



Statement of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) to the 4th Annual Session of the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC)

3-5 July 2018 Tokyo, Japan

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We are encouraged by the continued discussion and efforts of the NPFC on deep-sea fisheries. We note that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in 2016 reviewed the implementation of the actions taken by states and RFMOs for the management of deep-sea fisheries as called for in resolution 61/105 in 2006 and subsequent UNGA resolutions. On the basis of the review, the UNGA renewed the commitment to action by all states for the management of deep-sea fisheries in resolution 71/123 adopted in December 2016.

The resolution reaffirmed and reinforced the commitments of States and RFMOs to close areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur unless bottom fisheries in such areas can be managed to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs. The resolution stresses the importance of implementing the full set of criteria in the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas for conducting impact assessments, including cumulative impact assessments; identifying areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur; and assessing for significant adverse impacts (UNGA resolution 71/123; paragraph 180 (a) & (b)). All of these provisions of the Guidelines have been incorporated into the regulations adopted by the NPFC.

To effectively protect VMEs, the General Assembly encouraged States and RFMOs to make use of a variety of types of marine scientific research such as seabed mapping, mapping of vulnerable marine ecosystems based on information from the fishing fleet, on-site camera observations from remote vehicles, benthic ecosystem modelling, comparative benthic studies and predictive modelling to identify areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems are known or are likely to occur and to establish conservation and management measures to prevent significant adverse impacts on such ecosystems (UNGA resolution 71/123; paragraphs 181 & 182).

The UNGA also committed States and RFMOs to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, through conducting stock assessments, and the sustainability of non-target species and the rebuilding of depleted stocks, and to be particularly precautionary in regard to the catch or bycatch of vulnerable, threatened or endangered species (UNGA resolution 71/123; paragraph 186).

In addition, the UNGA called on States and RFMOs to take into account the potential impacts of climate change and ocean acidification in taking measures to manage deep-sea fisheries and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, and on States and other relevant international organizations (for example, the International Seabed Authority) to 'consider taking action' to address the potential impacts on VMEs from activities other than bottom fishing (UNGA resolution 71/123; paragraphs 185 & 184).

In 2020 the UNGA will conduct another review of the implementation of the resolutions adopted in respect of deep-sea fisheries on the high seas. In the meantime, states will begin negotiating a new treaty – the third implementing agreement of UNCLOS - for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction in September of this year. These negotiations are likely to continue into 2020. In addition, a conference to review the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans and seas will take place in 2020.

We recognize there are important issues before the NPFC this week in regard to the Pacific Saury, chub mackerel and squid fisheries, and issues related to IUU fishing, regional VMS, and boarding and inspection measures.

Nonetheless, the meeting this week, and the intersessional work between now and the 2019 meetings of the NPFC provide a window of opportunity to demonstrate that the NPFC is working to implement the commitments made by states through the UNGA and is acting on the basis of the best scientific information available. Implementation of the UNGA resolutions for bottom fisheries is one of the most important metrics to measure the capacity, political will, and effectiveness of RFMOs to conserve biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Amongst the issues and recommendations of the scientists involved in the NPFC/FAO workshop in March and discussed during the Small Scientific Committee meeting in April which the DSCC supports are:

1. New scientific information is available on the occurrence of VMEs on the Northern Hawaiian Ridge Emperor Seamounts from Japan and from the US National Science Foundation cruises and closures should be established accordingly;
2. There is good evidence of the recovery or regeneration of corals on seamounts within the fisheries footprint and a process should be established to identify and protect areas where this is occurring or likely to occur;
3. It is important to map VMEs in the NPFC convention area and to use predictive modeling and biogeographic information to help determine where they are likely to occur (this reflects the call for these types of actions made by the UNGA in its resolution of 2016);
4. Exploratory fishing within areas closed to protect VMEs should be avoided or not permitted and the CMM on bottom fishing should be amended accordingly;
5. Hydrocorals and sponges should be recognized as VME indicator species and management measures taken to prevent significant adverse impacts on these VMEs;
6. The US proposal for a moratorium on the deepwater fishery for pelagic armourhead until an adaptive management regime is in place should be adopted.

We urge Contracting Parties to act on these recommendations.

Finally, we are concerned that not all documents prepared for the meeting are available for observers. It is difficult for our organization to participate effectively in the meeting as an observer without having access to the documents. For this meeting we feel at a particular disadvantage over not having access to the final report of the Scientific Committee meeting and the recommendations of the Scientific

Committee to the Annual Meeting of the NPFC. We urge Contract Parties to review and revise, as needed, the rules of procedure to allow observers access to all relevant documents for the Annual Meetings.

We look forward to the side event with Dr. Amy Baco-Taylor who has spent 20 years studying deep-sea corals and who, together with a colleague, led 4 expeditions to the Northern Hawaiian and Emperor Seamounts to survey and study the benthic biology and ecology of the seamounts and the impacts of bottom fisheries.

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