



*for a living planet*<sup>®</sup>

**Annual Meeting of the  
North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC)  
London, 12-16 November 2007**

**Opening Statement**

---

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

WWF is grateful for the opportunity to address this meeting. We wish to highlight a number of priority issues regarding ecosystem conservation and fisheries management, including important links between the regional and global agenda.

To start with, WWF would like to congratulate NEAFC on the new port state regime. We already see positive results in the Barents Sea and we hope this will also deliver results in other places in the coming years. We sincerely hope that NEAFC will promote the scheme in other fora and that Contracting Parties will help make this system global.

On the issue of deep water fisheries management, WWF is still concerned that many species that are currently being exploited in the NEAFC areas are subject to levels of fishing pressure that are unsustainable for the stock. However, the interim prohibition on orange roughy fishing in the regulatory area is a sign that NEAFC is able to adopt measures for the protection of certain deep water species. WWF would like to see this measure extended until appropriate measures to manage the fisheries in a sustainable manner can be put in place. Which is why the burden of proof should lie with the Contracting Parties in providing data to conduct accurate assessments on the status of fishery and stock. In situations where such data is lacking, fishing should not be allowed to continue.

WWF also welcomes the increased level of cooperation and regular consultation between NEAFC and OSPAR, particularly concerning the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VME), including seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold water corals, from the adverse impacts of bottom fishing in the Regulatory Area. WWF seeks to inform this process by providing input and relevant information to both fora. In this context, we would like to refer to our statement at the Extraordinary Meeting of NEAFC in June this year, where we have presented an indicative map of ecosystems vulnerable to deep water fishing in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).

To facilitate the addressing of the existing obligations to conserve the marine environment in the North-East Atlantic, WWF suggests to

- establish a joint NEAFC-OSPAR expert group to coordinate fisheries and conservation measures on the High Seas including respective requests to ICES for scientific advice;

- use the proposed High Seas Marine Protected Area *Mid Atlantic Ridge (MAR) / Charlie Gibbs Fracture Zone*<sup>1</sup> as a pilot case for the integration and complementary application of conservation measures by OSPAR and fisheries measures by NEAFC.

As pointed out at the Extraordinary Meeting, swift implementation of the 2006 UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries is crucial for the protection of VMEs. This was underpinned by a joint NGO letter and call for action to NEAFC Contracting Parties prior to this Annual Meeting. WWF believes that the new spirit of collaboration between regional bodies is an excellent basis to establish a process to ensure that all bottom fisheries in the NEAFC Regulatory Area are conducted in a manner fully consistent with the provisions of the General Assembly resolution by 31 December 2008. However, it should be borne in mind that time is running out towards that deadline. This meeting provides the ultimate opportunity for taking timely and effective action to

- assess the impacts of individual bottom fishing activities on the high seas;
- withdraw or reject authorisation for bottom fisheries that cannot be managed to prevent significant adverse impacts to VMEs;
- close areas to all bottom fishing where VMEs are known or *likely* to occur, unless or until conservation and management measures are in place to prevent such impacts; and
- ensure that bottom fishing vessels move out of an area where VMEs are encountered during the course of fishing operations;
- ensure the earliest possible application of the FAO technical guidelines for the management of deep water high seas bottom fisheries.

We wish to encourage NEAFC to aim at a high level of ambition and commitment when establishing new mechanisms for the implementation of the UNGA Resolution in the entire Regulatory Area. However, this does not mean to postpone action to protect known cold-water coral reefs in specific areas for which scientific evidence has already been provided. On the contrary, it is a matter of credibility to adhere to the ICES advice of June 2007 and extend the existing closures to the use of bottom trawl and static gear (including bottom gillnets and longlines on Hatton Bank and to establish another closure on the Empress of Britain Bank on the Southern Rockall Bank without further delay.

WWF wishes you a successful meeting.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ngo.grida.no/wwfneap/Publication/Submissions/OSPAR2007/WWF\\_MASH07\\_HSMPA\\_MAR\\_Annex.pdf](http://www.ngo.grida.no/wwfneap/Publication/Submissions/OSPAR2007/WWF_MASH07_HSMPA_MAR_Annex.pdf)

# Annex

