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FISHERY COMMITTEE FOR THE EASTERN CENTRAL ATLANTIC

Scientific Sub-Committee

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DEEP-SEA FISHERIES AND VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (VMEs); GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES; CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CECAF REGION

SUMMARY

Deep-sea fisheries are often considered to be those fisheries that occur beyond and below the continental shelf break (i.e. on the continental slopes and below), or in association with isolated oceanic topographic structures such as seamounts, ridges and banks. These fisheries, and in particular those fisheries that occur in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) have attracted increased attention worldwide in recent years. A particular focus has been of those fisheries conducted by bottom trawling in these areas, and the sustainability of these fisheries and the potential impacts on biodiversity have been the focus of discussions in many international fora, including in the United Nations General Assembly. In 2008, the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas were adopted and provides guidance to RFMO/As and States.

INTRODUCTION

1. Deep-sea fisheries are often considered to be those fisheries that occur beyond and below the continental shelf break (i.e. on the continental slopes and below), or in association with isolated oceanic topographic structures such as seamounts, ridges and banks. The types of fishing gears and vessels vary greatly depending on the species targeted and their behavior, and include longlines, bottom trawls, midwater trawls, gillnets and traps/pots, but also pelagic gears such as purse seines and mid-water trawls for the pelagic species.
2. The precise definition of what constitutes “deep-sea” fishing varies but it is often meant to refer to any fishing activities below 200m depth in the ABNJ. There are well-

established deep-sea fisheries in many parts of the world catching many different fish species.

3. These fisheries, and in particular those fisheries that occur in ABNJ have attracted increased attention worldwide in recent years. A particular focus has been of those fisheries conducted by bottom trawling in these areas, and the sustainability of these fisheries and the potential impacts on biodiversity have been the focus of discussions in many international fora, including the United Nations General Assembly.
4. Although the species targeted by deep-sea fisheries covers a diverse range of different life histories and productivity rates, those that have given rise to most concerns are fisheries that affect the most vulnerable species (e.g. those that are long-lived, slow growing and with lower productivity) and that are conducted with gears that may have an impact on the bottom habitat (in particular trawling).
5. The legal framework for managing the ABNJ is the 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (LOSC). On the regulation of fishing in the ABNJ, the LOSC provides basic requirements including the obligation to cooperate in the management of fisheries, the control of nationals fishing in the area, and the effective monitoring and control of flagged fishing vessels. States engaged in fishing in the ABNJ must cooperate in the conservation and management of marine living resources and negotiate with the view to taking management measures necessary for the conservation of marine living resources and, as appropriate, establish subregional or regional fisheries organisations. States are also required to take necessary measures against their nationals for the conservation of living resources of the high seas. In addition, the LOSC provides a general obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment and towards this end requires all States to cooperate in formulating rules, standards and recommended practices and procedures for the protection of the marine environment. Elaborating on the provisions of the LOSC is the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. Among other matters, the Fish Stocks Agreement provides the enabling framework for the management of straddling fish stocks and associated species and introduces contemporary principles for the conservation and management of fisheries.
6. A suite of soft law or voluntary instruments provide regulatory details for the management of these fisheries, including the FAO *International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas* (DSF Guidelines). Moreover, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) leads important global processes affecting DSF management and biodiversity conservation in the context of its annual resolutions on oceans and sustainable fisheries, and has passed a series of resolutions addressing the sustainable management of fisheries and the conservation of marine biodiversity in the ABNJ.
7. With respect to marine biodiversity, the passing of the UNGA resolution 61/105 (2006) called upon States and RFMO/As to protect marine biodiversity in the ABNJ and first introduced the concept of vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). The resolution also addressed the protection of VMEs from significant adverse impacts (SAIs) from bottom fishing practices. Specifically the resolution calls on “States to take action immediately, individually and through Regional Fisheries Management Organizations or Associations (RFMO/As), and consistent with the precautionary approach and

ecosystem approaches, to sustainably manage fish stocks and protect Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)” (paragraph 80).

8. The passing of the above resolution triggered a series of consultations on deep-sea fisheries led by the FAO that culminated in the adoption in 2008 of the DSF Guidelines. The DSF Guidelines provide a framework for supporting sustainable DSF and safeguarding marine living resources and their habitats from significant adverse impacts from deep-sea fisheries. The DSF guidelines also include guidance on the identification of VMEs through providing information on a set of five VME criteria and guidance on associated management measures to protect VMEs from SAIs. Although the DSF Guidelines are voluntary, they have been used to inform the relevant conservation and management measures of States and regional fisheries organizations responsible for the management of deep-seas fisheries.
9. At the regional level, many RFMO/As with the mandate to manage demersal fisheries have initiated implementation of the above UNGA resolution and the DSF guidelines including addressing conservation of VMEs from significant adverse impacts. The RFMO/As rely on the best scientific information available to develop their management measures and implement the relevant components of the UNGA resolutions and Deep-sea Guidelines.

DEEP-SEAS FISHERIES IN THE CEECAF AREA

10. Historically in the CEECAF region, there are no well developed deep-sea fisheries in the ABNJ, but some countries report catches for deep-sea species in some of the CEECAF Statistical Areas.
11. Species include alfoncino, black scabbardfish, hake, and deepwater shrimp among others, although limited information is available from fisheries in ABNJ, or on the proportion of the catch caught in the ABNJ.
12. There is some potential for these fisheries to grow, and given that CEECAF’s mandate includes the ABNJ it could be opportune for the Scientific Committee to discuss and share information on recent developments in deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the CEECAF area, to reflect upon how CEECAF can support sustainable management of these fisheries and conservation of associated biodiversity in accordance with the UNGA resolutions and DSF Guidelines and also how CEECAF can benefit in this respect from FAOs work in supporting the implementation of the DSF Guidelines.

