



UNITED NATIONS URGED TO TAKE CRITICAL ACTION TO PROTECT MARINE LIFE FROM INDUSTRIAL DEEP SEA BOTTOM TRAWL FISHING

MEDIA RELEASE

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This week, from August 2-3, in New York, a United Nations workshop will explore how far States have come in safeguarding fragile deep sea ecosystems from the damage caused by industrial deep sea bottom trawl fishing. The DSCC calls on the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to finish the job the UNGA began in 2004 and insist that high seas fishing nations protect deep-sea biodiversity.

Seamounts are recognized by scientists as being deep-sea oases of biodiversity that sustain life found nowhere else on Earth, yet they are fragile and vulnerable to human impact. The United Nations Second World Ocean Assessment, published in 2021, concluded that “fishing, especially bottom trawling, constitutes the greatest current threat to seamount ecosystems”. They are also threatened by climate change, and could soon face new threats, such as the emerging destructive deep-sea mining industry.

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) urges the UNGA to commit governments to ban bottom trawling on deep-sea coral ecosystems and other biodiverse ecosystems and habitats associated with seamounts, oceanic ridge systems and so-called ‘underwater topographical features’ in ocean Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

The meeting this week kicks off a review by the UNGA this year of the implementation of a series of resolutions, adopted from 2004, calling on States “to take action urgently” to protect deep-sea species and habitats from destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling. The review will culminate in the adoption of a resolution in December 2022 calling for additional actions by States and regional fisheries management organisations to protect deep-sea ecosystems and biodiversity from the harmful impacts of bottom fishing on the high seas.

While significant progress has been achieved in implementing the resolutions, much more needs to be done and climate change is adding to the urgency. The UNGA meeting this week will involve a debate amongst scientists and representatives of high seas regional fisheries management organisations, deep sea trawl fishing organisations, countries that permit deep-sea trawling on the high seas and NGOs, including the DSCC.

The DSCC will present the findings of its independent review of the status of deep-sea fishing on the high seas. Some countries and regional fisheries management organisations have prohibited bottom trawling on seamounts and similar features, but others, such as New Zealand, Japan and the Cook Islands still allow bottom trawling on coral and other deepwater habitats and ecosystems on seamounts and oceanic ridge systems, notably in the Northwest and Southwest Pacific and Southern Indian Oceans.

Groups in New Zealand, including the DSCC, are also urging the New Zealand government to properly implement the UNGA resolutions that it has signed up to and ensure the effective protection of vulnerable deep sea ecosystems. The New Zealand public has also called for the protection of New Zealand's seamounts and features from harmful bottom trawl fishing, with recent polling showing 79% of respondents supported a ban on trawling in these areas. Groups have also expressed their concerns to Ray Smith, Director General of the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries, urging him not to issue any new High Seas Permits to the New Zealand bottom trawling fleet.

The DSCC's Karli Thomas commented: "To the detriment of our ocean, New Zealand has failed to implement and is now attempting to weaken international commitments to protect deep sea life. New Zealand's bottom trawl fleet is destroying habitats and potentially wiping out species that do not exist anywhere else on Earth, and the government continues to allow this despite the fleet's terrible track record. This is a recipe for extinction, and violates our commitments under UN Resolutions."

Matthew Gianni, DSCC Political and Policy Adviser, who will be a panellist at the UN meeting this week, said: "The protection of seamounts from the destruction caused by deep-sea trawling is long overdue. We urge members of the UNGA to 'finish the job' and call on the few remaining nations still allowing their vessels to bottom trawl on seamounts on the high seas to put an end to the practice. All nations have committed to protect and restore nature and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and this would be a major step toward achieving that goal."

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Further information

[Save deep sea corals: ban bottom trawling on seamounts](#) - DSCC report (July 2021)

[UN Second World Ocean Assessment](#) - Seamounts and Pinnacles - Chapter 7L (May 2021)

[Protecting global seamounts](#)- DSCC briefing document (March 21)

[Preventing biodiversity loss in the deep sea- A critique of compliance by high seas fishing nations and RFMOs with global environmental commitments](#) - DSCC report (October 2020)