PANEL IV:
REGIONAL FISHERIES
Regional Fisheries Panel
Introductory Remarks

Mary Beth West*

Let me begin by taking a few moments to set the stage. First, the East and South China Seas, which we are discussing this morning, have been extremely productive areas for fisheries. Influenced by warm currents, the East China Sea has been classified as a “Class One,” highly productive ecosystem. Numerous economically important species migrate through or are found in these waters, and the area is heavily fished. Likewise, the fertile South China Sea contains a variety of biological subsystems and habitats. In recent years, this sea has provided approximately 10 percent of the global fisheries catch, and is surrounded by seven of the world’s top fishing nations and entities. The resources of both areas are critical not only for export, but also as a source of food protein for peoples in the region. Both areas, however, are facing significant and increasing stress from over-fishing, unnecessary bycatch and discards, and in some cases, destructive fishing practices. Many stocks are depleted or are becoming depleted. Heavy fishing mortality has, in some situations, resulted in a shift from traditional species to faster-growing, smaller and lower-value species. In addition to over-fishing, however, these areas also face natural and anthropogenic changes from increasing water temperatures, pollution from land-based sources, and other factors. These changes have caused concern about reduction in ecological diversity and consequent harm to critical marine organisms and fisheries resources. In fact, in 2001, UNEP announced a 32 million dollar project, funded by the Global Environment Fund, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, to protect the marine environment of the South China Sea.

As we are all aware, fish – whether highly-migratory or not – do not respect jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, conserving and managing those resources – and the ecosystems in which they thrive – requires

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