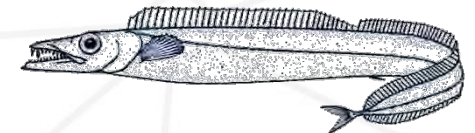
6 Mar	Aquaculture Overviews
20 Apr	Ecosystem Overviews
9 Jun	Deep-water fish stocks
9 Jun	Arctic and North-Western fish stocks
9 Jun	Icelandic deep-water fish stocks
29 Sep	Widely distributed stocks
4 Oct	Vulnerable Marine Habitats
4 Oct	Elasmobranchs
1 Nov	Eel
24 Nov	Faroese stocks
1 Dec	Ecosystem overviews



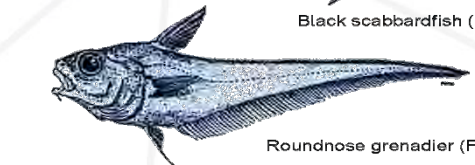
Tusk (FAO)



Blue ling (FAO)



Black scabbardfish (FAO)

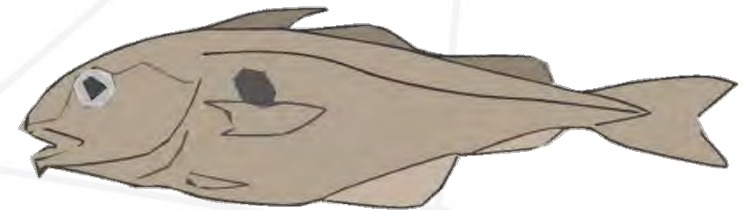


Roundnose grenadier (FAO)

# ICES Advice to NEAFC delivered in 2022

## Special Requests:

- 28 Sep Seabird bycatch in the NEAFC regulatory areas (RAs)
- 2 Oct Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures in relation to long-term biodiversity/ecosystem benefits of NEAFC's closed areas and areas restricted to bottom fishing
- 4 Oct Discarding in the NEAFC regulatory areas (RAs) (interim - presented at PECMAS)





# Data & data management

- TAF (transparent assessment framework) – focus on workshops and critical features in workplan, increased uptake in the community.
- ICES Quality Policy – outlines the quality policy and the ICES Quality Management System linked to the 10 Advice Principles.
- Data Preservation Plan – details how ICES handles the long-term preservation of data to fulfil the goals set out in the ICES Strategic Plan and the Advice Plan. Applies to data received by, processed at, or outputted from ICES data management and publication systems.

