

Transcript:

Australian Parliament

8 December 2005

House of Representatives Hansard

Statement from Member

Speaker: George, Jennie, MP (Throsby, ALP, Opposition)

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (9.55 a.m.)—I want to raise the issue of bottom trawling.

Bottom trawling is a fishing technique which involves dragging heavy nets across the sea floor to catch bottom-dwelling fish. The practice results in severe changes to the seabed, a high rate of bycatch and a loss of biodiversity. Bottom trawling is in fact the most destructive practice against deep sea life, literally scraping the ocean floor and smashing everything in the path of the heavy nets, including precious corals and whole marine mountains, known as seamounts, as well as killing countless species other than the target catch.

There are estimated to be 100 to 200 fishing vessels currently operating full time and year round bottom trawling on the high seas and a further few hundred part-time vessels. Only 11 nations take over 95 per cent of the high sea catch, the three biggest nations involved in this being Spain, Russia and New Zealand. The catch is then primarily sold to the European Union, the US and Japanese markets.

There is growing and unprecedented concern about the destruction of our deep seas. In early 2004, 1,136 eminent marine experts from 60 countries signed a public statement calling for a moratorium on bottom trawling in international waters. Such a moratorium, they argue, would provide the international community with the space to undertake the scientific research necessary to understand the nature and extent of that biodiversity as well as provide an opportunity to generate the internationally binding legal mechanisms necessary to effectively regulate this type of fishing on the high seas in a manner that is sustainable and equitable.

On Monday, 28 November in New York, the United Nations General Assembly discussed matters relating to oceans and the law of the seas. There were renewed calls from the scientific community and a growing number of nations indicating their support for a global moratorium on bottom trawling on the high seas. The General Assembly once again called on nation states to take urgent action to address the destructive impact of bottom trawling on biodiversity and urged the need for accelerated progress. They were unable, however, to advocate or propose any specific actions. A series of processes has been put in place for 2006 which will consider the adequacy of actions taken to date. Australia has indicated general support for the resolutions but noted that the UN should not limit its attention to bottom trawling. The end result of all this is really that, while governments ponder, the bottom trawlers keep on trawling. Deep sea creatures and their diverse habitats are being destroyed while the talks drag on.

The Australian government should act rather than talk and ensure that 2006 is the year for the protection of deep sea life.