



**BBNJ IGC4 Agenda item 6: informal informals on Area based Management Tools including Marine Protected Areas**

**Information related to Area Based Management tools (and cross-cutting issues) submitted by the NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC FISHERIES COMMISSION**

Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to provide this information to the fourth session of the IGC on behalf of the North-Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC).

The aim of this note is to highlight NEAFC's ongoing work as an illustration of cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination in the ABNJ by an existing Regional Fisheries Management Organisation. This is in the context of the discussions in the informal informals on Area-based Management Tools including Marine Protected Areas, where NEAFC was mentioned by some delegations, as well as to an extent the discussions on cross cutting issues.

Efforts to conserve and sustainably use living marine resources is the main function of NEAFC and all NEAFC measures are intended to contribute to such efforts. Furthermore, the work of the subsidiary bodies of NEAFC is aimed directly at conserving biological diversity. NEAFC works by applying an ecosystem-based management approach. In the oceans this implies that all organisations involved in regulation/management of human activities in the marine environment are cooperating and coordinating actions under their different legal mandates. NEAFC thus cooperates with other international organisations to this end.

Since 2005 NEAFC has been implementing area-based measures to ensure protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) from any possible significant adverse impacts caused by fishing with bottom gears. The measures currently in force ensure that bottom fisheries are only able to continue in established bottom fishing areas where the best available independent scientific advice has suggested that VMEs do not occur, or are unlikely to occur. Other areas are restricted bottom fishing areas which require exploratory fisheries with an assessment of potential impact on VMEs before allowing any activity, or otherwise closed areas. The areas open to commercial bottom fishing are equivalent to only around 2% of the total NEAFC Regulatory Area.

The IGC may want to be aware that NEAFC's legally binding Scheme of Control and Enforcement is an extensive and effective system of monitoring, control and surveillance measures and compliance and enforcement provisions, including provisions for inspections at sea. This means NEAFC can demonstrate very good compliance with the measures to protect VMEs (see the NEAFC Compliance report: <https://www.neafc.org/compliance> ).

While NEAFC has become involved in considering the effects of fisheries on the other parts of the marine ecosystem and on biodiversity, NEAFC's legal competence remains limited to managing fisheries. The fact that the vulnerable marine ecosystems that NEAFC is making efforts to protect can be affected by human activities other than fishing has led NEAFC to work with other organisations, with complementary legal competences, such as OSPAR, IMO and ISA.

NEAFC and OSPAR have a well-documented cooperation under the collective arrangement: <https://www.neafc.org/other/15790>. The aim of the collective arrangement is to include participation by other bodies; meetings have included observers from the Secretariats of other regional environment and fisheries bodies. While the collective arrangement meetings were suspended due to the COVID pandemic, contacts have continued between the two organisations throughout developments such as OSPAR's 2021 designation of a new High-Seas MPA and NEAFC's consideration of its Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM).

A NEAFC working group on OECM has in 2022 produced draft templates for NEAFC measures. Such work is informed by the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES), our independent science adviser. OSPAR has also included OECM in a 30% MPA target for the OSPAR convention area. Thus, there is a good basis for discussions on the issue at the next collective arrangement meeting, alongside other subjects such as scientific advice from ICES to inform conservation of deep sea sharks rays and chimaeras. NEAFC also cooperates with other regions on such issues, for instance via its MOU with the General Fisheries Council for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

Further information from NEAFC on its pertinent measures and decisions set out against relevant UN General Assembly resolutions is available at: <https://www.neafc.org/other/47327>

As always, NEAFC stands ready to explain further to delegations its approach to cross-sectoral coordination in areas beyond national jurisdiction, in particular on area-based management.