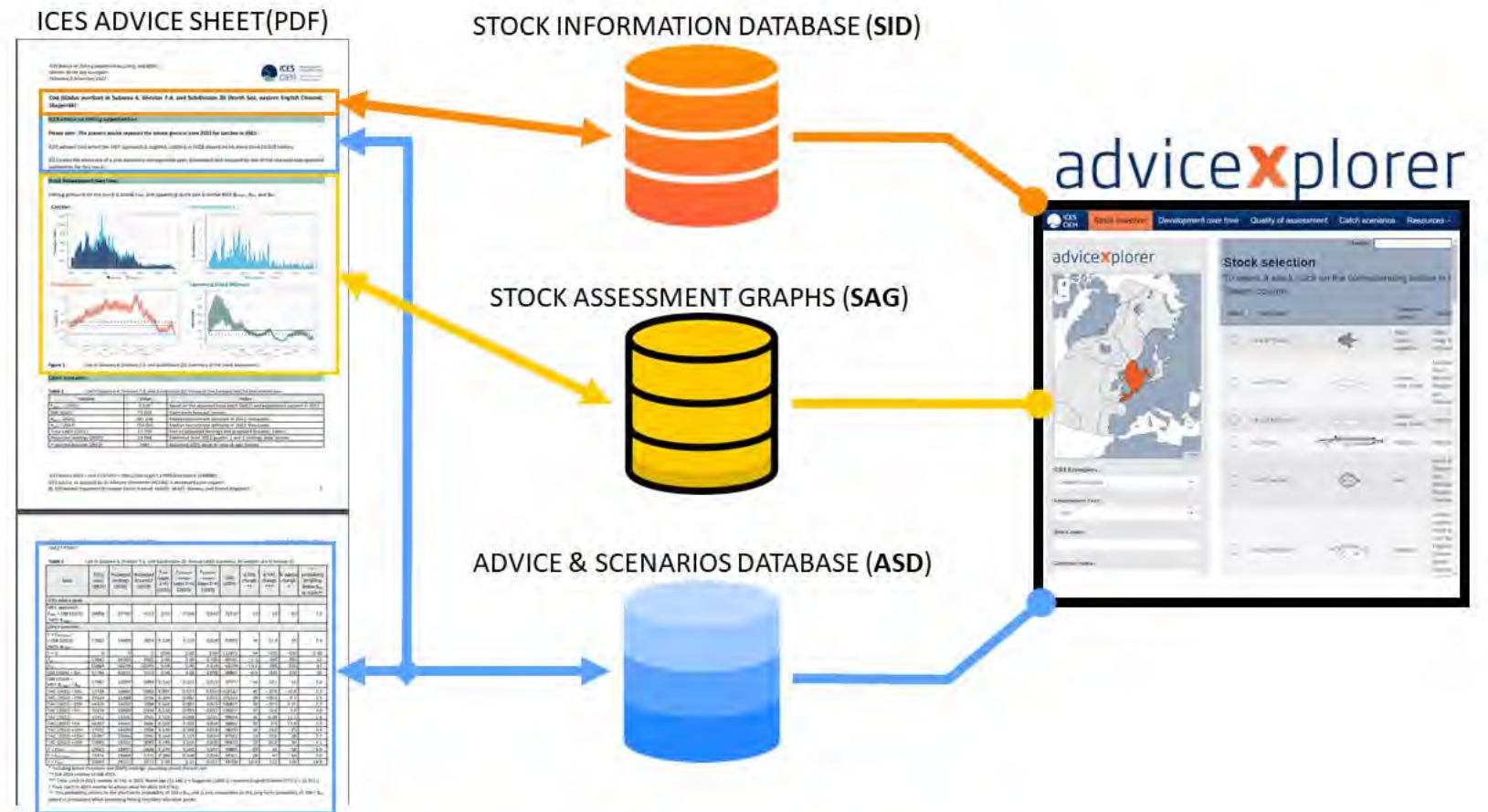


[ICES Quality Policy \(figshare.com\)](#); [Data Preservation Plan \(DPP\) \(figshare.com\)](#)



# Visualisation of advice

- AdviceXplorer – an online tool for viewing advice. The ICES Online Advice Shiny app displays data collected from advice databases and the ICES spatial facility.



# Impact of suspension of experts from Russian Federation

- In 2023 experts from Russian Federation were suspended from participating in ICES
- ICES has not requested data from Russia since they were suspended
- In advance of WGWIDE 2023 Russian scientists provided Norwegian scientists with catch information from 2022 for BW, mackerel and herring
  - The data was provided to Norway with the understanding that it could be used by WGWIDE in the assessments of these stocks
  - Russian survey data (NSSH assessment) was not available for 2022
- Impact of the missing data on the assessments of **mackerel, herring & blue whiting** is not considered to be significant



# Ecosystem Approach

## NEAFC & ICES MoU

The advice shall be based on an **ecosystem approach**. This will be implemented incrementally so that any information on the interactions between fisheries, the fish stocks and the marine ecosystem is considered and incorporated in the advice as it becomes available; specifically, taking ecosystem and environmental considerations into account when providing the recurring advice mentioned above, ICES will develop a process to incorporate the following advice into overviews:

- a) Assess the extent to which fishing disturbs the marine ecosystems and, where reference levels have been established, compare the impact to the reference level chosen.
- b) Provide any new information regarding the impact of fisheries on other components of the ecosystem including small cetaceans and other marine mammals, sea birds and sensitive habitats.
- c) Inform NEAFC of any notable impact of other factors on and imbalances in ecosystem structure that may prejudice the stocks of commercially valuable species and its long term exploitation;
- d) Propose reference points as guidance for management purposes in an ecosystem context.

ICES will in addition give warnings of any serious threats from fishing activities alone or in conjunction with any other relevant activity to local ecosystems or species as soon as ICES is aware of such threats.

# Ecosystem based management

CBD & FAO principles discussed & listed in <https://doi.org/10.1111/jfb.15168>

Received: 2 July 2021 | Accepted: 14 July 2022

DOI: 10.1111/jfb.15168

OPINION PIECE

JOURNAL OF **FISH BIOLOGY** 

## Exploring ecosystem-based management in the North Atlantic

Mark Dickey-Collas<sup>1,2</sup>  | Jason S. Link<sup>3</sup>  | Paul Snelgrove<sup>4</sup>  |  
J. Murray Roberts<sup>5</sup>  | M. Robin Anderson<sup>6</sup>  | Ellen Kenchington<sup>7</sup>  |  
Alida Bundy<sup>7</sup>  | Margaret M. (Peg) Brady<sup>8</sup>  | Rebecca L. Shuford<sup>8</sup> |  
Howard Townsend<sup>9</sup> | Anna Rindorf<sup>2</sup>  | Murray A. Rudd<sup>10</sup>  | David Johnson<sup>11</sup> |  
Ellen Johannesen<sup>1</sup> 

# Ecosystem based management

Need higher order objectives & operational objectives

Examples of higher order objectives



Restore seabed habitats



Provide sustainable energy



Build sustainable fishing communities



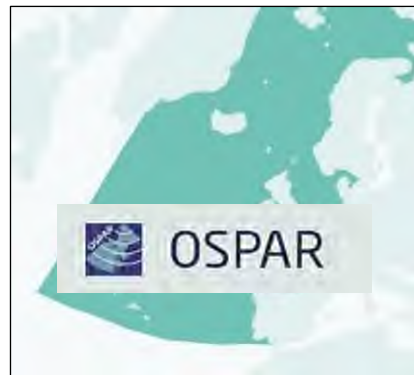
Maintain good governance



## OSPAR vision

*“a clean, healthy & biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably & resilient to climate change & ocean acidification.”*

