



United Nations

Resumed Review Conference on the Agreement Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks

New York, 24 – 28 May 2010

Advancing the Fish Stocks Agreement

Four years after the Fish Stocks Agreement came into force—a turning point in efforts to sustainably manage fisheries in the high seas—countries held in 2006 a Review Conference to assess its effectiveness and propose means to strengthen the implementation of the Agreement.

The Review Conference agreed on a comprehensive set of recommendations to strengthen the implementation of the Agreement. Many of these recommendations have guided States and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs)—the cornerstone of implementation efforts—in improving the management of fishery resources over the last four years.

The resumed Review Conference will be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 24 to 28 May 2010, and participating States will assess the implementation of the recommendations adopted at the Review Conference in 2006. The Secretary-General's report to the resumed Review Conference provides information on measures taken by States and RFMOs to implement those recommendations and identifies areas where progress has been made in the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, and areas where improved regulation is needed.

Steps forward

Since the Review Conference, 20 additional States have become parties to the Agreement. The increased participation in the Agreement has contributed to enhancing the legal regime for the conservation and management of the world's fisheries for straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks.

Gaps in the management of high seas fisheries are being filled. New RFMOs have been set up in the South Pacific and South Indian Ocean. Negotiations for a new body in the North Pacific are also underway. In addition, a number of RFMOs have strengthened their mandates and have undertaken performance reviews to improve their functions in the management of high seas fisheries.

States and RFMOs are increasingly embracing modern fisheries management tools, such as the precautionary and ecosystem approaches. For example, FAO's "International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas", adopted in 2008, includes tools for protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain.

Progress has also been made through monitoring and enforcement to ensure compliance with international conservation and management measures. In 2009, countries agreed on the FAO "Port State Measures Agreement", a new treaty that aims to close fishing ports to vessels involved in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Other measures include increased monitoring of fishing

vessels through satellite-based vessel monitoring systems, sharing of so-called “black lists” of vessels suspected of engaging in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and increased use of market-related measures to ensure that only legally caught fish enter the market.

FAO is undertaking important work to address issues at the heart of fisheries compliance, namely the failure of flag States to ensure that vessels flying their flag comply with applicable measures. This work includes the assessment of flag State performance and the development of a global record of fishing vessels.

Steps have also been taken to encourage more developing States to join the Agreement and to join RFMOs.

The need for improved regulation

There is still much room for improvement in the conservation and management of high seas fisheries, and the Secretary-General’s report to the resumed Review Conference identifies a number of areas where progress is required. In particular, it points to the need to eliminate harmful subsidies to the fishing industry, improve data collection and reporting, reduce by-catch and discards and address the issue of lost and abandoned fishing gear.

Given the key role of RFMOs, the Secretary-General’s report recommends concrete steps that the fisheries organizations must take to follow up on the recommendations from their performance reviews. Critical issues include improvements in decision-making processes, the development of transparent criteria for the allocation of catch among members, and the determination of the nature and extent of participatory rights for new members.

Additional measures identified in the report call for increased efforts by States to control the fishing activities of their nationals and fishing vessels. This is essential to preserve the integrity of RFMOs and to prevent overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as other unsustainable fishing practices. The development of regional guidelines for flag States to evaluate their sanctions systems is another way to secure compliance and deter violations.

In order to encourage developing countries to join the Agreement, there is a need for increased levels of financial and technical assistance to build the capacity of developing countries to implement the Agreement. Areas of need include the ability of these countries to conserve and manage straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks, develop their own fisheries for such stocks, and participate in high seas fisheries and in activities of relevant RFMOs. To facilitate these efforts, the Secretary-General has called for additional voluntary contributions by States to the Assistance Fund established under the Agreement.

In discussing these issues, the resumed Review Conference will determine whether the recommendations adopted in 2006 have been implemented, and where necessary, propose new measures to strengthen the implementation of the Fish Stocks Agreement.

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