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Revision of Article 17 of the NAFO CEM

Explanatory memorandum

In its 2015 report, the Scientific Council reiterating previous advices recalled that "the seamounts were properly classified as VME elements given the available knowledge on the ecology of seamounts in terms of structure and function, as well as the effects of human impacts on them, including midwater trawling and fishing with bottom gears. The information available since then continues to support the notion that seamounts should be considered VMEs".

Currently seamounts are closed for bottom fishing as prescribed by article 17(1) of the NCEM. However, Contracting Parties may still be authorized by the Fisheries Commission to conduct exploratory bottom fishing activities in seamounts if their request for such activities is in accordance with Article 18 of the NCEM and the exploratory protocol (Annex I.E.)

As a consequence, and as underlined in its 2014 report of the Scientific Committee, "seamount protection zones provide no additional protection to these areas than the ones afforded by the exploratory fishing protocol for all areas outside the NAFO fishing footprint."

At the 2014 Annual Meeting, the Fisheries Commission (FC) referred the issue of exploratory fisheries in seamount areas to the WG on Ecosystem Approach Framework to Fisheries Management (WG EAFFM) for further consideration (FC Doc. 14/35).

The WG EAFFM, at its meeting of 15-17 July 2015, considered options to grant additional protection to seamounts including by further controlling bottom fishing within the seamount areas. It recommended in particular to remove the provision for exploratory bottom fisheries from Article 17 of the NCEM.

Proposed amendments

In relation to the closure of seamounts to all bottom fishing activity, it is proposed to amend Article 17 as follows:

Article 17 - Areas Restrictions for Bottom Fishing Activities

Seamount Closures

1. Until 31 December 2020, no vessel shall engage in bottom fishing activities in any of the areas illustrated in Figure 3 and defined by connecting the following coordinates specified in Table 5 in numerical order and back to coordinate 1. ~~except to conduct exploratory bottom fishing activities, in accordance with Article 18 and the Exploratory Protocol in accordance with Annex I.E.~~



2. ~~A request to conduct exploratory bottom fishing activities, in any of the areas defined by paragraph 1, shall be in accordance with Article 18 and the Exploratory Protocol (Annex I.E).~~
3. ~~If a vessel fishing in any of the areas defined in paragraph 1 encounter a VME indicator species, as defined in Article 22.1, the encounter provisions as set out in Article 22 shall apply.~~