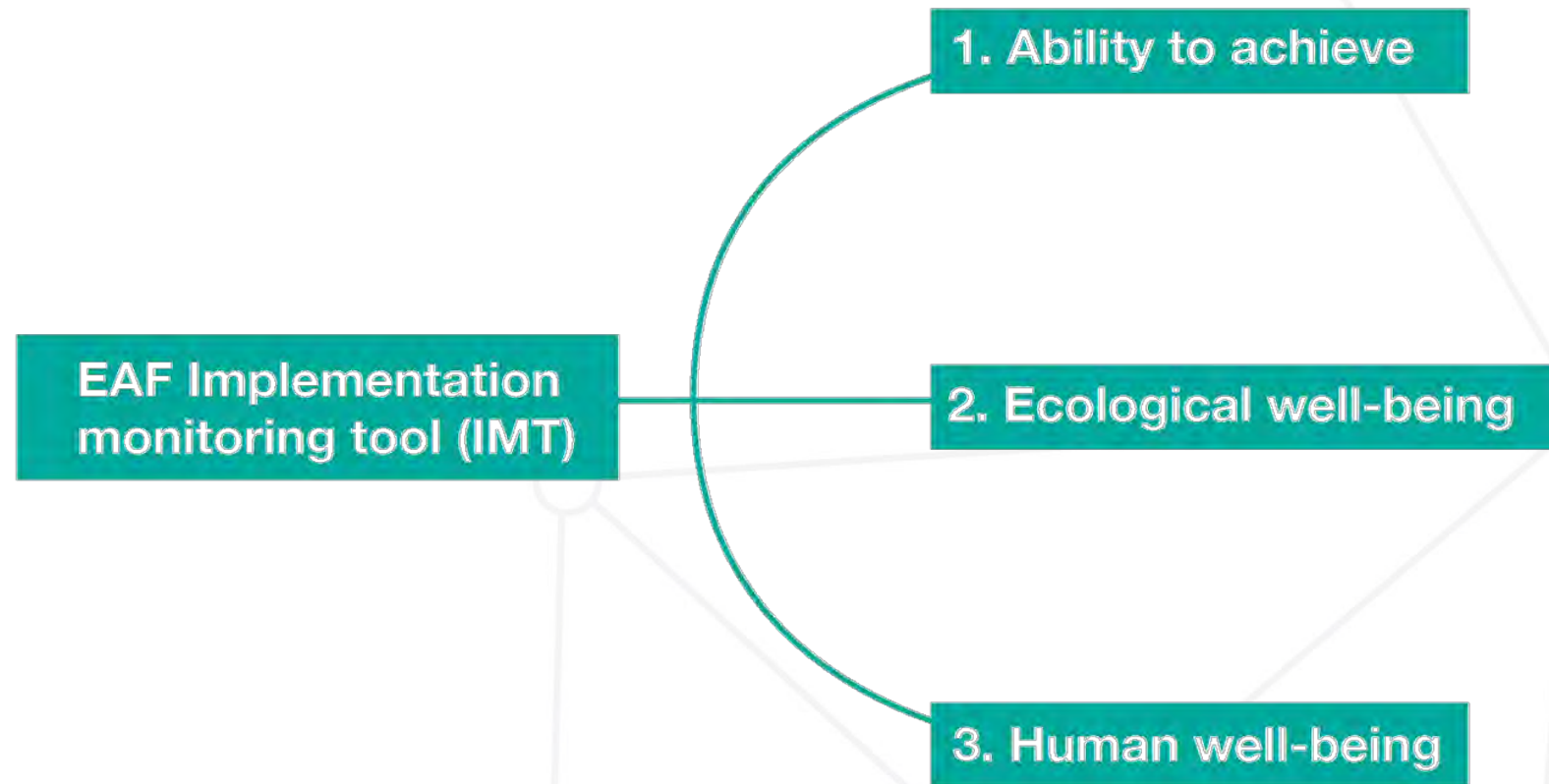
# Ecosystem based management



EBM objective/ defined	Social –economic objectives	Stakeholder engagement
Commitment, objectives not defined	No - 2006, 2014 reviews of NEAFC mentioned this	Parties consult
Commitment, objectives in <a href="#">NEAES 2030</a>	No	OSPAR & Parties consult



