Northwest Atlantic  Fisheries Organization

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Addressing the Impact of Climate Change on NAFO Fisheries

Explanatory Memorandum

There are pressures that are increasingly impacting fisheries and the health of our ecosystems. Climate change in particular is unequivocally altering marine ecosystems with consequences for fish stocks around the globe, including their contributions to food security and nutrition. Warming oceans, rising seas, melting sea ice, deoxygenation and increasing acidification are altering ecosystem structure and the distribution and abundance of marine species. Changing ocean conditions affect the distribution, seasonality, and productivity of fish stocks, as well as fishery interactions with bycatch, protected species, and other ocean users.

At the 35th meeting of FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI), COFI encouraged the FAO to increase the knowledge and awareness on climate change impacts in fisheries and aquaculture and to provide guidance on adaptation and mitigation, highlighting the need for guidance on climate resilient fisheries management, including by convening a workshop with regional fisheries bodies. Additionally, the 2021 UN General Assembly Sustainable Fisheries Resolution A/RES/76/71 calls on RFMOs to consider climate change in carrying out their work. Subsequently, RFMOs globally are taking notice of the serious implications that climate change poses to fisheries and of the science and adaptive management actions that likely are needed in response.

In light of this, the co-sponsors are proposing that NAFO strengthen how the organization addresses the impacts of climate change on target stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems, including supporting scientific efforts, building upon the SC's existing climate related work. The objective of this proposal is to identify climate change-related information and information gaps relevant to NAFO stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems to empower the Commission to incorporate climate science into its future decision-making.

The first step to that end is for the Scientific Council to identify what information it currently has regarding climate change impacts on NAFO resources, as well as gaps in that information that could otherwise inform possible future action for the Commission. The Scientific Council is already engaged in a number of climate change related efforts. For example, the Standing Committee of Fisheries Environment (STACFEN) provides climate related analysis to the Scientific Council to inform stock assessments and the Ecosystem Roadmap includes climate related efforts in tiers 1 and 2. This proposal is not requesting any new scientific research or advice, but rather for Scientific Council to collate the information it has available to it, and to determine if there are any gaps in that information, as well as any gaps in the expertise in the SC, to be able to advise the Commission on the impacts of climate change on NAFO resources, and how the Commission can address those impacts.

Proposal

ACKNOWLEDGING that climate change poses both short- and long-term significant challenges for NAFO, and given the widespread and lasting effects of climate change on the ocean environment and ecosystems, it also affects the individuals and communities that depend upon the fisheries and other resources within the Convention Area;

HIGHLIGHTING NAFO's commitment to implementing the ecosystem and precautionary approaches to fisheries management, as reflected in its Convention;

UNDERSCORING NAFO's commitment to addressing climate change in NAFO fisheries, as reflected in the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Roadmap;

Underscoring that the Scientific Council has already begun to address climate change effects at the ecosystem level within the Convention Area as part of NAFO's Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management Roadmap;

RECOGNISING the need to fully utilize existing data sources, and to identify additional information sources to gain a more complete understanding of the potential impacts of climate change on NAFO managed stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems in the Convention Area;

COMMITTING to developing effective management strategies and approaches in NAFO to adapt to ongoing broad-scale changes in environmental conditions that have been documented in the Northwest Atlantic Ocean, including supporting the resilience of NAFO stocks and related ecosystems, as well as of fishing communities, in the face of climate change.

Therefore, NAFO resolves to

1. Consider the current and future impacts of climate change on NAFO managed stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems in the Convention Area, including, *inter alia*, as appropriate, in its decision making, and through its work in the Ecosystem Roadmap.

2. To that end, take into account the best scientific advice available on the current and future impacts of climate change on NAFO-managed stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems, when developing conservation and management measures, with a view to address the effects of such impacts.

3. Further, evaluate how the management of target and non-target NAFO-managed stocks and associated ecosystems, as well as fishing activities, may be affected by climate change and examine if there are actions that could be taken to reduce or mitigate such impacts, including, as appropriate, consideration of adapting NAFO management approaches.

4. To inform the work in paragraphs one through three, and while recognizing the capacity challenges of the Scientific Council, request that the Scientific Council at its 2024 meeting summarize the information it currently has available regarding the current and future impacts of climate change on NAFO-managed stocks, non-target species, and associated ecosystems. The Scientific Council should further identify any consequential data gaps, research needs and opportunities for productive research.

5. Based on that information, the Commission should at the 2024 Annual Meeting consider appropriate next steps to advance NAFO's work on this important issue.