

THE IMPACTS OF BOTTOM FISHING ON VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF THE DEEPSEA FISH STOCKS - GHANA

Background to Bottom Fishing in Ghana

Historically, there have not been any well-developed deep-sea fisheries in the country's EEZ and its adjoining ABNJ. Ghana currently have no registered and licensed vessels for deep sea bottom fishing. The FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Guidelines presents the scope of deep-sea fisheries as: deep sea fisheries (below 200metres); high-seas/ABNJ (can be applied to EEZs); catch includes species that can only sustain low exploitation rates; and fishing gear may contact the sea floor. The Ghanaian registered and licensed vessels that engage in bottom fishing usually operates in depths less than 90 meters. Ghana have not recorded and reported any catch for deep-sea species such as alfonsino, black scabbardfish, hake, and deep-water shrimp. Ghanaian bottom fishing vessels operate on the shallower part of the continental shelf. VMEs are usually located in deep seas and types include seamounts, hydrothermal vents, cold-water corals and sponge grounds. The FAO criteria for identifying Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) includes; uniqueness or rarity, functional significance of the habitat, fragility, life history traits of component species that makes recovery difficult.

Ghana will support sustainable management of deep-sea fisheries and conservation of associated biodiversity in accordance with UNGA resolutions and FAO Deep-sea Guidelines. The 1982 United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea provides the legal framework for managing the seas areas beyond national jurisdiction. In the event of discovery of deep-sea species in Ghanaian catch records, CECAF would be informed. Presence of deep-sea species in catch records signify the potential for these fisheries to grow and expand into deeper waters.

Actions to identify deep-sea species and vulnerable marine areas

1. Catch records are being monitored for possible reporting of a deep-sea species.
2. Encounter with VME indicator species by observers on fishing vessels.
3. Discovery of VME indicator species in benthic samples.
4. Temporary area closure based on encounter threshold.
5. Close area to some type of bottom fishing to prevent significant adverse impact.
6. Sharing of information within the regional fisheries management organization on bottom fishing.

Conclusions

The impacts of bottom fishing on VMEs in the deep-sea destroys the seabed, degrades the habitat and kills non-target species, thereby impacting on ecological balance necessary to ensure sustainability of fragile deep-sea fish stocks. Ghana is committed to the relevant international instruments and agreements related to conservation of marine living resources.