

Statement from BirdLife International on Deep-sea fisheries

BirdLife International would like to add its voice to the call for regulation of deepwater fisheries on the high seas.

Given the challenge to COFI to focus on implementation, we are disappointed by the lack of urgency for action we heard in the interventions yesterday. In our view, commitment to develop a Code of Practice is not commensurate with the destructive scale of this fishery.

By contrast, we commend and support Norway's recommendation to COFI members to take urgent measures to prohibit their Flag State vessels from high seas bottom-trawling where no competent RFMO exists. As unregulated trawling activity, this sanction is fully consistent with the commitment already made by COFI members to the IPOA to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing.

We also commend the proposal for an urgent review and we urge COFI members to collect data on this bottom-trawling activity and its impacts on fragile seabed communities, especially seamounts. Deepsea bottom trawling on the high seas contributes less than half a percent of the world's fish protein and yet the enormity of the collateral damage it inflicts on the seabed is incalculable. So adopting these proposals would send a powerful signal of the FAO's wider commitment to ecosystem health and biodiversity.

The IUCN lunchtime meeting on this issue quoted a telling remark, namely 'Man is defined not by what he creates but by what he chooses not to destroy.' Mr Chairman, this is a defining moment for COFI and deepsea fisheries and we urge you all to seize the moment and choose wisely by adopting the strongest possible measures.