

P R E S S R E L E A S E**Fishing nations still flouting UN deep sea protection**

New York, 15th September 2011. Many countries are failing to live up to their commitments to the United Nations (UN) to protect vulnerable deep sea species and ecosystems, according to two reports released today ahead of a two day debate on deep sea fisheries by the UN in New York.

In spite of successive UN resolutions calling for urgent action, countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, South Korea, Russia, Cook Islands, Australia, New Zealand and Japan continue to allow their vessels to fish the deep ocean in international waters using bottom trawl gear, a highly damaging fishing technique, with devastating implications for the future of deep sea marine life in the world's oceans.

One of the reports¹ published today by eminent marine scientists concludes that five years after the UN General Assembly (GA) took action to protect them, highly vulnerable and unique deep sea ecosystems remain unprotected, and that deep sea fisheries are not being managed sustainably.

The other report², published by the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC), of which Seas At Risk is a steering group member, draws similarly damning conclusions. Fishing states and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) have had enough time to implement measures but, with the exception of the management of deep-sea fisheries in the waters around Antarctica, have not done so sufficiently. The DSCC report highlights a series of failures to implement key provisions of the UN resolutions including completion of proper impact assessments before granting fishing permits, and establishing regulations to ensure the long-term sustainability of deep sea species.

Seas At Risk Executive Director Monica Verbeek said: "These reports show that while some progress has been made, several countries continue to allow their vessels to engage in this type of fishing in contravention of the commitments they've made. These countries are therefore engaged in Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fisheries and should be told to shape up or stop fishing. The High Seas are the ocean's global commons, and their exploitation must be sustainable and their ecosystems protected."

¹ Weaver, et al. (2011). The impact of deep-sea fisheries and implementation of the UNGA Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72. Report of an international scientific workshop, National Oceanography Centre, Southampton, 45 pp. <http://hdl.handle.net/10013/epic.37995>

² Gianni et al. (2011) Unfinished business: a review of the implementation of the provisions of UNGA resolutions 61/105 and 64/72 related to the management of bottom fisheries in areas beyond national jurisdiction, DSCC, September 2011. http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/DSCC_review11.pdf

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The first of the UN resolutions addressing deep sea bottom trawling (2006) was adopted by the UN General Assembly after a lengthy debate in which many States called for a temporary prohibition on the practice of deep sea bottom trawl fishing on the high seas – considered one of the most highly destructive in current use. Instead, the UN negotiators reached a compromise which required that unless a series of protection measures was implemented by December 2008, fishing would not be allowed to continue. These measures were further strengthened in a follow-up resolution adopted by the UNGA in 2009.

The objective of the two day UN meeting is to evaluate and review the implementation of the 2006 and 2009 UN Resolutions. Representatives of the DSCC and several leading marine scientists will be giving evidence and present the findings of both reports to the UN at this meeting, and Seas At Risk will be present.

In a parallel development, global web movement Avaaz will deliver over half a million signatures on a petition calling on the UN General Assembly to ban deep sea bottom-fishing.

Deep sea bottom trawling is recognised as the most serious direct threat to deep-sea ecosystems. Some of the highest levels of marine biodiversity are found in the deep-sea and new species of corals and sponges are still being discovered. Once destroyed or overfished, slow-growing deep-sea species are either lost forever or unlikely to recover for decades or centuries.

Contact

Chris Carroll, Communications, +32 (0) 2 893 0967, ccarroll@seas-at-risk.org

Carole White, Fisheries Policy Officer at the meeting in New York, cwhite@seas-at-risk.org

Notes to editor:

- Seas At Risk is a European association of non-governmental environmental organisations working to protect and restore to health the marine environment of the European seas and the wider North East Atlantic.
- The DSCC was founded in 2004, to address the issue of bottom trawling on the high seas in the absence of an effective governance regime. The coalition is made up of over 70 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), fishers organisations and law and policy institutes, committed to protecting the deep sea. Seas At Risk is an active member of the DSCC. www.savethehighseas.org
- The UN FAO estimated that in 2006, the latest year for which global figures are available, approximately 285 vessels were engaged in high seas bottom fishing, 80% of which were flagged to the following 10 countries: Australia, Belize, Estonia, France, Japan, New Zealand, Portugal, Russia, South Korea and Spain. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/i11116e/i11116e00.htm>