# How to measure progress and plan EAFM progress

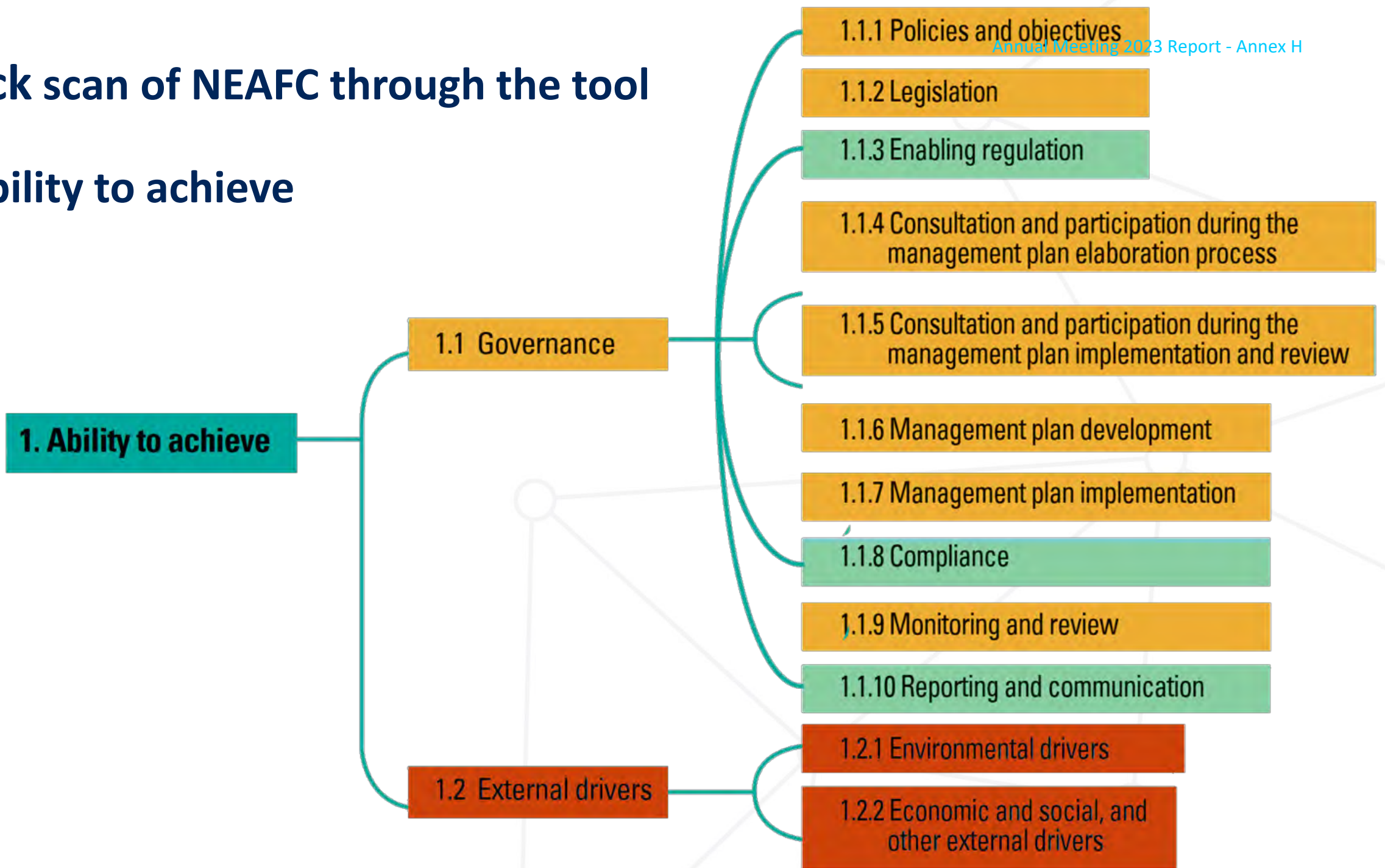


FAO EAF implementation monitoring tool <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3669en>

Note tool also being used by Horizon project SEAwisE <https://seawiseproject.org/>

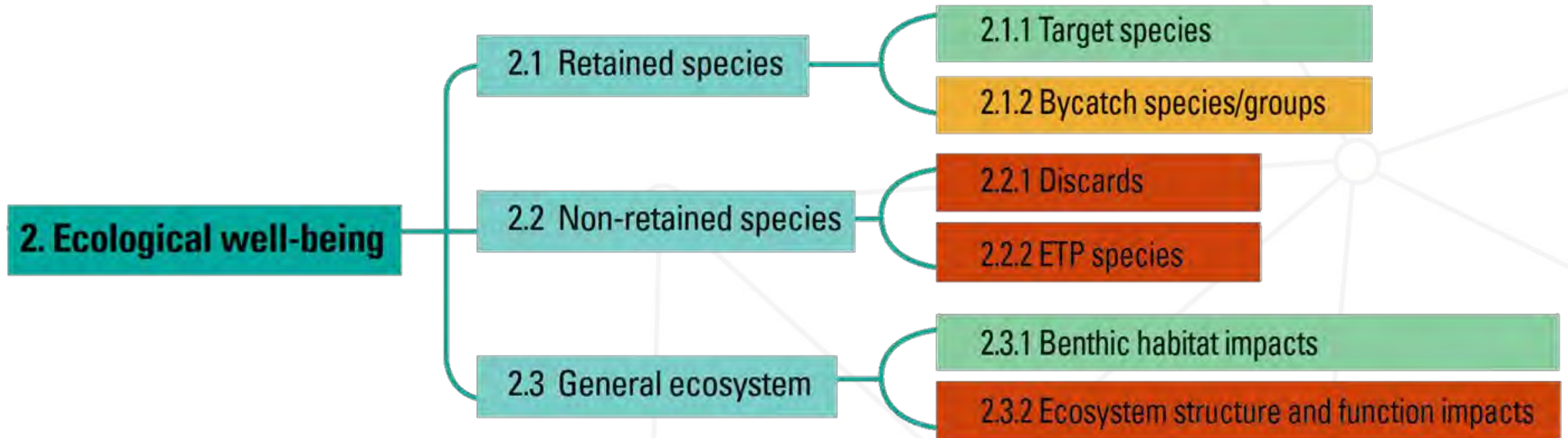
# Quick scan of NEAFC through the tool

## 1. Ability to achieve





## 2. Ecological well-being



### 3. Human well-being

Almost all of the elements under human well-being are outside the responsibilities of NEAFC, namely objectives on livelihood, food & nutrition security, health & safety, & gender & equity.

Contracting parties individually manage to their objectives (implicit & explicit) & thus take responsibility for implementation.



# Operational ecosystem-based fisheries management – current outputs from ICES

## 1 Ability to achieve

Advice framework & principles  
Regionalisation  
Data policy & QA  
TAF & RDBES  
Stakeholder engagement strategy



## 2 Ecological well-being

VMEs & EBSAs  
Trawling on seabed  
Bycatch PETS  
Escapement rules  
Conservation advice  
Bycatch relevance  
Ecosystem OVs



## 3 Services

MSY via mixed fisheries, variability of ecosystem, pretty good yields.  
Trade-off analysis  
Ecosystem reference points  
Data limited methods  
Innovative fishing gears  
Fishery OVs



# Broader challenges

## Tools & solutions

14. Government action
15. Business action
16. Citizens action
17. Biotech risks
18. Reduce cost: reform harmful incentive
19. Increase financial resources
20. Increase other resources
21. Information
22. Engagement
23. Women & girls

## People's needs

9. Species (hunting)
10. Ecosystems (fishing, aquaculture)
11. Other contributions
12. Urban
13. Access and benefit sharing

## 2030 targets

## Reducing threats

1. Sea use plan & retain wild spaces
2. Restore degraded areas
3. Protect & conserve (30x30)
4. Species
5. Harvest & trade are sustainable & legal
6. Invasive alien species
7. Pollution
8. Climate: impact on nature

# Global biodiversity framework



ICES welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with NEAFC to progress the implementation of the ecosystem approach in the North Atlantic.

