RFMO Conference Remarks

Brussels, Belgium
June 1, 2012
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I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today. Thank you for taking time away from your other duties to be here.

I am honored to share the podium with Commissioner Damanaki. I am in Brussels to express support for the EU's efforts to seek landmark reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. The time has come when we must look beyond short-term exploitation of the world's valuable marine fisheries and embrace their long-term sustainability.

As leaders in the RFMOs around the world, you sit in a unique position to be pioneers. You are forging paths to achieve a global first - sustainable management of the world's fisheries. Today, I would like to share my views on where we are headed in the near-term and look to the future of RFMO management.

We face three grand challenges:
Grand challenge #1: implementing management that is science-based;
Grand challenge #2: ensuring that there is compliance with agreed measures; and
Grand challenge #3: addressing all sources of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing that puts sustainable management at risk and puts fishers who play by the rules at a competitive disadvantage.

I will address each of these challenges individually.

SCIENCE-BASED MANAGEMENT

Committing to science-based management

Let's start with Grand Challenge #1: implementing science-based management of fisheries.
The first step in implementation is commitment.
The United States values the newfound spirit of cooperation – and indeed, urgency - with which many other RFMO members are now embracing the commitment to science. After all, RFMOs are only as effective as the members who sit together at the table. Strength of purpose and action comes from a unified approach.

We seek to work within the RFMO setting to ensure that management measures are based on science, consider entire ecosystems, are consistent with a precautionary approach, and are enforced.

Strengthening the science

What are some steps we can take to strengthen the scientific bases for effective management?

Data: First, we need to improve basic scientific information, specifically the gathering of key data. Second, those data need to be reported to RFMOs quickly and accurately.

Third, we need to understand the potential sources of uncertainty in data about different species' basic life history and other biological and environmental parameters. By studying these sources of uncertainty, we can improve the quality of our stock assessments and resulting scientific advice. Such investments in data collection and basic research give scientists the information they need to advise fishery managers decisions.

Scientists and research programs: Fourth, to make the best use of this information, we need a cadre of scientists with the training and knowledge of the specific fisheries under consideration, to inform decisions. Currently we lack that expertise. We must find ways to support the participation of more scientists in the RFMO science process, especially those with knowledge of key fisheries and those representing developing coastal states. Outreach, information-sharing, and formal capacity-building initiatives all provide demonstrated approaches to address this need. To further strengthen the science, we must find creative ways to support large-scale international research programs. Priority scientific activities that have been identified by the RFMO scientific committees should be funded by RFMOs and their members.

Integration: Fifth, we now appreciate that good fishery management means taking an ecosystem approach. Doing that requires integration across disciplines -- biological, ecological, economics and other social sciences. RFMOs are uniquely placed to gather and integrate the necessary information for an ecosystem approach. For example, some RFMOs have adopted measures to improve species-specific data collection for sharks, to reduce impacts on vulnerable marine habitats and ecosystems, and to increase reporting of bycatch.

Key elements of ecosystem-based management can be seen in measures adopted by CCAMLR: mitigating seabird bycatch; setting catch limits for ecologically and scientifically relevant sub-areas, requiring near real-time catch and effort reporting to prevent catch overruns, and taking into account target, associated, and predator populations.

At the CCAMLR meeting this fall, we have an opportunity to permanently protect one of the most unique and least impacted ecosystems on earth – Antarctica - and breathe new life into the development of a network of marine protected areas. The Ross Sea is teeming with penguins, seals, whales, krill, and other living resources, and it may be the closest thing to wilderness left in the oceans, with immense icebergs and vast distances without a human in sight. We seek all of your governments' support to establish a Ross Sea MPA this year at CCAMLR.

Using the science (tools)

The best science in the world will have little impact if it is not used. Managers must be committed to making decisions based on scientific information and they must have tools to make the science usable.

RFMOs must do more to ensure that conservation and management measures reflect the science and take a precautionary approach. Performance reviews conducted for several RFMOs and cross-RFMO dialogue tell us that this is the case.

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One way to 'do more' is to make better use of available tools that help make more informed management decisions. A number of such tools were developed by the tuna RFMOs through the Kobe process. These tools help managers evaluate the relative certainty of management alternatives that address overfishing and rebuilding stocks. Specifically, Kobe II developed a Strategy Matrix to help managers consider the relative risks of various conservation and management options.

Similarly, NAFO has had in place since the early 2000s a decision-making matrix to ensure that decisions are made based upon scientific knowledge and applying the precautionary approach. We would like to see such tools implemented across the RFMO landscape. Several RFMOs are in the process of considering and implementing these tools.

