

Greenpeace and scientists: plea for action to protect our deep seas

Canberra: Wednesday 19 October 2005

Professor Callum Roberts, a visiting marine biologist from the University of York (UK), today called on the Australian Government to support a UN moratorium on the destructive fishing practice of bottom trawling in high seas. This follows unprecedented recommendations from the UK and Canadian scientific communities to their Governments to support an immediate ban on bottom trawling. [Letters attached].

“Urgent action is needed as the damage being caused by bottom trawling could be permanent. Even if banned now the vulnerable ecosystems could take decades or centuries to recover. It is more like strip mining than harvesting,” said Professor Roberts.

Professor Roberts describes “bottom trawling as indiscriminate, scooping up unsustainable levels of the targeted fish as well as destroying their habitat and many other fish and marine life discarded as ‘by-catch’. It is devastating the world’s last great frontier wilderness”.

Negotiations are currently underway in the United Nations on actions to address bottom trawling. Governments including Australia will vote on these UN resolutions in late November. To date Australia has not publicly declared a formal position on a moratorium on bottom trawling and has been resistant to all short term protection measures put on the table.

Oceans Adviser to Greenpeace Australia-Pacific Lyn Goldsworthy said “After a couple of years of talks where Australia has blocked discussions on a moratorium, without putting up relevant alternatives, it’s time for the Government to declare support for a moratorium. Long term measures such as the negotiation of Regional Fishery Management Organisations will take years to become operational. What is needed is urgent short term measures in place to protect the fish and their habitats.”

Last week the Senate, with Government support, agreed that action was needed to address the destructive impacts of deep sea bottom trawling.

“Australia, as a responsible fishing nation and a leader on other marine issues, should now join the growing number of countries seeking a UN moratorium on bottom trawling in international waters. Australia would not accept this type of fishing in our national waters and should not accept it in the high seas” concluded Ms Goldsworthy.

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Images are available of damage created by deep sea bottom trawling