# Thank you



## Request to ICES for Scientific Advice for 2024

### 1 Background

#### 1.1 Requirements in the amended Convention

Reference is made to the Memorandum of Understanding of 2019 between NEAFC and ICES.

According to the 2006 amendment of the NEAFC Convention, the objective of the Convention is to ensure the long-term conservation and optimum utilisation of the fishery resources in the Convention Area, providing sustainable, environmental and social benefits.<sup>1</sup>

When making recommendations for management measures the NEAFC Commission shall

- a) ensure that such recommendations are based on the best scientific evidence available;
- b) apply the precautionary approach;
- c) take due account of the impact of fisheries on other species and marine ecosystems, and in doing so adopt, where necessary, conservation and management measures that address the need to minimise harmful impacts on living marine resources and marine ecosystems; and
- d) take due account of the need to conserve marine biological diversity.

The Commission shall provide a forum for consultation and exchange of information on the state of the fishery resources in the Convention Area and on the management policies, including examination of the overall effects of such policies on the fishery resources and, as appropriate, other living marine resources and marine ecosystems.

The ecosystem approach has been reviewed regularly by the NEAFC Commission. There is general agreement that the way forward is incrementally adding elements that integrate environmental concerns in the fisheries measures.

#### 1.2 International trends

The UNFSA *UN Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks* states maximum sustainable yield has developed into a limit reference point for fishing mortality in well managed fish stocks rather than a target. The “Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development”,<sup>2</sup> Johannesburg 2002, agreed<sup>3</sup> that, to achieve sustainable fisheries, stocks should be maintained or restored to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield and aim to achieve these goals for depleted stocks on an urgent basis and where possible not later than 2015.

#### 1.3 Scientific basis for management measures for fisheries

UNFSA is prescriptive with respect to determining stocks status. Annex II of the UNFSA stresses the use of precautionary reference points. Two types of precautionary reference points should be used: conservation, or limit, reference points and management, or target, reference points. Limit reference points set boundaries which are intended to constrain harvesting

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<sup>1</sup> Article 2 of the 2006 amendment to the Convention

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD\\_POI\\_PD/English/WSSD\\_PlanImpl.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/WSSD_PlanImpl.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 31. To achieve sustainable fisheries, the following actions are required at all levels:

- (a) Maintain or restore stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield with the aim of achieving these goals for depleted stocks on an urgent basis and where possible not later than 2015;

within safe biological limits within which the stocks can produce maximum sustainable yield. Target reference points are intended to meet management objectives.

The ecosystem approach and, in general, the impact of fisheries on species other than target species and habitats is expected to be added and integrated into the measures already in place in the years to come. This involves area management for which NEAFC seeks specific advice.

## **2 Specification of requests**

### **2.1 Standard recurring advice**

NEAFC requests ICES to provide advice on the status of fish stocks in the NEAFC Convention Area in accordance with the MoU between ICES and NEAFC as laid out in Annex 1 and 2.

**NEAFC requests that ICES submit all the recurring advice no later than 1<sup>st</sup> October.**

### **Status of the ecosystem in a portion of the high seas of the central Arctic Ocean**

NEAFC requests ICES to provide at suitable intervals information on and assessments of the status of the marine ecosystem in the portion of FAO Statistical area 27 located within the Arctic Ocean (ICES divisions 1.b, 2.b.2 and 14.a), which shall be coordinated with scientific activities under the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean.

### **2.2 Non-recurring advice**

#### **Ecosystem approach to fisheries management**

For given higher-level biodiversity and ecosystem objectives<sup>4</sup> describe the available approaches to define related operational objectives and to monitor and assess progress towards meeting these operational objectives.

At least three approaches (options) are to be considered, ranging from a risk assessment approach suitable for application in data-limited circumstances through to an approach reliant on the collection and processing of a wide range of data on ecosystem structure and function.

For each option, describe the following elements:

- a) the approach,
- b) the range and scope of operational objectives that could be identified,
- c) how targets, limits and other reference points would be defined,
- d) the associated monitoring and assessment requirements, and the extent to which they are met by available data,
- e) timelines and resources for development of the approach (e.g. provision of technical guideline),
- f) timelines and resources for implementation of the approach,
- g) the maturity of science underpinning the approach,
- h) whether there are applications of the approach in other jurisdictions,
- i) assumptions and caveats,

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<sup>4</sup> NEAFC Convention <https://www.neafc.org/system/files/Text-of-NEAFC-Convention-04.pdf>



- j) gaps in scope in relation to higher-level objectives,
- k) consequences of uncertainty,
- l) the extent to which progress towards objectives will be determined by fisheries management actions,
- m) the extent to which the approach contributes to implementation of an ecosystem approach<sup>5</sup>,
- n) comparative analysis of the suggested approaches with the description of benefits and drawbacks of each.

### **Advice on vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area**

The objective of the NEAFC Recommendation 19:2014 (as amended) on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area is to ensure the implementation by NEAFC of effective measures to prevent significant adverse impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems known to occur or likely to occur in the NEAFC Regulatory Area based on the best available scientific information provided or endorsed by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

According to Article 10, first paragraph, of the Rec 19:2014 the Commission shall every five years from the date of the Recommendation's entering into force<sup>6</sup> examine the effectiveness of the Recommendation in protecting VMEs from significant adverse impacts. In addition, this review process shall be supplemented by modifications required as a result of new scientific advice.