A movement also exists to improve the quality of scientific advice, the communication of scientific advice to managers, and the way in which such advice is translated into management decisions. For example, at the 2011 annual ICCAT meeting, decision-making principles on the use of science in managing stocks were adopted.

We would like to see broader adoption of these tools. In basing our management decisions on science, we ensure that our catch levels are appropriate to the current and future health of the stocks.

Using Precaution

Various factors including short-term economic gain, politics and history often lead to risk-prone decision-making. Many fisheries, fishermen, fishing communities, countries and industries have suffered the consequences. Even the best scientific information in the world will not provide complete certainty in outcomes of different fishery management choices. Therefore, erring on the side of caution in making decisions is more likely to achieve sustainable fisheries than risk-prone choices. If nothing else, history has taught us the folly of the latter.

II. COMPLIANCE

On to Grand Challenge #2: ensuring compliance by all members to all agreed measures.

We can predict the likely success of our management measures, but we will not succeed unless there is full compliance.

This means establishing and applying fair and consistent rules for non-compliance, including clear, fairly applied criteria for determining consequences, and sanctions for countries and fishing entities that willfully fail to comply with agreed management measures, especially in cases of serious infractions that undermine our ability to manage common resources.

We can enhance compliance through a collaborative approach. For example, capacity-building efforts to share effective management and enforcement approaches are key to securing the involvement of all fishing and coastal nations in our work.

IUU FISHING

Now for the final challenge – Grand Challenge #3: Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing – also known as IUU fishing or pirate fishing.

The EU has been a global leader in combating IUU fishing. In September of last year, Commissioner Damanaki and I signed a joint statement outlining our plans to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. A EU-U.S. working group is making progress toward coordinating and strengthening our monitoring and enforcement.

If the RFMOs would unite to address the destructive and unfair practices of IUU fishing, we could minimize this global travesty, to our collective benefit. IUU fishing - amounts to a global economic loss of $7.8-18 billion Euros a year. IUU fishing is the second largest producer of fishery products in the world.

This pirate fishing comes at a high cost to honest fishers, honest fishing industries, and to the food security of all nations, particularly developing states. It comes at a high cost to the environment as well, such as when trawlers ruthlessly destroy bottom habitats upon which fisheries depend. Pirate fishing also has far reaching consequences for global food supplies and thus food security because it threatens the long-term sustainability of our stocks. RFMOs have a critical role to play in the fight against IUU. For example, by implementing measures that keep IUU vessels out of our ports; modernizing trade tracking programs where needed; and strengthening data collection and reporting programs.

A number of RFMOs are beginning to tackle this problem head on:

NEAFC (pronounced NIAF-ik) and NAFO implemented port state measures (consistent with the minimum standards set forth in FAO agreement) which allow vessel owners and officials to send, manage, and track port State notifications of landings. CCAMLR adopted port inspection measures, a centralized vessel monitoring system, an electronic catch documentation scheme, and an IUU vessel list to prevent illegally caught Patagonian toothfish from finding a market. At ICCAT, stronger provisions were adopted on inspection of IUU vessels and the minimum length of listed IUU vessels was lowered to 12m, thereby expanding the IUU list to address IUU activities by a broader suite of vessels. Some RFMOs have also agreed to cross-list vessels on their IUU vessel lists, therefore closing down avenues for continued IUU fishing.

These examples show how far we've come. What more needs to be done? We need continue to work to harmonize criteria for listing IUU vessels, consider other tools to enhance our effectiveness, share best practices across RFMOs, and commit to making progress together.

We should also recognize the importance of parallel international initiatives that can reinforce and support RFMO measures to ensure compliance including the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, the FAO Global Record, and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

CLOSING

We have made important strides in tackling these global challenges, but we need to build on this momentum to continue moving forward.

For many years, we have allowed our resources to be overexploited, making the decisions of today all the more difficult. This has led to a public perception that international management of fisheries has failed. Through our actions, we can change this perception and ensure a sustainable future for global fisheries. Recent performance reviews provide us with a roadmap for improving the functioning of the RFMOs. There are many common themes. Chief among them are the calls for science-based

management, use of precaution, and ensuring compliance, which lie at the heart of what we are striving to achieve.

As we work to strengthen, reform, and improve functioning of the RFMOs, we will increase our collective power to successfully tackle these common challenges. The United States appreciates the commitment of the Chairs and Executive Directors to helping these organizations become the best they can be. We are grateful for the strong partnerships that we have developed with the European Union and others to strengthen the scientific, management and compliance activities of these organizations. We call upon all of our fellow RFMO members to unite in support of a long-term vision of international fisheries – global fisheries that are well-managed, sustainable sources of fishing, food, and jobs for many years to come.

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