



DSCC Update - April 2008

1 May 2008

Recently touted as headline news around the world was the fact that the Wilkins Ice Shelf is "hanging by a thread." This news from Antarctica is the latest in an increasingly worrying string of stories about melting polar ice caps and the effects of climate change on global oceans, declining fish stocks, the devastation of bottom trawling, and the total human impact on the world's oceans (see below a collection of media reports on the latest scientific findings). This is the backdrop for the upcoming meeting of the UN Working Group on Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, taking place in New York from April 28-May 2. The DSCC is calling on governments to develop concrete recommendations for the comprehensive protection of marine ecosystems, for consideration by the 63rd Session of the UN General Assembly when it meets in the latter part of 2008.

The DSCC continues to maintain that a new implementing agreement to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is necessary to ensure that the duties to protect and preserve the marine environment and to conserve living marine resources and biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction are effectively implemented. Recognizing that it will take some time for such an agreement to be developed, the DSCC has also put forward in briefing paper for UN representatives a number of interim proposals for action (available upon request).

This meeting follows closely on the heels of the most recent negotiating session of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SP RFMO). The Fifth meeting to discuss the establishment of the SP RFMO wrapped up week-long negotiations on March 14, 2008 in Guayaquil, Ecuador, though details on implementation of the interim measures, consistent with UN GA 61/105, agreed upon at the Renaca meeting in May 2007 were woefully lacking. While for the first time, participants addressed a number of important aspects that needed airing, it is clear that much more work needs to be done before the SP RFMO can implement a leadership role incorporating an ecosystem approach to fisheries management for the conservation of and protection of marine living resources, including vulnerable marine ecosystems, as mandated by United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 61/105. Only one government, New Zealand, presented a draft detailed plan for implementing conservation and management measures for high seas bottom fisheries, and the New Zealand plan still falls short of effective implementation of UN GA 61/105, while other States continue to license high seas bottom fishing vessels in the region, yet have not provided information on whether or how these deep-sea fisheries will be managed to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. For more details on the outcome of this meeting, see the DSCC website: <http://www.savethehighseas.org/display.cfm?ID=168>. The next meeting will take place from 6-10 October in Canberra.

The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) has also adopted measures for the management of high seas bottom fisheries consistent with 61/105 and States whose vessels bottom fish on the high seas are required to produce impact assessments for the meeting of CCAMLR in October 2008. In the North Atlantic, however, NAFO and NEAFC both missed opportunities last year to begin the process of implementing 61/105; instead they have scheduled Extraordinary Meetings this year (in May and July respectively) to negotiate regulations that would bring them in line with the UNGA resolution. Time is running out for these organizations to adopt and implement measures consistent with 61/105: the UN GA resolution calls for a halt to high seas bottom fishing by December 31st 2008 unless or until measures have been adopted and implemented.

In December 2007, the DSCC produced a review of measures adopted as of the end of 2007 by the abovementioned and other regional fisheries management organizations and

arrangements, including Interim Measures in areas where no such organizations currently exist. This can be found at <http://www.savethehighseas.org/display.cfm?ID=166>

Finally, the UN FAO hosted a Technical Consultation to draft International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas in February 2008. While progress was made on defining key elements of UN GA 61/105 in relation to identifying vulnerable marine ecosystems, assessing the impacts of bottom fisheries, and determining significant adverse impacts, the Technical Consultation did not complete the Guidelines. One of the difficulties encountered at the Technical Consultation was the under-representation of developing States. A follow-up meeting has been scheduled by the FAO for late August 2008. A summary of the meeting of the Technical Consultation, in which representatives of the DSCC participated as observers, can be found at <http://www.savethehighseas.org/display.cfm?ID=167>

The Latest Science/in the Media

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), global warming is exacerbating the decline of fish stocks as a result of pollution and overharvesting. UNEP reports in its recent publication, "In Dead Water", that "at least three quarters of the globe's key fishing grounds may become seriously impacted by changes in circulation as a result of the oceans natural pumping systems fading and falling."

Moreover, "The worst concentration of cumulative impacts of climate change with existing pressures of over-harvest, bottom trawling, invasive species infestations, coastal development and pollution appear to be concentrated in 10-15 per cent of the oceans...and is concurrent with today's most important fishing grounds." The report notes that cold-water and deep water corals could be affected by acidification by 2050 and that bottom trawling is among the most damaging and unsustainable fishing practices at the scales often seen today. The report can be found at: <http://unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=528&ArticleID=5751&l=en> along with numerous media reports and features, including: <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/03/24/eco.aboutfishing/index.html>

The devastation caused by bottom trawling has also been recently featured in the news as a result of a presentation by Les Watling and John Amos on February 15 at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Footage of the plumes of sediment dredged up by bottom trawlers can be seen from space in satellite images. See for example this story that ran on the Fox network in the United States: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,333175,00.html>