ICES is requested to contribute with scientific information regarding the effectiveness of the Recommendation in protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area from significant adverse impacts.

ToR for this request will be agreed by correspondence between NEAFC and ICES during 2023.

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<sup>5</sup> FAO EAF implementation monitoring tool <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3669en>

<sup>6</sup> Recommendation 19:2014 entered into force 2014-09-11

**Item 13 Report of WG Future of NEAFC (FDN)**

**Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures (OECM)**

**Proposal adopted by the Annual Meeting**

AM 2023-34 Rev 1 informs the Annual Meeting on the progress on the development of OECM templates for potential NEAFC OECM recognition.

The template for the closed areas is now developed to a stage where it is clear that the closed areas meet the CBD OECM criteria. The template included in AM 2023-34 Rev 1 now includes the latest text from the European Union which is in accordance with the arrangements agreed at PECMAS 2.

**It is thus proposed that NEAFC agrees to report the closed areas as OECMs to the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD. The Secretariat shall send the report, when the narrative that is under development in cooperation with OSPAR, and referred to in the template is finished.**

The template for the restricted areas has also been advanced to a stage where NEAFC can consider reporting the parts of the restricted areas shallower than 1400 metres as OECMs. According to the ICES advice the restricted areas contain biodiversity attributes as articulated in the guidance of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and that they achieve *in situ* biodiversity/ecosystem benefits where no bottom fishing activities occur. The ICES advice does not specify this with any higher resolution than each of the restricted areas themselves. The work done during 2023 has focused on the parts of the restricted areas that are shallower than 1400 metres. It would improve the information in the template, and thus better inform decision-making on appropriate recognition of OECMs, if ICES were asked to specify if the advice on biodiversity attributes and *in situ* biodiversity/ecosystem benefits applies to the areas shallower than 1400 metres as specified in the polygons included in the template for the restricted areas presented in AM 2023-34 Rev 1. Such a request will imply that ICES presents a table listing the polygons and advising whether the biodiversity attributes and *in situ* biodiversity/ecosystem benefits of these measures apply, in the same way as is done for each of the closed areas in the OECM advice that has already been received.

ICES will verify whether each of the polygons given in the table meet OECM criteria as defined in the CBD guidance used in previous ICES advice.

**It is thus proposed that NEAFC agrees to report the restricted areas shallower than 1400 metres as OECMs to the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD, if ICES confirms that that individual area identified in AM 23-34 Rev 1 achieves long-term *in situ* biodiversity/ecosystem benefits as long as no bottom fishing activities occur, using guidance articulated by the CBD. The Secretariat is mandated to forward the advice from ICES to the Contracting Parties without delay once it has been received. PECMAS shall then discuss how to proceed, including evaluating the option of the Contracting Parties proceeding by written procedure. ICES is invited to, if possible, present the advice so that both the closed areas and the restricted ones can be reported at the same time.**

**The following request to ICES is proposed:**

In its response to the NEAFC request on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures in relation to long-term biodiversity/ecosystem benefits of NEAFC's closed areas and areas restricted to bottom fishing, ICES advises *inter alia* the following:

*ICES advises that the restricted bottom fishing areas in NEAFC RAs achieve in situ biodiversity/ecosystem benefits as long as no bottom fishing activities occur. NEAFC RA 1, RA 2, and RA 3 contain biodiversity attributes as articulated in the CBD guidance (CBD, 2018, Annex III, Section B). The restricted bottom fishing areas can potentially be opened to exploratory fishing. As such any bottom fishing in these areas may preclude them from satisfying sustained governance for long-term biodiversity benefits.*

ICES is requested to advise on whether this advice applies to each of the areas identified in AM 23-34 Rev 1, Annex 2, figure 2, the lilac polygons.

**NOTIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED AT THE FORTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING  
OF NEAFC, 14-17 NOVEMBER 2023**

I am writing to formally notify you, in accordance with Article 11 of the Convention, of the recommendations adopted at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of NEAFC held 14-17 November 2023.

These recommendations are:

- Recommendation 1: Recommendation on management measures for the protection of the shallow pelagic redfish stock and the deep pelagic redfish stock in the Irminger Sea and adjacent waters in 2024
- Recommendation 2: Recommendation on the management of *Sebastes mentella* in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (ICES Sub-Areas 1 and 2) in 2024
- Recommendation 3: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Norwegian Spring-Spawning (Atlanto-Scandian) Herring in the NEAFC Regulatory Area for 2024
- Recommendation 4: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Mackerel in the NEAFC Regulatory Area for 2024
- Recommendation 5: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Rockall Haddock in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (ICES 6b) for 2024
- Recommendation 6: Recommendation on Regulatory Measures for the Protection of Blue Ling in the NEAFC Regulatory Area (ICES Division XIV) from 2024 to 2027
- Recommendation 7: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Basking Shark (*Cetorhinus maximus*) in the NEAFC Regulatory Area from 2024 to 2027
- Recommendation 8: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measure for Deep Sea Chimaeras in the NEAFC Regulatory Area from 2024 to 2027
- Recommendation 9: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Deep Sea Sharks in the NEAFC Regulatory Area from 2024 to 2027
- Recommendation 10: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Deep Sea Rays (Rajiformes) in the NEAFC Regulatory Area from 2024 to 2027
- Recommendation 11: Recommendation on Conservation and Management Measures for Porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*) in the NEAFC Regulatory Area in 2024
- Recommendation 12 : Recommendation on amending Recommendation 19:2014 on area management measures for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area, as amended
- Recommendation 13 : Proposal for a technical correction of Recommendation 19:2014 on area Management measures for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems in the NEAFC Regulatory Area, as amended
- Recommendation 14: Recommendation to amend Article 13 of the Scheme of Control and Enforcement – Communication of Transshipment and Port of Landing

