



**21 November 2004**

## **BATON OF HIGH SEAS PROTECTION PASSES TO WCC AS UN FAILS TO TAKE ACTION**

**Bangkok** – A global coalition of conservation organizations today called on members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) attending the World Conservation Congress (World Conservation Congress) to agree to a resolution that will help protect deep sea biodiversity on the high seas. The coalition was joined in this call by Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, Minister of Environment and Energy for Costa Rica.

The resolution calls for protection of high seas biodiversity through, among other things the adoption of a UN moratorium on high seas bottom trawl fishing. High seas bottom trawl fishing has had a devastating impact on deep sea coral ecosystems, some of which are up to 10,000 years old, putting at risk many thousands of species unique to their ecosystems. Conservationists believe bottom trawling may be the marine environment equal of clear cutting tropical rain forests.

This issue dominated recently concluded UN General Assembly negotiations on oceans and fisheries. Despite calls for urgent action by environmental and conservation NGOs, scientists, progressive states, fishing interests and others, the final resolutions did not go far enough to stop the plunder.

Lisa Speer of the Natural Resources Defense Council, a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) and IUCN, who is attending the World Conservation Congress said: “Immediate action needs to be taken to protect the irreplaceable habitats of the deep oceans from bottom trawling. The UNGA failed to take it. It now falls to IUCN to set the lead and demonstrate what can be achieved if the collective good is imposed over commercial interest.”

The DSCC has repeatedly called for the UN General Assembly to adopt a moratorium on bottom trawl fishing on the high seas. Obstacles include strong opposition by Iceland and the European Union led by Spain.<sup>1</sup> Despite the failure of the General Assembly to

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a report authored by Matthew Gianni for IUCN, WWF International, the Natural Resource Defense Council and Conservation International, 11 countries took 95% of the bottom trawl fish catch on the high seas in 2001. They were: Iceland, Spain, Portugal, Japan, Russia, New Zealand, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Faroe Islands (Denmark) and Norway. Spain was responsible for 40% of the global catch.

do so this year, however, the DSCC says that there is cause for optimism in the coming year.

Matthew Gianni of the DSCC said: “The tide is definitely turning. There is increasing concern within the international community over the destruction of deep sea biodiversity by fleets from a small number of countries. Costa Rica, Norway, Palau and Chile fought hard for strong UN General Assembly action this year. Costa Rica is sponsoring the moratorium resolution at the WCC.”

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is an alliance of nearly 30 international organizations, representing millions of people in countries around the world. It is calling for a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling.

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A DSCC press conference will be held at the WCC in the Congress Press Centre on November 21<sup>st</sup> at 15:00 hrs. Speakers include Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, Minister of Environment and Energy for Costa Rica, Lisa Speer and Matt Gianni.

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