In the late 1990s a number of deep-sea scientists began raising concerns in international bodies over the threats to barely explored, poorly understood deep-ocean ecosystems from a fishing practice known as deep-sea bottom trawling. This practice was on the increase as a result of new technology that enabled fishing vessels to go deeper and further out to sea in pursuit of fish. With the introduction of bottom gear with names such as ‘canyon busters’, scientists were alarmed by the prospect of losing species and unique habitats before they had even been discovered by science.

Responding to this concern, international policy experts from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace, WWF, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Marine Conservation Institute took up the issue. In 2004 a meeting held in the offices of the JM Kaplan Fund in New York led to the establishment of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition.

Several of the early members of the DSCC issued a report in 2004 which analyzed the extent of bottom-trawl fishing on the high seas, the countries involved, the volume and value of the catch, the management regime for these fisheries, and scientific concerns. It called for a moratorium on bottom-trawl fisheries on the high seas until they could be managed consistent with obligations under international law requiring sustainability and the protection of the marine environment.

Using strategic analysis as the basis for its campaign, the DSCC decided to work through the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to prompt international action to bring bottom trawl and other deep-sea fisheries on the high seas under control. The Coalition identified two overarching goals for its work: to substantially reduce the greatest threats to life in the deep sea and to safeguard the long-term health, integrity and resilience of deep-sea ecosystems.
As a result of the DSCC’s work and that of its member organizations and cooperating partners, the UNGA process has successfully committed high seas fishing nations and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) to implement a series of actions to protect the deep sea from the harmful impacts of fishing. Although much more still needs to be done, this momentum has led to increasing action by states and RFMOs to regulate deep-sea fishing on the high seas, in particular bottom trawling and deep-sea gillnetting.

It is critical that the UNGA continues to exercise oversight with regard to deep-sea life, lest it becomes a case of ‘out of sight, out of mind’. The UNGA has agreed to hold a review of the implementation of the resolutions in 2016, and the DSCC will work towards this at every level to ensure that the unique and vulnerable habitats and ecosystems of the deep sea are protected from harmful bottom fisheries.

**Deep-seabed mining**

Since 2012 the DSCC has also taken on board concerns around deep-seabed mining and has begun work aimed at ensuring the deep ocean is protected from its harmful impacts. The Coalition is proactively building capacity on this issue and is now actively engaged at the International Seabed Authority and in other arenas.

The collective work of NGOs at the Rio+20 Summit led to an agreement by the international community to enshrine the kinds of protection and conservation advocated for by the DSCC within a new treaty for the protection of biodiversity on the high seas. The DSCC will continue to work hard to make this a reality within the next decade.

FACT: Deep-sea species tend to be slow growing, late maturing and highly vulnerable to disturbance or even extinction