- Recommendation 15: Recommendation to amend Article 14 of the NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement
- Recommendation 16: Recommendation to amend Article 18 of the NEAFC Scheme of Control and Enforcement
- Recommendation 17: Recommendation to amend Article 28 of the NEAFC Scheme
- Recommendation 18: Recommendation to amend Article 34b of the NEAFC Scheme
- Recommendation 19: Recommendation to Amend Annex I of the NEAFC Scheme
- Recommendation 20: Recommendation on Updating Annex VIII 4) of the Transition Scheme
- Recommendation 21: Recommendation to Increase the NAF Field Character Limit of the transition scheme
- Recommendation 22: Recommendation to include the information of receiving vessels in the prior notification forms Annex XVA (PSC1) and (PSC2)
- Recommendation 23: Recommendation to amend Recommendation 02:2011 (Monthly Statistics)
- Recommendation 24: Recommendation on amending Recommendation 2:2011, to add additional deep-sea Chimaera species to Annex I – Stock Units in Recommendation 2:2011 Monthly Statistics (as amended by Recommendations 17:2021: 23:2020: 13:2016, 17:2015, 14:2013), and to amend the scientific name and FAO code for Iceland catshark
- Recommendation 25: Recommendation pursuant to Article 2 (Scope) and Article 7.2 (Information Classification) of Recommendation 11:2013 and to Recommendation 08:2014
- Recommendation 26: Recommendation pursuant to Article 2 (Scope) and Article 11 (Access Control) of Recommendation 11:2013 and to Recommendation 08:2014

**Statement of the Russian Federation on the issue of contribution to the budget of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)**

Madam President, Mr. Campbell, Heads of Delegations,

As Head of the delegation of the Russian Federation, let me introduce the Statement on the issue of contribution to the budget of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC).

The most important obligation of the members of an international organization is their obligation to contribute the repayment of its expenses and to pay annual contributions to the budget of the organization.

Regretfully, we have to declare that currently the contribution of the Russian Federation to the Commission has not been received, despite the information about the transfer of funds.

The Russian Federation draws attention of the Contracting Parties to the fact that the delay in receiving the funds occurred due to circumstances beyond the control of our country. All possible ways and steps for payment have been worked out jointly with the NEAFC Secretariat.

The Russian Federation has been billed for the annual contribution to NEAFC for 2022 the amount of 328 thousand pounds and for 2023 the amount of 333 thousand. In connection with the sanctions imposed on the banking sector of the Russian Federation and restrictions on international payments, together with the NEAFC Secretariat we have applied for a license from the UK Financial Sanctions Authority (OFSI) to transfer funds to the NEAFC account. It was in October 14, 2022. In early March 2023 the Secretariat received a response from the UK Ministry of Finance on the agreement to license operations on annual contributions of the Russian Federation to NEAFC for 2022 and 2023. Later, on May 16, 2023 the license itself was issued, allowing the Barclays bank in which NEAFC is serviced to accept a transaction from Gazprombank. On June 13, 2023 we have received a letter from D. Campbell stating that the NEAFC Secretariat is still awaiting confirmation from its bank about the possibility of receiving

payment from the Russian Federation along the route indicated in the license. Only on July 19, 2023 the approval from the Barclays bank was received confirming that they were ready to receive contributions from the Russian Federation. On August 21, 2023 an application was sent to NEAFC for amendments to the license for currency exchange from pounds to euros. On September 29, 2023 an amended license of the Ministry of Finance of the United Kingdom was received with changes in the payment details and currency. On October 11, 2023 the payment was made to the account of a correspondent bank in Luxembourg. Last Friday the money left Luxembourg for the Barclays bank in Frankfurt on Main.

So you can see from my brief report that Russia does not refuse to pay out.

We have made the payment, but all these obstacles occurred due to circumstances beyond its control.

Please note that, despite all the difficulties, Russia has transferred funds to the NEAFC budget for the year 2022 and their receipt is expected in days.

Formally, in accordance with paragraph 8 of Article 17 of the NEAFC Convention, a Contracting Party that has not paid its contribution within two years by the date determined by the Commission does not have the right to submit votes and objections in accordance with the provisions of this Convention until it fulfills its obligations, *unless at the request of the interested Contracting Party the Commission will not decide otherwise.*

In this regard, the Russian Federation requests the Commission not to restrict its rights. We would especially like to note that the Russian Federation is an original member of the NEAFC and one of the founding States of this organization. For all the years of our membership, there have been no cases of delayed payments of contributions to the NEAFC budget. Moreover, Russia has always acted as a responsible State that strictly followed the goal of the NEAFC Convention, which is to promote the conservation and optimum utilization of the fishery resources in this part of the World Ocean.

I am here today to explain you the situation and in accordance with paragraph 8 of Article 17 of the NEAFC Convention kindly request you to vote in favor of a different decision that does not restrict out rights.

Hope for your deep understanding, thank you.



