

# Statement to the United Nations General Assembly

## on behalf of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition



SEAS AT RISK



**My name is Karen Sack. I am here today on behalf of my organisation, Greenpeace International, but am speaking on behalf of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition representing more than 30 organizations from around the world whose members care deeply about the oceans. These include, amongst others: The Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), The Natural Resources Defense Council, Greenpeace International, Conservation International, Oceana, Seas at Risk, the Living Oceans Society, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Ocean Futures Society, the Center for International and Environmental Law (CIEL), The Environment and Conservation Organisations of New Zealand (ECO), Centro Ecoceanos, Centro de Conservación Cetacea, Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (OLCA), Confederación de Gente de Mar (Congemar), CeDePesca, Mundo Azul, ProNaturaleza, Derecho Ambiente y recursos Naturales, SPDA (Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental) Universidad Estatal Federico Villareal and ECOPLAYAS.**

Today (November 16th, 2004) marks the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This groundbreaking treaty was a major step toward international recognition that the oceans are a truly global resource, and that we all share responsibility for protecting, preserving, and sustainably and equitably using them.

UNCLOS has blossomed over the years, with new implementing agreements and arrangements springing from its robust framework. Today we celebrate that framework and embrace again the promise it holds for all of humankind and our oceans.

However, while paying homage to UNCLOS, we must also recognize the huge task that lies ahead. Ten years ago, the focus of oceans policy negotiators was on ways to secure sovereignty over waters adjacent to coastal states. Today it is clear that unless States deal comprehensively with the threats to

the High Seas, we will face a future devoid of vibrant ocean ecosystems, thriving fish populations, and deep sea biodiversity.

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The Secretary General's own Report to the General Assembly states that, "according to the FAO, the global situation of the marine fish stocks for which information is available continued to deteriorate ... 47% of major fish stocks were fully exploited having reached their maximum sustainable limits; 18% were overexploited without any prospect for expansion or increased production; and the remaining 10% were significantly depleted." The Report also noted that an amount equaling almost one quarter of the world's total fish catch is discarded as bycatch. Recent scientific reports have also determined that 300,000 small whales, dolphins and porpoises die each year (one every two minutes)

and all six endangered marine turtles, more than 250,000 loggerhead and leatherback turtles in particular, are caught as fisheries bycatch. Overcapacity, illegal and unregulated fishing, land-sourced pollution, and the impacts of exotic and alien species from ballast water are also highlighted as having negative impacts on marine ecosystems and their capacity to remain functionally intact.

**Primary among the threats facing high seas biological diversity, are the impacts of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.**

Eliminating IUU fishing is not simply a fisheries management issue. Since some of the most destructive high seas fishing is unregulated and then goes unreported, this has major implications on marine living resources in international waters. Addressing this problem therefore requires attention from all the international agencies and agreements that either have competence over, or an interest in, managing the biological diversity of the High Seas. For the past two years, the UNGA has called for urgent consideration of ways to conserve vulnerable high seas ecosystems. The World Summit on Sustainable Development emphasized the need to maintain vulnerable high seas ecosystems, and in February of this year, the Convention on Biological Diversity called for the United Nations General Assembly to take urgent short, medium and long term measures to conserve vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems. Also in February of this year, more than 1000 conservation biologists and marine scientists from 69 countries, called on the General Assembly to take swift action to protect imperiled deep-sea coral and sponge ecosystems by declaring an immediate moratorium on bottom trawl fishing on the high seas.

**The threats posed by bottom trawl fishing to vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems, including seamounts and cold-water corals, are numerous and serious.**

These deep-sea features typically support slow-growing, long-lived species, which are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Fish inhabiting deep-sea ecosystems can live for up to 150 years and coral structures may reach several thousands of years in age. A single bottom trawl across such a vulnerable area not only usually destroys these coral structures, but alters the topography in such a way that they may never recover. In addition, it is believed that because many of the creatures – some of which have yet to be discovered – only occur in specific seamount ecosystems, they can be driven to extinction before they have even been identified.

The current Resolutions before the General Assembly again speak of the need for urgent measures to be taken to protect deep sea biodiversity. Unfortunately, however, the resolutions fall short of the comprehensive and immediate protection that is so sorely needed – and required by the CBD and under UNCLOS obligations to

conserve the marine environment. A temporary halt to high seas bottom trawling would provide an important opportunity to gather information about deep-sea ecosystems, and to then use it to inform the policy making process to ensure that the deep sea does not follow the path of the world's coastal fisheries and marine habitats. As such, at the same time as the UNGA could declare a temporary moratorium on high seas bottom trawling, it is crucial that a process be initiated to carry out the necessary scientific and management assessments of deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystems which would enable them to be managed with a precautionary and ecosystem-based approach.

The members of the DSCC believe that it is time to stop calling for urgent consideration of measures, and actually take action. The sooner a moratorium on high seas bottom trawl fishing is in place, the sooner we can begin to constructively address the destruction of deep-sea biological diversity, assess the extent of that diversity, and develop the measures necessary to conserve it and regulate potentially destructive activities. This is the UNGAs opportunity to build on, test, apply and enforce the provisions available in existing legal regimes.

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As the current steward of this global commons, it is essential that United Nations member states ensure that while they take advantage of the rights offered by UNCLOS, they are equally cognizant and duty-bound by the obligations that go with those rights, and are proactive in ensuring that they meet those obligations.

The global conservation community, represented by this coalition urges all states to meet the calls made in the Resolutions before them today, to agree to a immediate interim moratorium on bottom trawling on the sensitive habitats of the high seas and to take the necessary steps towards adopting and implementing effective legally binding regimes to protect deep sea biodiversity, eliminate IUU fishing and manage the bottom fisheries of the high seas. In doing so, consistent with UNCLOS, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, the Compliance Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and many other elements of international law, the investment to develop these instruments would be rewarded with results and a brighter future for all.

**Today, United Nations member states are faced with a real and unique opportunity to take action to mitigate and reverse the negative results of human impacts on the marine environment. With the knowledge that states already do have, immediate action can and must be taken to ensure a vibrant, sustainable and equitable future for the oceans and its users.**

*Thank you*



The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, an alliance of over 20 international organisations, representing millions of people in countries around the world, is calling for a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling. For further information about the Coalition visit [www.savethehighseas.org](http://www.savethehighseas.org)