We are Very Well Respected...
Trust Us, Really!

ECO understands that Delegates have been proudly puffing out their chests and declaring "Trust us! We can and will stop IUU fishing on our own". ECO has since learned that this was all in response to a proposal made by Australia to list toothfish on CITES Appendix II. Before CCAMLR XXI, ECO was under the clearly mistaken impression that this proposal was quite an endorsement of CCAMLR by extending its rules to 160 countries, the vast majority of whom are not CCAMLR members.

Now ECO understands this was, apparently, a grave insult to the well-respected CCAMLR body, which certainly doesn't need some nosy neighbor, like CITES, poking its proboscis into "family matters".

So, that said, let's have a look at what we have covered in past issues of ECO here at CCAMLR XXI:

We know that IUU fishing continues to increase inside the Convention Area. CCAMLR's Catch Documentation Scheme has succeeded in allowing toothfish caught illegally within the Convention Area to enter into the legal trade. States involved in IUU fisheries, including CCAMLR Members, have cynically exploited a weakness in the CDS that allows them to fetch top dollar for their contraband as if it were legal.

Delegates to CCAMLR XXI have repeatedly recognized this problem and have expressed outrage that members of this very Commission are not meeting their obligations, are facilitating the depletion of toothfish fisheries, and are seriously damaging CCAMLR's international reputation.

Another problem is that of non-Contracting Party fishing States voluntarily cooperating with the CDS but whose vessels are obviously fishing inside the Convention Area. One such State awards flags to known IUU operators struck from the Belize register. Now these mainly Spanish-owned companies enjoy access to the CDS and top-dollar rewards.

Despite the recognition that CCAMLR has a serious problem, delegates have reassured themselves that CCAMLR has both the capacity and will to respond, and Very Exciting Proposals on the table with which to restore its good name, and certainly has no need to cooperate with CITES.

ECO has learned a little bit about these Very Exciting Proposals:

- First off are proposals to improve the operation of the CDS. Proposals which, presumably, will prevent false reporting of DCD data. As mentioned above, many Delegates publicly agree that falsification of DCDs is a Very Serious Problem. One of the key proposals to fix this is the introduction of an electronic DCD.
- Delegates also have in front of them a proposal for centralised VMS. The strongest proposal would ensure that states do in fact operate VMS, and, through simultaneous transmission of VMS data to the CCAMLR Secretariat, would prevent fraudulent reporting.
- A blacklist of vessels and states with a history of undermining CCAMLR Conservation
Measures would provide the raw material for subsequent action by Members and by CCAMLR as a whole against these states and vessels.

- Delegates have an excellent opportunity to expand the reach of CCAMLR Conservation Measures to all states and vessels involved in the toothfish trade by endorsing Australia’s proposal to list toothfish on Appendix II of CITES. This listing would reinforce and expand CCAMLR’s capacity and measures (such as CDS) through wider membership, better global coverage, inclusion of states involved in toothfish trade, and established enforcement mechanisms and trade monitoring.

ECO agrees that these are all Very Exciting Proposals, but has noticed that as Delegates make their way through the casino, they look a bit hunched over, unable to hold themselves up straight. It appears to us that some of the backbones of Delegates are turning to mush and that the Very Exciting Proposals are going the way of Notothenia rossii. These hunched postures indicate to ECO that the proposals have gone from Very Exciting Proposals to the following:

- A few CCAMLR Member States – most likely, none of which are implicated in toothfish from Areas 51 or 57 – will implement a voluntary electronic DCD.
- The “centralised” VMS will not require boats to report VMS data directly to the CCAMLR Secretariat. The data will go to the flag-state first and then to CCAMLR.
- Delegates might be backing off blacklists out of fear that some CCAMLR Member states and vessels would meet the criteria for these lists.
- Delegates might have a perverse view that a proposal to expand CCAMLR’s conservation measures to additional states, vessels, and areas, and consequently cast a wider net against IUU fishing is somehow meant to undermine CCAMLR.

ECO now wonders, assuming that the first set of Very Exciting Proposals have devolved into something resembling the theoretical second set of Just Barely Useful Proposals, what CCAMLR Delegates plan to do to address the Very Serious Problem of IUU fishing.

ECO reminds Delegates that it is conservatively estimated that 700,000 seabirds have been killed by IUU fishing since 1996. ECO also reminds delegates that the Scientific Committee states that this level of bycatch is WHOLLY UNSUSTAINABLE. Delegates are clearly facing a catastrophic collapse of the Southern Ocean ecosystem, and ECO really hopes that they have something better up their collective sleeve than the pathetic second set of Just Barely Useful Proposals.

ECO hears that Delegates opposed an Appendix II listing of toothfish by CITES because of the Very Exciting Proposals under discussion. However, if these Very Exciting Proposals have devolved into a second set of Just Barely Useful Proposals, what excuse will Delegates now use for not needing a CITES listing?

What’s CCAMLR to do now then? Fish the problem away? Continue with business as usual until the fish and birds are gone and nobody will have anything to complain about? Or, perhaps, negotiations with some mercenary PR firm, (Hokey and Catchy, perhaps?) have already begun to mount a publicity campaign to massage away the credibility problem.

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