

Coalition of twenty-three organisations around the world

Global coalition seeks regulation of fishing activities in international waters

Organisations from various countries are alarmed by the growth in fishing activities without any form of control and their impacts on both marine resources and the deep sea bed.

Yesterday, a follow-up event to the workshop “Campaign for Deep Sea Conservation in International Waters” that took place in Buenos Aires on Monday and Tuesday, was held in Mar del Plata.

Matthew Gianni, coordinator of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition comprising over 23 organisations from around the world, attended.

The coalition is working for the implementation of a moratorium on bottom trawling in international waters and for the regulation of fishing activities on the high seas by the United Nations.

The Mar del Plata event was organized jointly by CeDePesca and the Fishing Skippers’ Association, both members of the coalition. Gianni, underlined the importance of the issues in question, “which are very common, mainly in the South Atlantic, North Atlantic and Pacific Ocean international waters.”

He went on to explain that “the coalition is not calling for the suspension of all fishing activities, but rather a halt on deep sea bottom trawling, the activity destroying the deep sea bed along with its dependent ecosystems.” He also pointed out that “we are seeking the long-term sustainable regulation of deep sea fishing as we are concerned about the impact not only on seabed ecosystems but also deep sea species.”

After emphasizing that the United Nations dealt with this issue at its 2002 General Assembly, having reaffirmed its concern in 2003 and again this year, Gianni pointed out that “an international action agreement on what has to be done in order to solve the problem is being negotiated for next year.”

The specialist recognized that “it is going to be a political struggle - negotiations on current issues at the UN conclude next week. So far, a few countries led by Costa Rica and Norway are promoting a conservationist policy. We have noticed positive signs from Brazil, Chile, Peru and Argentina, but these have not yet manifested themselves as formal policy in support of a moratorium and a conservationist position in order to solve the problems of unregulated fishing on the high seas.”

In this respect, local entities pointed out that a document based on the conclusions of their work over the last few days is being prepared and will be submitted to Argentina’s federal government in the coming days.

In addition, the coalition is working on the issue with industry, fishing guilds and scientists in order to ensure a comprehensive view.

“There is a tendency to expand this fishing practice into international waters. The reasons

for this are obvious – fisheries resources within national waters are over-exploited. Ships are leaving for international waters in search of new opportunities, an appealing prospect since there is no control on fishing on the high seas. These ships do not have to operate under quotas and are not required to have on board observers or to send the catch data to anyone,” added Gianni.

According to 2001 data, 11 countries take approximately 95% out of the high seas bottom trawl catch (2001 data). These countries are headed by Spain, New Zealand and Russia.

The regulation of fishing in international waters is important not only from the fishery resource conservation viewpoint. According to Gianni, “a hundred million species are estimated to exist in those marine ecosystems, but only one percent of them have been discovered and they are already in danger.”