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Conference on saving world's fish stocks opens at UN Headquarters



24 May 2010 – A five-day conference on fish conservation opened at United Nations Headquarters in New York today amid warnings that three quarters of the world's fish stocks are in distress and nearing depletion while marine ecosystems continue to deteriorate.

The conference chairman David Balton, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and Fisheries in the Bureau of Oceans, cited over-fishing, the effect of fishing on the marine environment and the need for further assistance to developing countries as among the forum's main issues.

The conference is reviewing implementation of the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement that established a legal regime for long-term conservation and sustainable use of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. It will provide an opportunity for countries to consider new measures to tighten implementation of the legal regime.

The agreement, which took effect in 2001 and has 77 States parties, covers highly migratory species that regularly travel long distances, such as tuna, swordfish and oceanic sharks, as well as straddling stocks that occur both within the exclusive economic zone of coastal States – up to 200 nautical miles offshore – and areas beyond and adjacent to that zone, including cod, halibut, pollock, jack mackerel and squid.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) estimates that currently three quarters of all fish stocks are in distress and nearing depletion and that the

majority of straddling fish stocks, highly migratory species and other high seas fish stocks are either fully exploited or over-exploited.

The conference, a resumption of the last review that was held in 2006, will “take a hard look at what is being done to give effect to the Fish Stocks Agreement,” Mr. Balton said.

It will also consider progress made in the implementation of recommendations since 2006, many of which led to concerted action to improve fisheries. The conference is open all countries.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including many that raised concerns about the fate of Atlantic bluefin tuna and two species of sharks at the recent meeting of the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), are also participating.

Also kicking off today is a UN gathering of experts to discuss pollution in the Caribbean.

The UN Environment Programme’s Caribbean arm, known as [UNEP](#) CEP, and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have invited more than 50 pollution control specialists to a five-day meeting in Panama City.

Participants will focus on how to bolster the region’s commitment to ratify the Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities, or the [LBS Protocol](#).

That pact sets up regional guidelines and standards for reducing pollution’s impact on the coastal and marine environment, as well as on human health. More than 80 per cent of the pollution of the Wider Caribbean’s marine environment is believed to be from land-based sources and activities.

So far, only six countries – Panama, Belize, Saint Lucia, France, the United States and Trinidad and Tobago – have ratified the LBS Protocol.

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