On February 14, researchers from the US National Science Foundation (NSF) published the first global map showing the total human effect on the world's oceans. The findings were dramatic: More than 40% of the ocean is heavily impacted by human activities, and no area is unaffected. According to the NSF press release, "[h]uman influence on the ocean varies dramatically across various ecosystems. The most heavily affected areas include coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, rocky reefs and shelves and seamounts." See <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/319/5865/948> for the abstract and link to Science magazine. A New York Times editorial commenting on this study noted that "[t]he United Nations could do far more. Successful in banning huge drift nets, it has made few inroads on bottom trawling, a ruthless form of industrial fishing. And it has gone nowhere in its effort to persuade Japan and the European Union to stop their assault on the world's shark populations, which have been decimated beyond belief. The World Trade Organization could also usefully limit the huge government subsidies that allow most of the world's industrial fleets to stay afloat." http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/opinion/09sun2.html?_r=2&ref=opinion&oref=slogin&oref=slogin . See also a [New York Times feature](#) on the subject.

Given the spate of alarming stories documenting the decline of the world's fisheries and oceans, governments should take urgent action to secure protection for global marine

ecosystems. Indeed, the status of fish stocks on the high seas is far worse than those found exclusively within the EEZs, as was made clear in the 2007 report by the UN FAO on the State of Fisheries and Aquaculture. The report states (page 33) that "*Evidence seems to suggest that the state of straddling stocks and of other high seas fishery resources is even more problematic...with nearly two-thirds of the stocks for which the state of exploitation can be determined being classified as overexploited or depleted. Although these high seas fishery resources represent only a small fraction of the world fishery resources upon which millions of people are critically dependent for their food and livelihood, these correspond to fish stocks that are key indicators of the state of an overwhelming part of the ocean ecosystem, which appears to be more overexploited than the EEZs*". (www.fao.org/docrep/009/A0699e/A0699E05.htm#5.1.1)

Unfortunately, many States still view the high seas as a global opportunity to expand fishing operations. A fleet of large vessels from the European Union has recently begun fishing on the high seas of the Southeast Pacific on already heavily exploited stocks of jack mackerel and Russia appears poised to greatly expand its high seas fishing operations as indicted in the article below:

22.03.2008 / 12:02 Fishing in World Ocean to grow 50 times - fisheries committee

MOSCOW. March 22. KAZINFORM. The state committee for fisheries, Goskomrybolovstvo, plans to build up the production of biological resources in the open part of the world ocean 50 times, the committee's chief, Andrei Krainyi told a conference that gathered the chiefs of the committee's territorial divisions and federal agencies on Friday.

"At present Russian fishermen catch 30,000 tonnes in the open part of the World Ocean," he said adding that in a year from now the catch was to be increased to 1.5 million tonnes.

A fleet of Russian fishing boats will be dispatched to ocean areas close to the economic zones of Peru and Chile, boasting gigantic biological resources. This year a special research expedition will make a voyage to this area to estimate the reserves more accurately, Kazinform refers to Itar-Tass.

"The scientists are to identify the best areas, where Russian ships will be fishing in 2009," the official said.

The fisheries committee chief believes Russia should never miss the chance to be present in the so-called conventional areas, where fishing is liable to the operation of various agreements.

"Otherwise our country may lose fishing quotas there. In various international organizations there is the historical principle of quotas distribution. If a country carries out no fishing in such zones for a long time, the quotas may be taken away from it," Krainyi warned.

He recalled that in the Soviet era half of the annual catch was brought from the open areas of the world ocean and the conventional areas.

<http://www.inform.kz/showarticle.php?lang=eng&id=162053>

On a more positive note, we highly recommend that you view this five minute piece with spectacular footage of deep sea and other marine life: <http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/206>

Other benthic species information from a recent Antarctic survey can be found [here](#).

Upcoming meetings

- UN Working Group on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. 28 April – 2 May, New York, New York.
- UN Fish Stocks Agreement meeting of the Parties, April, New York, NY.
- NAFO Extraordinary Meeting, April 30-7 May
- 9th CBD Conference of Parties. Scheduled to review of progress on high seas biodiversity conservation and MPAs May 19-30, Bonn, Germany
- States Parties Consultation on UNCLOS (SPLOS), 16 - 27 June, New York, NY.
- UNICPOLOS – 23-27 June. Discussions on maritime security (highlighting problem of flags of convenience and non-compliance) June, New York, NY.
- FAO -- Technical Consultation to draft a legally-binding instrument on port State measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, 23 - 27 June
- NEAFC Extraordinary Meeting, 1 -3 July, London
- International Seabed Authority Assembly July, Kingston, Jamaica
- FAO Technical Consultation on International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas, 25 - 29 August, Rome
- NAFO Annual Meeting, 22 - 26 September, Vigo, Spain
- IUCN World Conservation Congress, October 5-15, Barcelona, Spain
- SPRFMO, 6th negotiating session, 6 - 10 October, Canberra, Australia
- CCAMLR (Commission and Scientific Committee), 27 October -7 November, Hobart, Australia
- NEAFC Annual Meeting, 10-15 November
- London (Dumping) Convention, November, London, UK