



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **DSCC Response to WWF/TRAFFIC publication, "Follow the Leader: Learning From Experience and Best Practice in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations"**

A new publication by the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and TRAFFIC confirms the position of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) that regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) are not a panacea to stop the devastation of vulnerable deep-sea marine ecosystems by bottom trawlers operating on the high seas.

Countries actively opposing the DSCC's campaign for a United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) moratorium on high seas bottom trawling – such as Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan and Spain – have repeatedly suggested that better management under RFMOs will solve the problem.

The DSCC has always stressed the fact that bottom trawl fishing in approximately 75% of the high seas is not regulated at all by any regional body, and that deep sea ecosystems are running out of time. The establishment of new RFMOs cannot be done quickly enough. The remaining 25% falls under the competence of just five RFMOs, three of which have done very little to date to curtail the destruction.

According to the WWF/TRAFFIC report, RFMO decision-makers regularly ignore the advice of the scientific bodies which inform them. "Advice from scientific and stock assessment groups is increasingly clear about uncertainty and promotes the application of precaution in the face of it. However, rarely do RFMOs take decisions that reflect the precautionary advice they receive." ("Follow the Leader:").

DSCC Political Advisor Matthew Gianni said, "This suggests that deep sea destruction is a matter of political choice and that we cannot rely on RFMOs to protect deep-sea biodiversity from the destructive impact of bottom trawl fishing on the high seas in the short term. We need a UNGA moratorium on high seas bottom trawl fishing until RFMOs are capable of managing deep-water fisheries effectively."

The report follows WWF's call on the Northeast Atlantic Fisheries Commission in November last year to close all deep-sea fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic and support the DSCC call for moratorium on high seas bottom trawling in the region because of the damage caused by deep-sea trawling to sensitive habitats in the region.

([http://www.neafc.org/reports/annual-meeting/docs/am2005\\_papers/2005-48\\_wwf-position-on-deep-sea-fisheries.pdf](http://www.neafc.org/reports/annual-meeting/docs/am2005_papers/2005-48_wwf-position-on-deep-sea-fisheries.pdf) )

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Notes to Editors:

The report: "*Follow the Leader: Learning From Experience and Best Practice in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations*" can be found at:

<http://assets.panda.org/downloads/rfmoreport06.pdf>

It includes the following extracts:

"Over the last decade, the management of high seas stocks has been increasingly challenged by the expansion of bottom-trawling into deep-water to target new stocks (e.g., CCAMLR, NEAFC, NAFO and the GFCM)..."

"Only some RFMOs (CCAMLR, NEAFC, NAFO, SEAFO and GFCM) have the mandate to manage high seas deepwater species. Negotiations to establish RFMOs with a mandate to manage deep-water fisheries are under way in both the Indian and South Pacific Oceans. Most RFMOs have been slow to adopt any management measures for these species and the measures adopted are often more reactionary than precautionary."

"CCAMLR appears to be the only RFMO that has specific policies in place to manage new and exploratory fisheries. CCAMLR's approach is to ensure that new and exploratory fisheries do not develop faster than the ability of the Commission to evaluate their potential consequences for the ecosystem in which they operate. In other RFMOs it appears that there are little or no constraints on the development of fisheries for new stocks or of new methods of exploiting known target species."

### **Lessons Learned and Best Practice**

Most RFMOs have failed to meet their own objectives with respect to the target stocks for which they are responsible. Far from being managed sustainably, many stocks are assessed as over-fished or of uncertain status. There are a range of reasons for this failure, one of which is the lack of precaution applied by RFMOs in the face of the need to rebuild stocks or to ensure, in the face of uncertainty, that other stocks do not become over-fished."

"Advice from scientific and stock assessment groups is increasingly clear about uncertainty and promotes the application of precaution in the face of it. However, rarely do RFMOs take decisions that reflect the precautionary advice they receive. Very few RFMOs have applied a precautionary approach to the exploitation of new and exploratory fisheries. This has resulted in ongoing and, in some cases, serial depletion of new high seas fisheries. The impact of this has been most marked in fisheries for deep-sea species. RFMOs have, in the main, failed to adopt approaches that allow fishing in new and exploratory fisheries only under agreed precautionary management arrangements that ensure the rate of expansion is consistent with the best available scientific information on the fishery. Where new and exploratory fisheries are not under the mandate of an RFMO, States with an interest in the fishery have been slow to develop an RFMO and States have failed to take action in the interim with respect to their own nationals to ensure the conservation of the living resources of the high seas as required under UNCLOS."

“The decisions of RFMOs reflect the commitment of their members to legally-binding conventions to which they are a party and to internationally-agreed standards. In 2005, there were just over 100 members of RFMOs. Of those, fewer than half had signed both UNCLOS and the UNFSA. Many members therefore have no obligation to apply principles such as the precautionary approach. This leaves those members who do have such obligations in a position where they are obligated, in the absence of precautionary decisions by the RFMO, to take those decisions themselves in relation to exploitation of the stocks by their nationals. However this does not appear to be occurring.”

The WWF press release can be found at:

[http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/index.cfm?uNewsID=69120](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/index.cfm?uNewsID=69120)

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