



Barcelona, 13 September, 2004

Mrs. Elena Espinosa
Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Spain

Dear Minister Espinosa,

The government of Spain, in hosting the celebration of World Environment Day in Barcelona earlier this year, focused international attention on the plight of our oceans.

The Spanish people, more so than those of most nations on Earth, appreciate the importance of conserving and protecting our oceans to ensure a healthy abundance of fish and the preservation of the marine environment.

The Prestige disaster suffered by Spain in 2002 was a clear reminder to all of us of the incredible damage we are capable of inflicting on the oceans, to the detriment of its unique biodiversity and to those who make their livelihood from the sea.

Unfortunately, another disaster is now unfolding in the deep ocean, one which is largely unseen but which threatens many thousands of species and may reverse tens of thousands of years of evolution. The deep ocean is home to one of the world's great reservoirs of biodiversity and each new scientific expedition to explore the depths brings fresh discoveries of previously unknown species and new forms of life. It has also become the target of an expanding fleet of deep-sea fishing vessels scouring its corals and other fragile ecosystems with heavy bottom trawl nets and gear in search of new opportunities to fish.

In February 2004, in response to a request by the United Nations General Assembly for urgent consideration of the threat to deep-sea biodiversity, 1,136 scientists from 69 countries issued a statement expressing profound concern "*that human activities, particularly bottom trawling, are causing unprecedented damage to deep-sea corals*" and other rare and unique species.

The scientists called on the United Nations General Assembly to declare a moratorium on bottom trawl fishing on the high seas – an unprecedented call to action to protect the marine environment by experts in marine sciences and conservation biology.

A coalition of conservation organizations has formed to persuade the United Nations General Assembly to heed the scientists' call and declare a moratorium on bottom trawl

fishing on the high seas – the international waters of the world’s oceans and one of the largest of the earth’s global commons. A moratorium on this method of fishing must be put into place until the full scope of the biodiversity of the deep-sea is understood and protective measures are put into place to ensure that unique coral and deep-sea ecosystems are not destroyed before we have a chance to discover, study, understand and appreciate them.

The Spanish government has an opportunity and a responsibility to take a lead in promoting a resolution declaring a moratorium on bottom trawl fishing on the high seas at the negotiations now underway at the UN General Assembly. I would encourage you to do so, to protect the deep ocean’s wealth of corals and other unique species, to the benefit of the Spanish people and of all humankind.

The NGOs promoting marine biodiversity have asked me to convey this message to you.

I thank you in advance for your kind consideration of this important issue.

Mikhail Gorbachev
President Green Cross International

Encl. Joint-NGO Statement on Bottom Trawling