*A resolution on climate change considerations for the attention of the NEAFC Permanent Committee on Management and Science*

ACKNOWLEDGING that climate change poses both short and long-term significant challenges for Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), including the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), and given the widespread and lasting effects of climate change on the ocean environment and ecosystems, it also affects the individuals and communities that depend upon the fisheries and other resources within the Convention Area;

RECOGNISING international initiatives to address climate change and its effects, including through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and the Glasgow Climate Pact;

RECALLING that the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identified take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13) and the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources (SDG 14) as two of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as part of a highly inter-connected agenda;

CONSCIOUS of the stark findings of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), including the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC) and the Sixth Assessment Report (AR6);

AWARE that, in September 2022, at the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Committee on Fisheries (COFI) highlighted the need for developing guidance on climate resilient fisheries management including a process to facilitate coordination and cooperation among Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)/ Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs);

RECOGNISING the scientific work of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) in relation to the impacts of climate change, including through the Workshop on pathways to climate-aware advice (WKCLIMAD);

COMMITTED to developing effective management and other strategies and approaches to adapt to changing conditions and improve the resilience of NEAFC relevant stocks, fisheries, and related ecosystems, as well as of fishing communities, in the face of climate change;

MINDFUL of the need to apply the precautionary approach to fisheries management to ensure conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in the Convention Area.

Therefore, NEAFC requests PECMAS to consider the below elements for discussion in its standing agenda item on climate change in PECMAS:

1. Discuss, based on the best available scientific advice from ICES, the potential impacts of climate change on all relevant NEAFC stocks, non-target species and species belonging to

the same ecosystem or associated with or dependent upon all relevant stocks, as well as any related socio-economic or other impacts on the fisheries.

2. Discuss how best integrate climate change science in the NEAFC decision-making processes as to better mitigate, prepare for and respond to climate change impacts including through adaptation measures that can ensure ecosystem resilience as appropriate as advised by ICES.
3. Consider the best available scientific information and advice available from ICES on the potential impacts of climate change on all relevant NEAFC stocks, species, and ecosystems, and related impacts on fisheries.
4. Consider if there are any gaps in that information, to be able to advise the Commission on the impacts of climate change on all relevant NEAFC stocks and marine ecosystems, and how the Commission can address those impacts.
5. Discuss work undertaken by other international organisations, such as global best practice and potential overlap with the work of NEAFC, including under the framework of the OSPAR-NEAFC collective arrangement.
6. To share information and best-practices on climate change initiatives relevant to the fisheries sector, including, as appropriate, domestic efforts undertaken by Contracting Parties to encourage a lower carbon footprint within their NEAFC fisheries as well promote the use of more efficient fishing gears and measures to reduce the carbon footprint.
7. Consider options to reduce the environmental impacts of NEAFC meetings and those of its subsidiary bodies, including encouraging hybrid participation where possible.





**PRESS RELEASE FROM THE 2023 ANNUAL MEETING OF  
THE NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION**

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) was held in London from 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

NEAFC is the intergovernmental organisation responsible for fisheries management in international waters in the North-East Atlantic. Its Contracting Parties are Denmark (in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom.

In opening the meeting, the President, Janet Skarðsá, welcomed participants to London after another somewhat difficult year, in light of the suspension of several NEAFC meetings in the face of the international situation. She noted the major steps forward in global oceans governance in the last year, including the new Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the conclusion of the negotiations on an instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. These developments had included the active participation of NEAFC Contracting Parties.

While these developments did not fundamentally change NEAFC's management of fisheries to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes, nevertheless they offer new opportunities for cross-sectoral engagement.

One example is the agreement at the Annual Meeting to finalise proposals for Other Effective Area Based Conservation Management designations that protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, to be reported to the CBD in 2024. These will help deliver global area based marine conservation targets set under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

At the Annual Meeting, NEAFC adopted conservation and management measures for 2024 for a number of fish stocks on the basis of the latest independent scientific advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES). The stocks include herring, mackerel, blue ling and Rockall haddock. While the agreements for the pelagic stocks were not comprehensive, given allocations of the Total Allowable Catch to each Contracting Party had not been set out for 2024, important consultations will continue between the coastal States, including on blue whiting. With a focus on conservation of elasmobranchs, complete bans on fishing of basking shark, porbeagle, deep sea sharks, rays and chimaera were renewed.

NEAFC not only agrees legally binding measures but has a strong capability in monitoring, control and enforcement of these requirements. The Annual Meeting agreed a major step forward in this by setting a launch date of 15th January 2024, for its new modernised electronic reporting system. This follows many years of intense work and provides NEAFC with much needed detailed information on fishing gear and haul by haul fishing activity. The system is combined with a new online interface that helps national inspectors and the NEAFC secretariat instantly see all the data about individual vessels' activity in the high seas. This not only helps with enforcement, but the data also helps NEAFC's scientific advisor to better develop advice on ecosystem-based fisheries management and the protection of biodiversity.

Canada renewed its General Cooperating non-Contracting Party status for the year 2024. Active Cooperating non-Contracting Party status for 2024 was renewed for the Bahamas and for Panama. These States will cooperate with NEAFC and, in some cases, deploy vessels for transshipment operations in the NEAFC Convention Area.

Finally, NEAFC acknowledges that climate change poses very significant challenges to the ocean environment and ecosystems and to regional fisheries management. At this meeting it committed to address the issue in particular through its management and science processes as well as aiming to reduce the environmental impacts of NEAFC meetings.

For further information on NEAFC please see [www.neafc.org](http://www.neafc.org), or contact the Secretary of NEAFC, Darius Campbell, on +44 207 631 0016 or [darius@neafc.org](mailto:darius@neafc.org)

London, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2023