

MEDIA RELEASE

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Greenpeace halts bottom trawling in international waters

As United Nations' discussions continue on how to manage the earth's oceans, Greenpeace today again disrupted a New Zealand bottom trawler in international waters. Bottom trawling the sea floor is the biggest threat to life in the deep sea.

Using the Rainbow Warrior and inflatable boats, activists successfully stopped four trawls of the Ocean Reward in the international waters of the Tasman Sea. Yesterday activists delayed the vessel from deploying its net by attaching an inflated life-raft, despite being shot at with compressed air guns and sprayed with fire hoses.

Bottom trawling uses underwater nets up to 40 metres wide that are dragged along the sea floor. Huge chains or rollers attached to the front of the nets destroy everything in their path, including coral forests, as well as sponges, worm tubes, mussels, boulder fields, and rocky reefs. Huge numbers of non-target fish are unintentionally caught as well and discarded.

"This type of fishing is considered by scientists to be the greatest threat to deep sea biodiversity and every trawl does incredible damage," said Carmen Gravatt, Greenpeace New Zealand campaigner on board the Rainbow Warrior.

"A global moratorium on bottom trawling in international waters is urgently needed to protect life in the deep sea."

This week the sixth meeting of the United Nations Informal Consultation on Oceans and the Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) is underway at the United Nations in New York. The focus of the meeting is on sustainable fisheries and it is expected that the demand for a UN moratorium on high seas bottom trawling will again be on the table for discussion. A growing number of countries are moving to support a moratorium as the only responsible way to immediately protect deep sea biodiversity.

Last year Greenpeace documented bottom trawlers hauling up sea stars, rocks and even endangered black coral, despite fishing industry claims that their bottom trawling vessels did not touch the seafloor.

"Greenpeace is taking action against bottom trawling in international waters because governments have failed to establish a moratorium to stop the destruction," said Gravatt.

Campaigns Manager for Greenpeace Australia Pacific, Danny Kennedy, called on the Australian Government to stop talking and take action. "Australia is happy to champion the whales rhetorically but now it's time to become hero of the high seas by supporting an international moratorium on bottom trawling" said Kennedy.

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Visual images of the action is available from Michelle Thomas on 0404 096 556