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## **Time for UN action on deep sea bottom trawling**

Greenpeace today is calling on the Australian government to take steps in an international forum to help protect the ecosystems of the high seas.

As the United Nations Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) meeting begins in New York this week, the international community faces a crisis of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

More than a thousand scientists from around the world have signed a joint statement calling for a ban on high sea bottom trawling<sup>1</sup>. Scientists estimate that if urgent action is not taken to regulate bottom trawling, most deep sea fish stocks on the high seas caught today will be commercially extinct in 20 years.

“Australia and New Zealand have been talking about better management of fisheries for fifteen years already but have not come up with any effective biodiversity protection,” said Danny Kennedy Campaigns Manager for Greenpeace Australia. “Australia is happy to champion the whales and now it’s time to become hero of the high seas by supporting an international moratorium on bottom trawling.”

“Bottom trawling is a destructive fishing practice which is damaging the largest pool of undiscovered life on Earth. Each day bottom trawling continues more deep sea life gets wiped out and the situation becomes more critical.”

“We need a United Nations moratorium on high seas bottom trawling to allow time to take stock of the ecosystems around deep sea mountains<sup>2</sup> and other parts of the sea floor.”

“The UNICPOLOS meeting will provide an international opportunity for support for sustainable fishing rather than allowing destructive bottom trawling,” said Mr Kennedy.

UNICPOLOS will provide input to the deliberations of the United Nations General Assembly later this year.

“The Australian and New Zealand Governments should be joining other countries in leading the global push for a moratorium at the United Nations in November this year” said Danny Kennedy.

The Rainbow Warrior, Greenpeace’s flagship vessel is currently documenting the impacts of bottom trawling in the Tasman Sea.

**For more info:**

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<sup>1</sup> **Bottom-trawling** is a highly destructive fishing method which involves the dragging of huge nets armed with steel plates and heavy rollers across the seabed, plowing up and pulverizing everything in their path. The rollers are to protect the net from snagging on rugged seafloors.

Fragile deep-water ecosystems, and coral systems in particular, are easily bulldozed by these heavy plates. In the matter of a few weeks, bottom trawl fishing can destroy what took thousands of years to create. Deep sea structures are not merely damaged - they are obliterated in a manner akin to clear-cutting a rainforest. After heavy trawling, the surfaces are reduced to mostly sand and bare rock or coral rubble.

<sup>2</sup> **Seamounts** are underwater mountains that rise 1,000 metres or higher from the seabed mostly not breaking the ocean's surface. They are home to cold-water coral reefs and forests, sponge beds and hydrothermal vents, as well as the many millions of species dependent on these. And because many seamounts are located in remote surroundings, each seamount has a large number of species as yet unknown and unique to that particular seamount.

Because of their physical characteristics and strong localised currents, seamounts accumulate enormous quantities of plankton, that attract a vast array of marine life, providing feeding as well as spawning grounds for a myriad of pelagic species, including some that have migrated across wide oceanic areas. As home to large marine mammals, such as dolphins and whales, an extraordinary diversity of fish species and the birds that prey on them, exotic sponge ecosystems and microscopic bacteria, seamounts are among the world's greatest marine-biological treasures. They provide habitats for several commercial bottom-dwelling fish species, such as orange roughy, roundnose grenadier, blue ling, mirror dory and silver dory.

Seamounts are also home to remarkably rich coral systems, some of which have been carbon dated at 8,000 years old or more.