



Deep Sea Conservation Coalition recommendation on protecting deep-sea biodiversity on seamounts from destructive fishing practices¹
Resumed meeting of SBSTTA-24, March 2022

Introduction

In 2004, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP-7, in paragraphs 60 and 61 of the Marine and Coastal Biological Diversity Decision VII/5, called on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to protect the biodiversity of seamounts in marine areas beyond areas of national jurisdiction from destructive practices:

The Conference of the Parties

60. Concerned about the serious threats to the biological diversity, stresses the need for rapid action to address these threats on the basis of the precautionary approach and the ecosystem approach, in marine areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, in particular areas with seamounts, hydrothermal vents, and cold-water corals, other vulnerable ecosystems and certain other underwater features, resulting from processes and activities in such areas;

61. Calls upon the General Assembly and other relevant international and regional organizations, within their mandate, according to their rules of procedure, to urgently take the necessary short-term, medium-term and long-term measures to eliminate/avoid destructive practices, consistent with international law, on scientific basis, including the application of precaution, for example, consideration on a case by case basis, of interim prohibition of destructive practices adversely impacting the marine biological diversity associated with the areas identified in paragraph 60 above;

The Decision by COP-7 prompted the adoption of the first of the substantive resolutions by the UNGA, resolution 59/25, which incorporated the COP-7 call to action as follows:

The General Assembly...

*66. Calls upon States, either by themselves or through regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements, where these are competent to do so, **to take action urgently, and consider on a case-by-case basis and on a scientific basis, including the application of the precautionary approach, the interim prohibition of destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling that has adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems, including seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold water corals located beyond national jurisdiction, until such time as appropriate conservation and management measures have been adopted in accordance with international law***

Two years later, in 2006, the UNGA adopted 'landmark' resolution 61/105, which in paragraphs 80-91 committed States to take a series of measures specifically in relation to the management of deep-sea fisheries on the high seas to protect biodiversity beginning in paragraph 80 to call on States to:

¹ *Protecting Global Seamounts*, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. March 2021
<http://www.savethehighseas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Protecting-Global-Ocean-Seamounts-final-web.pdf>

“take action immediately, individually and through regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, and consistent with the precautionary approach and ecosystem approaches, to sustainably manage fish stocks and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, including seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold water corals, from destructive fishing practices, recognizing the immense importance and value of deep sea ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain”
(paragraph 80)

Since 2004

While much has been done implement the COP-7 commitments and those of UNGA resolutions 59/25, 61/105 and subsequent UNGA resolutions over the past two decades, more needs to be done to ‘finish the job’ begun by COP-7. Deep-sea bottom trawl fishing is still permitted on many seamounts and oceanic ridge systems on the high seas, particularly in the Northwest and Southwest Pacific and Southern Indian Oceans.

The UN’s First World Ocean Assessment, in Chapter 51 - “Biological Communities on Seamounts and Other Submarine Features Potentially Threatened by Disturbance” - concluded that:

“Deep-sea ecosystems associated with seamounts, ridges, and other topographic features are now and will increasingly be subjected to multiple stressors from habitat disturbance, pollutants, climate change, acidification and deoxygenation...the widespread destruction of deep-water benthic communities due to trawling has presumably reduced their ecological and evolutionary resilience as a result of reduced reproductive potential and loss of genetic diversity and ecological connectivity” and that “the extent of benthic impacts has been described for local fishing grounds but has not been assessed globally; however, if the impacts of these regional studies are generalized, we can extrapolate that fishing, and in particular deep-water trawling, has caused severe, widespread, long-term destruction of these [seamount] environments globally.”²

DSCC Recommendation to CBD SBSTTA-24

In November 2022, the UNGA will conduct a review of the implementation of the UNGA resolutions adopted since 2006 related to protecting deep-sea biodiversity from destructive fishing practices in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

We urge SBSTTA to recommend that COP-15 reiterate and reinforce the decision taken by COP-7 and call on the UNGA and other relevant international and regional organizations to ‘finish the job’ begun in 2004 through adopting a recommendation in the Marine and coastal biological diversity decision as follows:

“Call on the United Nations General Assembly to commit states to prohibit bottom trawling on seamounts and other underwater features in areas beyond national jurisdiction and eliminate the threat of destructive fishing practices to the biodiversity of seamounts, hydrothermal vents, cold-water corals and other vulnerable ecosystems in areas beyond national jurisdiction”

² https://www.un.org/depts/los/global_reporting/WOA_RPROC/Chapter_51.pdf