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Report from the NEAFC Annual Meeting, 12-15 November 2024

The meeting started with all the Contracting Parties (CPs) apart from Russia condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For its part, the Russian delegation seemed not to react, other than to note in their opening statement that not holding the NEAFC subsidiary meetings (e.g., the Permanent Committee on Management and Science – PECMAS, and the Permanent Committee on Monitoring and Compliance – PECMAC) during the year because of the other CPs' refusal to sit with Russia for those meetings was hindering the work of NEAFC.

All CPs then provided opening statements. Strengthening Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) in the NEAFC area was deemed a key issue for some CPs, with concerns expressed over IUU fishing and transshipping that appear mostly focused on Russian activity. Several CPs included comments on the declining and concerning status of mackerel and herring, but notably all CPs commented on the need for comprehensive sharing arrangements (CSAs) for the key stocks.

Observers then gave their opening statements, with this reportedly being the NEAFC meeting with the most observers, ever. With NAPA on the back row were Blue, Sinter Ocean, Seas-at-Risk, Pew, European Bureau for Conservation and Development – EBCD, MSC, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition – DSCC and Accountability.Fish. Amongst some non-NAPA issues, all observer statements pointed to the need for CSAs. The need for governance reform, particularly on transparency, was also a theme.

Overall, the meeting felt mixed – bad in that there seems to be resistance to making progress on key issues (unilateral interests, and working with Russia is undoubtedly problematic for other CPs), but good in that there is clearly growing awareness of the pressure from observers to make progress.

Points for NAPA:

1. It was highlighted in several places by the CPs and the NEAFC Chair that the Coastal States discussions, not NEAFC, has competence to agree key management actions (specifically, sharing arrangements and TACs) for the three stocks of NAPA interest.
2. Management of the key stocks was rolled over from last year with no changes, in essence following the Coastal States processes. It was confirmed that TACs would be set to advice, and that each Coastal State was to set its own quota and other management measures.
3. Re: the [NEAFC Convention](#): “Article 18bis The Commission shall make recommendations establishing procedures for the settlement of disputes arising under this Convention” there is no change – Russia maintained its objection to the amendment. As such, it remains not in effect, so there is no formal, disputes resolution process at NEAFC (or Coastal States).
4. The last NEAFC performance review was completed in 2014 and a new one is seen by observers as long overdue and a key opportunity. However, there is no agreed Terms of Reference. This should be discussed at the Working Group on the Future Development of NEAFC (FDN) in January. Rob plans to attend for NAPA as this presents an opportunity to maintain pressure on the CPs, including on the lack of a disputes resolution process.
5. For the first time ever, NEAFC did not agree a compliance report. This was due to a lack of agreement on Russian activity (alleged illegal bottom trawling being the concern) between Russia and the NEAFC Secretariat on one side, and the EU and other CPs on the other.
6. There was a change of NEAFC President – it was with the Faroes but is now with Iceland.
7. Discussions were held on NAPA's behalf with lead delegates from the Faroes, DFG, UK, and the EU, and well as with ICES, Darius Campbell (NEAFC Chair), industry, Pew, and other observers. There was considerable interest in and support expressed for NAPA's overall objectives, and several references to NAPA's Dec 5<sup>th</sup> meeting as a good opportunity to meet with Members to hear and discuss issues.