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MEDIA RELEASE

DSCC response to UN report of high seas protection: Sparse, ineffective, woefully inadequate – now will you take action?

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The United Nations Secretary General's Review of measures by states to protect vulnerable deep-sea life from destructive fishing practices such as high seas bottom trawling has confirmed these areas receive woefully inadequate protection. The Review was released last night in New York.

"It's taken two years for this UN review to confirm what everyone knew already: that deep-sea life and vulnerable habitats like cold water corals are being wiped out by a relatively few number of extremely destructive fishing vessels. That's two years in which extinctions have almost certainly occurred, and in which vast swathes of deep ocean ecosystem have been irreplaceably destroyed by bottom trawling. The UN must take the only step which can halt this uncontrolled destruction, to establish a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling later this year," says Lyn Goldsworthy of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition Australia.

The Review was requested by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2004 and conducted by the UN Secretary General. It is based on submissions by member states reporting on what they have done individually or as members of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOS), to stop destructive fishing practices – including bottom trawling – on the high seas.

It concluded that: "Many fisheries are not managed until they are overexploited and clearly depleted and, because of the high vulnerability of deep-sea species to exploitation and their low potential for recovery, this is of particular concern for these stocks. This raises the question of the urgent need for interim measures in particular circumstances, pending the adoption of conservation and management regimes." http://www.un.org/Depts/los/general_assembly/documents/impact_of_fishing.pdf

"NGOs and scientists have repeatedly said that the existing measures are inadequate and a Review would only confirm this. Sadly it is a Review which has cost the deep oceans two years worth of protection. 2006 must be the year when the buck passing stops," said Ms Goldsworthy.

"Australia has so far failed to show strong support for the moratorium, in the last two months over 25,000 protest mails have been sent to the Australian Government by Greenpeace networks. It is now time for Australia to follow advice given by the UN itself and support the moratorium. If Australia and the international community fails to take action to protect the global commons when the evidence is so clear cut, one must seriously call into question its ability to manage other global resources of benefit to all humankind" said Helen Oakey Political Advisor with Greenpeace Australia.

Negotiations around a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling will occur at the UNGA on October 4 and 5 prior to decisions being made in November.

For further information contact:

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A DSCC analysis of some State submissions to the Review and a map showing the few high seas areas which have been afforded protection, can be found at www.savethehighseas.org

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is an alliance of over 50 international organizations, representing millions of people in countries around the world. It is calling for a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling until the nations of the world can establish strong management measures for deep-sea fisheries and protect biodiversity on the high seas.

Australian Members: Australian Conservation Foundation,
The Wilderness Society and Greenpeace Australia Pacific.