

Ecology Action Centre (Member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition)

**Opening Statement to the
35th Annual Meeting of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization
Halifax NS, September 23-27th 2013**

Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Fellow Observers, on behalf of the EAC and as members of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, we appreciate the opportunity to once again attend NAFO as official observers and to welcome everyone who has come to Halifax for this meeting.

It will be no surprise to many of you – that our primary concern remains the mitigation of fishing impacts on the marine ecosystem for which NAFO has competence. Over the past several years, NAFO has made good progress in implementing the United Nations General Assembly Sustainable Fisheries Resolutions 61/105 /, 64/72 and 66/68 which outline measures to and stress the urgency of protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems and sustainably managing deep sea fisheries. We view the work of NAFO in the full implementation of the UNGA Resolutions and recognizing the commitments made at Rio + 20 as a matter of continuous improvement.

This year, we sincerely hope that NAFO Contracting Parties take a positive decision to protect the additional areas recommended by the Scientific Council, through the work of the WG-EAFM, where significant concentrations of VMEs have been identified.

We are concerned about the lack of consistency in reporting of observer information, and need to make use of observer data in impact assessments and identification of VME areas. We urge Contracting Parties to agree to standardized observer reporting and to recommit to 100% observer coverage. The exploration of a scientific observer scheme is also recommended to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from having observers on board. We support the data flow model put forth by our colleagues at WWF as a way forward in ensuring quality data collection and reporting.

We look forward to the completion of analysis of data collected during the NERIEDA expedition and this information being fully applied to existing knowledge of VME areas, as well as contributing to a better understanding of the marine ecosystem in the NRA and surrounding waters.

While NAFO has made progress on protecting the marine ecosystem upon which all Contracting Parties depend for the provision of valuable fisheries resources, there remain key areas for improvement including the accurate catch reporting, ending fishing of unregulated species, lack of data collection on bycatch and ensuring best practices for management of all species in the NRA including sharks.

We urge NAFO to take action on exploring data sharing agreements and opportunities with oceans governance organizations, including the Canada Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board and the International Seabed Authority, and to agree to active participation and data sharing as part of the workshop hosted

by the Convention on Biological Diversity to identify Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas in the Northwest Atlantic – which is scheduled to take place in Spring 2014. These efforts are much needed to ensure that existing mechanisms are used to maximize protection of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

We also urge Contracting Parties to support efforts to better understand the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on rebuilding efforts of NAFO stocks.

Our specific recommendations will be circulated and are available on the table for observer information. We look forward to this week's meeting and seeing further progress at NAFO, and continued transparency of decision making.

Thank you.

Susanna Fuller on behalf of EAC and DSCC.