

DSCC position statement

For the **PROTECTION** of seamounts, cold-water corals, and other vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems

Rapidly advancing technology has opened major new scientific and commercial frontiers in the deep ocean beyond the zones of national jurisdiction. Deep-sea fishing, bio-prospecting, marine scientific research, minerals exploration and energy development are among the extractive activities already underway or on the horizon. At the same time, merchant shipping, military operations and seismic activities are expanding on the high seas, generating unprecedented levels of anthropogenic noise and invasive species introductions. Over all of these looms the spectre of climate change and related impacts, including ocean warming and acidification, loss of polar ice, sea-level rise, slowing of deep-ocean circulation and the possibility of deep-ocean CO₂ sequestration. The existing oceans governance regime is woefully inadequate to address the full spectrum of threats to marine biodiversity.

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The member organizations of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition are particularly concerned about the threat to vulnerable deep-sea biodiversity hotspots, including seamounts and cold-water corals, posed by bottom trawl fishing conducted on the high seas. These deep-sea features typically support slow-growing, long-lived species, which are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Fish inhabiting these deep-sea ecosystems can live for up to 150 years, and coral structures may reach several thousands of years in age. Urgent action is needed to protect seamounts, deep water corals and other vulnerable deep water habitats that occur beyond the 200-mile limit from bottom trawl fishing, and to prevent the serial depletion of populations of numerous commercially important species of deep-sea fish associated with them.

The need to address this issue has been repeatedly recognized by the international community. In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution calling for a series of measures to prevent bottom trawling and other types of deep water bottom fishing from having a significant adverse impact on vulnerable marine ecosystems. In addition, the UNGA has begun a process to address the management gap in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

In addition to its work to secure rapid and effective action to implement the 2006 UNGA resolution, the DSCC is also calling for a new 'implementing agreement' under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Such an agreement is necessary to address the full spectrum of threats to biodiversity on the high seas. An implementing agreement would build on the existing framework of UNCLOS and integrate relevant principles and norms embodied in other legal agreements to provide a consistent modern mandate for high seas biodiversity conservation. Sources include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement (FSA), and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, as well as relevant

resolutions, plans of action and declarations adopted by the UN, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and other global bodies.

These principles should be adopted and transformed into legal obligations requiring States and Regional Organizations to:

- 1 Apply the precautionary approach in order to conserve living marine resources, protect marine biodiversity, and protect and preserve the marine environment, particularly in the face of limited knowledge of deep-sea ecosystems on the high seas (*FSA, art. 6; CBD, preamble; FAO Code of Conduct, art. 7.5; UNCLOS, art. 145 and 192*).
- 2 Adopt an integrated, ecosystem-based management approach (*FSA, art. 5 and 6; CBD COP 5, Decision VI/6*).
- 3 Adopt uniform environmental impact assessment standards and procedures to assess the impact of all activities that may impose more than a minor or transitory impact prior to commencement of the activity (*UNCLOS, art. 206; CBD art. 7(c) and 14; FSA, art. 5(d), 6.3, 6.4 and 6.6; Madrid Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty, art. 8 and Annex I*).
- 4 Establish a representative network of marine protected areas and reserves consistent with international law and based on science (*WSSD Plan of Implementation, para 32(c); CBD, art 8*).
- 5 Prevent Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing through strong and centralised enforcement mechanisms and ensuring the transparency of vessel ownership (*UN FAO IPOA to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing*).
- 6 Ensure full accountability, transparency and civil society participation in decision-making arenas affecting deep sea biodiversity beyond zones of national jurisdiction.

DSCC

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is an alliance of some 60 international organizations, representing millions of people around the world. The Coalition's aim is to protect the deep seas through conserving living marine resources and protecting the marine environment and biodiversity.