



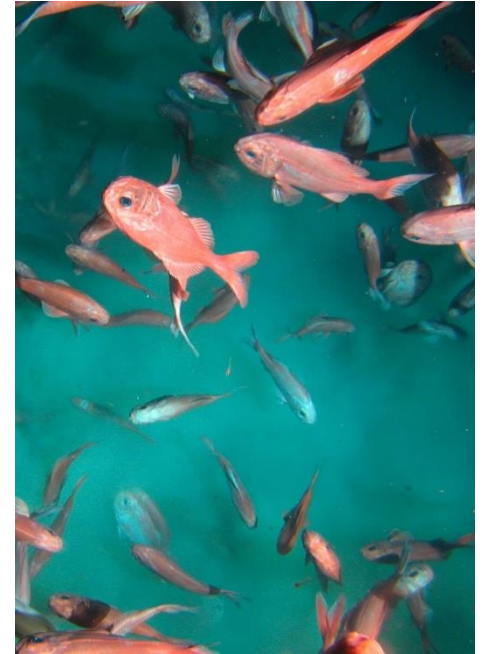
Deep-sea fisheries project



**Overview of international requirements for the application of the
Precautionary Approach: managers' responsibilities**
NPFC/FAO Informal Workshop on Science-Based Management Options
10 December 2025

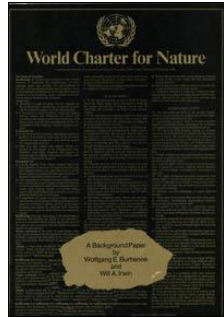
Introduction

- ❖ Precautionary Approach as a core principle of modern fisheries governance
- ❖ Deep-sea and data-limited fisheries involve **high uncertainty, slow recovery, fragile ecosystems**
- ❖ PA ensures **prevention of serious or irreversible harm** even when data are limited

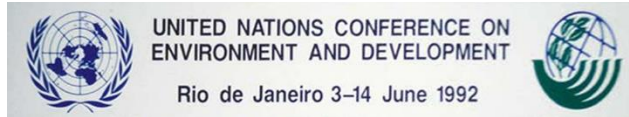


Evolution of Precautionary Approach

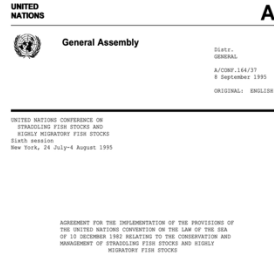
1982



1992



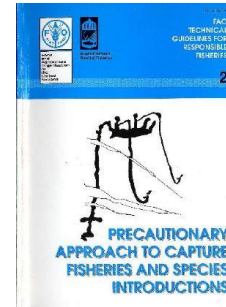
1995



1995



1996



2008



UNFSA: Binding Legal Framework

Under Article 6 States must:

- **apply precaution “widely” to protect fish stocks and ecosystems;**
 - **ensure scientific uncertainty does not delay conservation measures;**
 - **adopt reference points and actions when they are approached or exceeded;**
 - **and take emergency action when stocks face serious or immediate risks.**
-
- **Annex II provides detailed technical guidance, linking the legal obligation to specific methodologies**



UNFSA - Annex II: Reference Points

Limit Reference Points (LRPs)

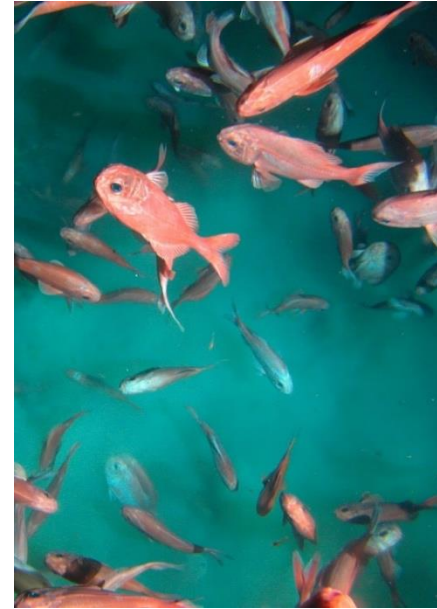
- Define unacceptable biological states
- Must not be crossed; if reached → mandatory corrective action

Target Reference Points (TRPs)

- Define desired stock/fishery conditions
- Guide long-term management objectives

Decision makers' Responsibility:

- Ensure reference points exist
- Ensure pre-agreed Harvest Control Rules specify actions
- Ensure monitoring to detect when points are approached/exceeded



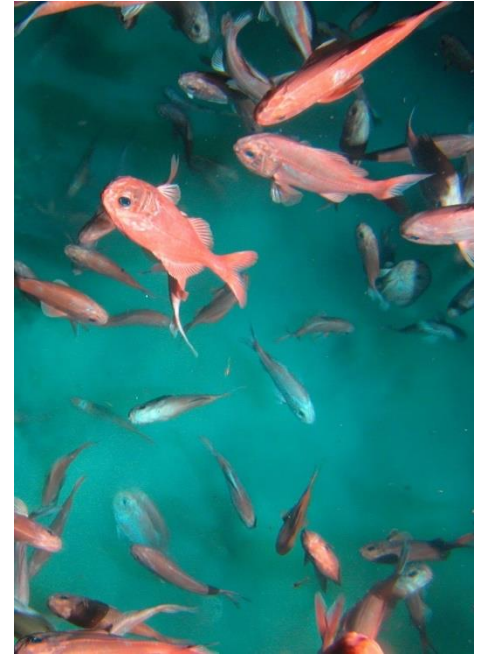
FAO Code of Conduct and Technical Guidelines

CCRF Article 7.5

- Reinforces UNFSA: absence of data \neq justification for inaction
- Requires risk assessment, adaptive management, transparent processes

