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European Commission: new convention will strengthen Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organisation

The European Commission has welcomed the outcome of the annual meeting of the North-West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (NAFO), which ended earlier today in Lisbon, Portugal. Parties were able to agree the text of a new Convention, which will simplify the organisation's structure, strengthen its decision-making processes and give it a clear mandate to manage its fishery resources in an integrated and sustainable manner. The meeting also set fishing possibilities for the main fish stocks which NAFO manages, including Greenland halibut. In response to the recommendations on destructive fishing practices, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2006, NAFO decided to close an area to all fishing in order to protect concentrations of corals.

Welcoming this agreement, Joe Borg, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, said: "I am delighted that our joint efforts with international partners to enhance the fisheries management system in the North Atlantic has delivered an excellent result. The new NAFO convention is a state-of-the-art cooperation instrument that will help us adopt legally binding arrangements for the sustainable use of sea resources. I am particularly pleased that NAFO members agreed to protect coral reefs from destructive fishing practices, as recommended by the United Nations. This sets a most welcome precedent for other organisations."

The European Union, along with Canada, has been leading the working group within NAFO that has spearheaded a series of reforms over recent years, culminating in today's adoption of a new modernised convention. This new convention improves the organisational structure of NAFO and aligns its goals with the latest developments in the Law of the Sea. It introduces requirements to take into account the precautionary approach, ecosystem and biodiversity considerations, as well as the obligation to form decisions on the basis of the best scientific advice available and to avoid destructive fishing practices.

The decision-making mechanism has been modernised, too. Now, when the search for consensus is exhausted, decisions may be taken by two-thirds majority. An objection procedure has also been put in place, along with a disputes settlement mechanism in line with those laid down in the Law of the Sea Convention and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. The structure of NAFO has been streamlined, to bring it into line with those of other Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. The Fisheries Commission and the General Council will now be merged into a single NAFO Commission, supported by a Science Council and other subsidiary bodies.

The meeting set fishing possibilities for the stocks under NAFO arrangements, including Greenland halibut, which is subject to a long-term recovery plan. This recovery plan was adopted in 2003 on a proposal from the EU, and is set to run for fifteen years. A recovery plan for 3NO cod was also adopted. The aim of this plan is to reduce by-catches of cod in other fisheries. Fishing possibilities were also agreed for other stocks, many of them on a multi-annual basis.

Furthermore, NAFO agreed on interim measures to implement the provisions of the UN General Assembly Resolution 61/105, which *inter alia* calls on regional fisheries management organisations, such as NAFO, to adopt and implement measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. This will prohibit fisheries in a defined area straddling both the high seas and the Canadian Exclusive Economic Zone to protect an area of significant coral concentration. Further work to establish the procedures to evaluate the potential impacts of current fisheries on sensitive marine eco-systems will be carried out in the coming year.

NAFO was established in 1979 to manage most of the fish stocks in the northwest Atlantic, except for salmon, tunas/marlins, whales and sedentary species. The members of NAFO are: Canada, Cuba, Denmark (in respect of the Faeroe Islands and Greenland), the European Union, France (in respect of Saint Pierre et Miquelon), Iceland, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Norway, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the United States of America.

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press_corner/press_releases/archives/com06/com06_95_en.htm

<http://www.nafo.int/>