



## **SPANISH CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOTTOM FISHING WORKSHOP, 2-3 AUGUST 2022**

**15/03/2022**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 2016 it was adopted to conduct in 2020 a further review of actions taken by States and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and arrangements in response to paragraphs 113, 117 and 119 to 124 of Resolution 64/72 of 4 December 2009, according to General Assembly Resolution 71/123 on sustainable fisheries, addressing the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks.

It was also decided to precede that review with a two-day workshop with a view to ensuring implementation of measures and to make further recommendations and decided (paragraphs 212 and 213 of Resolution 74/18).

Originally scheduled for taking place in 2020, the Bottom Fishing Workshop will be convened from 2 to 3 August 2022, due to the impact caused by COVID-19 global pandemic, according to the General Assembly Resolution 75/89.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

VMEs research (identification and protection) has been carried out by Spain (either by itself or in collaboration with other Nations) and should be considered as examples of ad hoc actions of fishing Nation to contribute to the implementation of Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72. The scientific data obtained has improved the knowledge of high seas VMEs and has led to the proposal and/or implementation of protection measures.

### **3. SPANISH EXPERIENCE: Case Studies**

In the NEAFC area, from 2005 to 2008, EMVs studies were carried out at Hatton Bank to study vulnerable marine ecosystems. This was the first project of the kind involving seabed mapping from oceanographic vessels, and provided a challenge, because it involved the development of multidisciplinary work with a team of scientists (including biologists, ecologists and geologists) from the Spanish Oceanographic Institute (IEO).

The results of the studies were presented at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and following its recommendations NEAFC was able to protect the EMV areas on Hatton Bank. Furthermore, in collaboration with the European Union (EU) through a scientific survey programme on board of commercial fishing vessels, the seabed where the commercial fleet operates is being studied, looking for possible interactions between vulnerable marine ecosystems in relation with fishing gears.



In the same way, Spanish exploratory campaigns under the sponsorship of the EU originally aimed to assess fish stocks, have led to the identification and protection of VMEs in other NEAFC areas as Edora Bank, thanks to the additional work of Spanish biologists.

In the Southeast Atlantic, at Walvis Dorsal within SEAFO regulation area, since February 2008 campaigns have been carried out, in collaboration with the Namibian Scientific Institute, to study the location and identification of bio-constructions associated with underwater mountains, as potential VMEs exposed to interactions with bottom fishing.

In the NAFO Regulation Area, the Grand Banks of Newfoundland is one of the most important fishing grounds for the Spanish fleet. Since 2005, an international project has been carried out in the area in order to study the identification and distribution of benthic invertebrates and the effects of fishing activities, mainly, over deep-sea corals (like gorgonian genus and black corals), Sea pens, bryozoa, and sponge fields. The study involved a seabed mapping from oceanographic vessels, and a subsequent laboratory work is still being carried out. As the result of these studies 15 NAFO areas are now closed.

More assessment and identification of EMVs studies, including seabed mapping by a Spanish oceanographic vessel, were carried out in the Patagonian Platform international waters, beyond the 200 nautical miles corresponding to the Argentinian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the Malvinas Islands Conservation Zone, up to 1,500 meters deep. As a consequence of these studies, Spain has unilaterally closed 9 areas for bottom fishing, where EMVs were located. The control of this prohibition is enforced by satellite tracking and on board observers. At the same time, a scientific observation programme on board of the commercial fishing vessels is in place from 1988, in collaboration with the IEO.

In the framework of CCAMLR and SPRFMO, Spain carried out exploratory fisheries campaigns, previously approved by those areas Organisations' Scientific Committees, where stock data and indicators of VMEs are collected.

In the SIOFA and SEAFO areas, the Spanish scientific observers from IEO on board of the Spanish commercial fishing vessels collect data from fish stocks as well as from marine invertebrates.

At the Barents Sea, Spain develops its fishing activities within the Norwegian EEZ under the EU-Norway fisheries Agreement, and in the area of "Svalbard" through the Treaty of Paris (1920). On both areas, Spain complies with Norwegian regulations to protect VMEs. Furthermore, as it happens in NAFO and NEAFC regulation areas, Spain, in collaboration with the EU, has a scientific survey programme that not only collects stock assessment data but also indicators of VMEs.

Such multidisciplinary scientific research has meant an important step forward both in terms of the study of these ecosystems and of the ongoing improvement to fisheries regulation and international collaboration, aiming to improve the sustainability of the fishing activity.