FAO Technical Guidelines

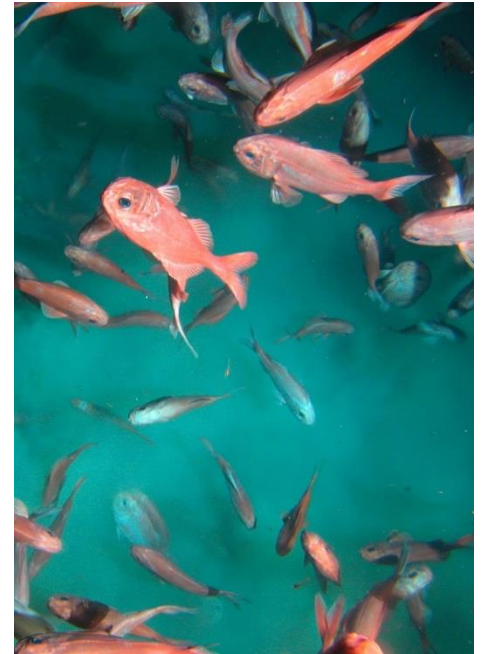
- PA = continuous risk management
 1. Preventive action
 2. Scientific monitoring
 3. Feedback and adjustment
- **Emphasize LRPs, TRPs, decision rules, and stakeholders involvement**



FAO Deep-Sea Fisheries Guidelines (2008)

Specific to deep-sea, high-seas fisheries:

- Require high degree of precaution due to ecosystem vulnerability
- Management plans must include:
 - ✓ Long-term objectives
 - ✓ Reference points and HCRs
 - ✓ Monitoring and data requirements
- Impact Assessments required before authorizing bottom fishing
- Implement VME encounter protocols and spatial management
- Exploratory fisheries must proceed under strict, conservative controls



What International Law Requires Managers to Do

Managers must ensure:

Best scientific information is collected, shared, and used

Uncertainty is explicitly considered in advice and decisions

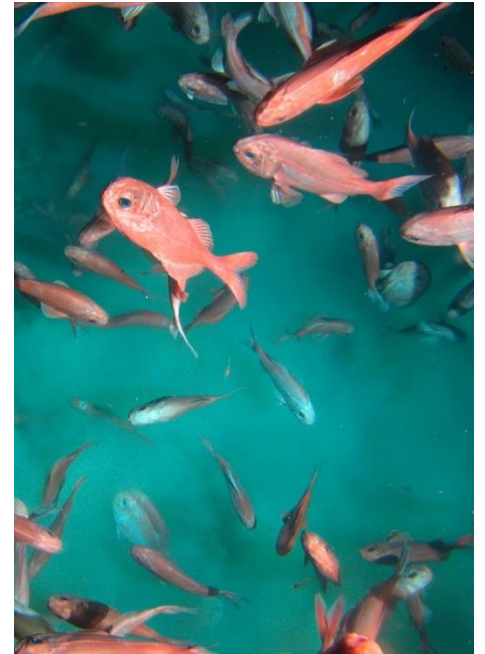
Reference points and HCRs are adopted and applied consistently

Precautionary measures are in place for:

- Data-poor stocks
- Non-target/bycatch species
- VMEs and habitats of concern

Monitoring and compliance systems support PA implementation

Decisions are transparent, documented, and reviewed regularly



Role of RFMOs in implementing the PA

RFMOs are central to operationalizing the PA

- Translate UNFSA Articles 5 and 6 into coordinated regional action
- Precaution and ecosystem approaches embedded in RFMO mandates.

Progress:

- Biological reference points
- Interim / quantitative harvest strategies
- Risk-based catch limits
- Use of Management Strategy Evaluation

Challenges: uneven implementation across regions and species



PA in RFMO Practices

RFMOs reflect UNFSA requirements in conventions and CMMs.

Examples across RFMOs:

NAFO: PA framework with LRPs/TRPs, rebuilding plans

NEAFC: spatial closures and catch limits

SPRFMO: MSEs and interim reference points

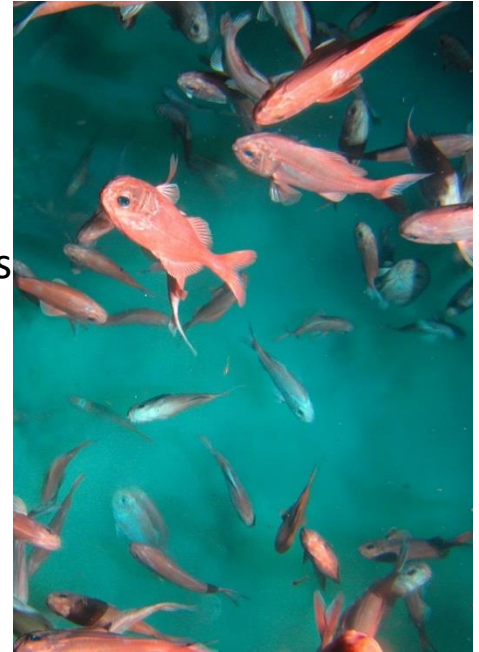
SIOFA/SEAFO: exploratory fishing frameworks, VME encounter rules

GFCM: multiannual management plans



Summary and Key Messages

- The Precautionary Approach is binding under UNFSA and reinforced through FAO instruments.
- Managers have legal and operational duties to act even under uncertainty
- Reference points, HCRs, and risk-based frameworks are essential tools
- Deep-sea fisheries demand particularly robust precautionary measures.
- RFMOs, including NPFC, are progressively operationalizing PA—yet continued development of harvest strategies is remains critical.
- Transparent, science-based, precautionary decision-making is the global benchmark.



COMMON OCEANS PROGRAM



PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND BIODIVERSITY
IN THE OCEAN AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION



Thank you for your attention