FAOs DEEP-SEAS FISHERIES PROGRAMME AND THE COMMON OCEANS PROGRAMME

13. The FAO Deep-seas fisheries programme is implemented through various projects that support sustainable fisheries in the ABNJ and protect vulnerable areas. In the past, projects funded by various donors have provided the resources to develop tools and identification guides for vulnerable deep-sea species, review and update information on deep-sea fisheries management and biodiversity conservation, and develop a database to compile all related information on vulnerable areas and related measures, among many other activities.

14. A recently approved project, *Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation of Deep-sea Living Marine Resources and Ecosystems in the ABNJ* (ABNJ Deep-seas project), will also provide the means to address many existing issues in deep-sea fisheries management and share model current practices among deep-sea fisheries actors. This project is one of four projects under the GEF¹ supported ABNJ Programme, now known as the Common Oceans Programme (see www.commonoceans.org).

SOME ACTIVITIES OF POTENTIAL INTEREST TO CECAF

VME Portal and DataBase

15. In December 2014 FAO launched a global VME portal and database (<http://www.fao.org/in-action/vulnerable-marine-ecosystems/vme-database/en/>), which contains VME-related information and an interactive map for the deep-sea RFMO/As, showing the VME closures and other spatial measures of the region. As such it is a compilation of information on management measures taken to reduce current or potential impact on areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur. The VME database was developed in collaboration with the regional bodies with mandates to manage deep-sea fisheries in ABNJ.
16. As of October 2015, the database contains measures for 174 area closures issued by seven RFMOs or multi-lateral bodies (CCAMLR, GFCM, NAFO, NEAFC, SEAFO, SPRFMO, NPFC) in the last ten years.
17. The database is designed to facilitate the work of scientists and managers working on these fisheries and also to promote transparency and accessibility of work that has been done in relation to VMEs to the general public.
18. The database was developed specifically in response to a request from the UN General Assembly (61/105, paragraph 90) to create a database of information on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) in ABNJ. It has been developed within the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Programme to promote the use of the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas that provides guidance to States and RFMO/As to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of marine living resources in the deep seas. This includes preventing Significant Adverse Impacts on VMEs.

Regional VME meetings

19. FAO has held a number of VME regional meetings in cooperation with RFMO/As. In general, the VME regional meetings address the Deep-sea Guidelines and share experiences from other regions on VMEs. One of these, the meeting in the WECAFC region, was a meeting focusing on both VMEs and Deep-seas Fisheries in general and a similar meeting is proposed for the CECAF region in 2016. There is scope to plan the meeting according to the needs of the region.
20. **The VME Processes and Practices** publication is a working document that details the experience of each regional body managing deep-sea fisheries and VMEs. The report is intended to provide an overview of the processes and practices in each region to

¹ Global Ocean Facility (see www.thegef.org)

facilitate the sharing of experience and, in general, improve general knowledge on the processes. The publication will contain a chapter on the eastern central Atlantic and it details the CECAF mandate and the bottom fisheries and VMEs of the region. This publication will provide a baseline overview of the CECAF region in relation to bottom fisheries and VMEs, and may inform new activities on these in the region.

21. In 2009 FAO published the *Worldwide review of bottom fisheries in the high seas*. The review was prepared in response to a request by the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and is a summary of the current status of high seas bottom fisheries worldwide. The review is based on best available information for 2003 – 2006, gathered from a questionnaire circulated to 40 countries and regional bodies. An update to the first review is planned for 2016, and as before the information gathered will be via questionnaire, and cover data from 2007 – 2014. The 2nd review will also address information gaps identified in the first review. There is scope to include a chapter on the central eastern Atlantic region, and the proposed DSF and VME meeting mentioned above will be designed so to seek to provide additional information for this review from the CECAF region.

Global deep-sea species overviews

22. In 2012, a workshop was held to review the assessment and management of alfonso species (*Beryx* spp.), which culminated in a report that will be available by the end of 2015. The information of this report may be useful for CECAF, given the historical alfonso catches of the region. A similar meeting is planned for 2016 focusing on orange roughy. CECAF members are invited to inform of species of their interest that may merit such a dedicated review in the future.
23. ***Species identification guides*** for deep-sea species such as sharks to be used onboard by observers or crew have been developed, including for the Southeast Atlantic region. A training in taxonomy and the use of the guide was organized in June 2015 in Cape Town, where six scientists from the CECAF area (Angola, Nigeria, Senegal, Mauritania, Cabo Verde) area also participated. Other guides and identification products focusing on vulnerable groups such as Sponges and Corals are also under development.
24. **A data collection manual** for deep-sea species is being produced and will be published by early 2016. This will supplement existing observer manuals and will be useful for those vessels operating in areas without RFMO technical support or without full observer coverage on data collection to meet new data collection requirements. The manual is written for a variety of users such as observers, scientists and non-scientists.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SSC

25. The Scientific sub-committee is invited to discuss and provide information on DSF in the CECAF area, including in the ABNJ and to discuss relevant information and research in support of conservation measures to protect VMEs.

26. Furthermore the SSC members are invited to propose specific topics to be addressed by the Regional DSF/VME workshop in the CECAF region and to propose potential experts.
27. Finally it is asked to reflect upon deep-sea species subject to fisheries that may merit attention for future global (or regional) reviews.