

Dr. Sylvia Earle Engages in High Seas Discussions with Canadian Government

World renowned underwater explorer joins Canadian conservation groups in Ottawa to support a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling

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World renowned underwater explorer Dr Sylvia Earle will be meeting with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada today, encouraging the Canadian government to support a moratorium on bottom trawling on the world's high seas. Scientific evidence shows that bottom trawling is equivalent to clear cutting the ocean floor, and the United Nations has encouraged countries to take urgent action to address this issue by 2006.

“My role is to encourage the Canadian government to engage with the scientific community to better understand the dire impact that high seas bottom trawling has on marine biodiversity, and to form their policies based upon that,” says Dr. Earle. “We don't bulldoze forests to hunt deer, and we shouldn't destroy the seafloor to catch fish. The high seas and all marine ecosystems can and should be managed sustainably, to ensure a future for life in the ocean and the economies that depend upon them.”

Dr. Earle is a legendary ocean explorer and marine biologist. She holds several diving records, has served as the leader of more than 60 deep sea expeditions, and is the author of more than 130 scientific, technical and popular publications including the books *Exploring the Deep Frontier*, *Ocean Realm* and *Sea Change*. British Columbia's Living Oceans Society and Nova Scotia's Ecology Action Centre invited Dr. Earle to come to Ottawa so that the Minister and senior DFO officials would have an opportunity to engage with Dr. Earle about the need for science-based, conservation-oriented policies on high seas bottom trawling.

“There is growing support for a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling, particularly where there are no fisheries management bodies,” says Mark Butler, Managing Director of the Ecology Action Centre. “Last week at the UN Fish Stocks Agreement meeting in New York, new support was voiced from countries such as Brazil and Norway, and the US is working on domestic legislation which will have strong implications for trawling on the high seas.”

The “high seas” refers to the vast parts of the ocean that lie outside the Exclusive Economic Zones of each country. The high seas are virtually unregulated and where some Regional Fisheries Management Organizations are in place, they fall short when it comes to regulating this industry.

“Until effective management regimes are in place on the high seas that ensure the conservation of marine life and marine ecosystems, we need a time-out on bottom trawling” says Jennifer Lash, Executive Director of Living Oceans Society. “The Canadian government must protect the vulnerable and unregulated high seas from this destructive fishing practice.”

Dr. Earle is the Executive Director of Conservation International's Global Marine Division, and has joined the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition in championing the call for all countries to support a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling at the United Nations.

This year, the UN will be reviewing the action that countries such as Canada have taken since the UN called for urgent action two years ago. Canada has historically taken a leadership role when it comes to conservation on the high seas, such as the creation of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement in 1996. Dr. Earle will be encouraging Canada to once again assume a leadership role in protecting high seas stocks and biodiversity by recognizing the consequences of high seas trawling.

The groups are joined in Ottawa by Nova Scotian fisherman Russell Atkinson, who fishes with bottom hook and line gear, a type of fishing that does much less damage to the ocean floor. Both the Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society are based in fishing regions and are advocating for a transition to more sustainable gear types.

Dr. Earle will be holding a media breakfast briefing at the Press Club Restaurant, 150 Wellington Street, Ottawa, from 7:45 to 9:15 a.m. All are welcome.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Dr. Earle contact:

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Backgrounder

Bottom Trawling is a method of fishing that drags heavy nets, steel doors, and rollers over the ocean floor, taking everything in its path. There are 11 countries responsible for 95% of the reported high seas bottom trawl catch: Spain, Russia, Portugal, Norway, Estonia, Denmark/Faroes, Japan, Lithuania, Iceland, New Zealand, and Latvia. The catch amounts to over 200,000 metric tons of fish annually. The majority of high seas bottom trawling catch is taken in a relatively small area of the Northwest Atlantic, off the grand banks of Newfoundland and the Flemish Cap.

Since scientists began studying deep water corals and sponges just a decade ago, concern has been growing over the rapid depletion of deep water coral and sponge reefs, largely brought about by bottom trawling. These forests and reefs of the deep provide food, shelter from prey, nursery, and rearing areas for many species of groundfish and invertebrates, and are critical to healthy oceans and healthy fish stocks.

The "high seas" refers to the vast parts of the ocean that lie outside the Exclusive Economic Zones, or national waters, of each country. The high seas are virtually unregulated and where some Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, such as the North Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) are in place, they fall short when it comes to regulating the industry and protecting the ocean floor.

About Conservation International

Conservation International (CI) applies innovations in science, economics, policy and community participation to protect the Earth's richest regions of plant and animal diversity and demonstrate that human societies can live harmoniously with nature. Founded in 1987, CI works in more than 40 countries on four continents to help people find economic alternatives without harming their natural environments. For more information about CI, visit www.conservation.org.

About Living Oceans Society

Living Oceans Society is a non profit organization working to protect marine biological diversity to ensure healthy oceans and healthy communities. Living Oceans Society promotes innovative solutions through the publication of science reports, public awareness campaigns, and analysis of government policies, to build strategies that ensure long-term health of the ocean and coastal communities on the Pacific Coast of Canada. For more information visit www.livingoceans.org.

About Ecology Action Centre

The Ecology Action Centre is Nova Scotia's largest and most active environmental organization. Since 1971, the EAC has been working to build a healthier, more sustainable Nova Scotia. Current areas of focus include marine & coastal issues, wilderness, public lands, food, transportation, energy, and urban issues. EAC has over 800 members, and 250 volunteers and staff. For more information visit: www.ecologyaction.ca.