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**Contact:
Ben Enticknap, Oceana: (503) 329-4465
Kate Slusark, NRDC: (212) 727-4592
Matthew Gianni: +31 646 16 88 99**

INTERNATIONAL DELEGATION ADVANCES HABITAT PROTECTIONS AND NEW FISHERY MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION IN PACIFIC OCEAN

Oceana, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition: Agreement will protect over 16.1 million square miles of seafloor from destructive fishing

Vancouver, Canada – Delegates from around the world marked a major step forward in controlling highly destructive bottom trawl fishing and other bottom contact gear Friday, when they concluded talks for a new treaty to manage bottom fisheries in international waters on the North Pacific Ocean, according to the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, the Natural Resources Defense Council and Oceana. Negotiations between the U.S., Canada, Japan, Russia, China, Korea and Taiwan (Chinese Taipei) began in August 2006 and concluded late last week in Vancouver, Canada.

Bottom trawls are massive weighted nets with steel doors that are dragged along the ocean floor, ripping up or scooping out whatever they encounter, including ancient coral forests, gardens of anemones and entire fields of sea sponges. Participating nations, acting on a commitment they made at the United Nations General Assembly, agreed to interim conservation measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, like seamounts, deep sea corals and hydrothermal vents, in international waters. Seamounts, or under water mountains, act as magnets for diverse marine life in the expanse of open ocean.

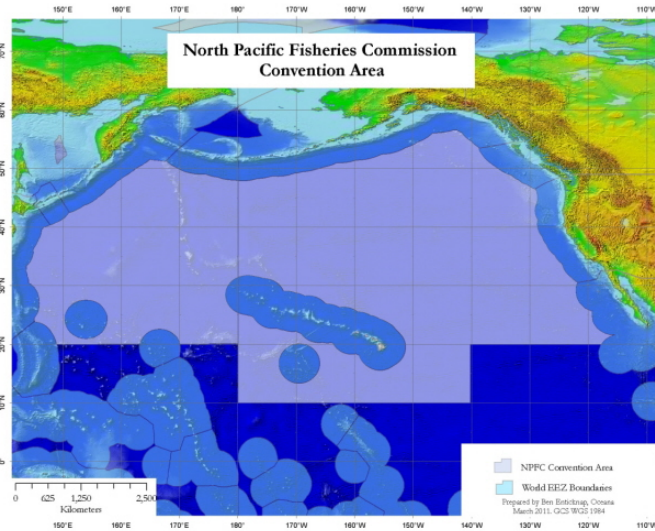
The interim conservation measures halt the expansion of bottom trawling and other bottom contact fishing gear, require an assessment of the long-term sustainability of fish stocks, and a determination that fishing would not have significant effects on sensitive habitats as a condition to allow fishing. If fishing were to commence, however, participating nations must still meet UN General Assembly commitments to require trawlers to stop fishing if they encounter evidence of vulnerable marine ecosystems, such as deep water corals, during the course of fishing operations and to ensure fish species are managed sustainably. The treaty itself will establish a new international fishery management organization, the North Pacific Fisheries Commission, to oversee implementation and enforcement of regulations for high seas bottom fisheries and other high seas fisheries for species not already managed by existing treaties.

This action is particularly significant as today's technology is bringing bottom trawlers deeper and farther from shore than they could ever reach before, into high seas areas populated with slow-growing deep-sea fish and corals that are especially slow to recover from trawling. Nets can be 200 feet wide and 40 feet high, weighing as much as 1,000 pounds and reaching depths of more than 5,000 feet.

Oceana's Pacific Project Manager, Ben Enticknap, participated as a member of the U.S. Delegation to these negotiations. "The U.S. worked with a diverse group of nations to freeze the footprint of bottom

trawling in international waters, freeze the level of fishing effort, and develop a new fisheries management organization focused on sustainable fisheries and healthy ocean ecosystems.”

Lisa Speer, Director of the International Oceans Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council and member of the U.S. delegation to the negotiations, said: “Bottom trawling is hands down, the most destructive way to fish. It clear-cuts the ocean floor, devastating vibrant corals and other life in its path. Now, over 16 million square miles of the Pacific Ocean – and the life that makes its home there – will be safe from unregulated trawling.”



North Pacific Fisheries Commission
Convention Area

Matthew Gianni, Political and Policy Advisor for the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition attended the meeting as an official observer. “The conclusion of these negotiations is a major step forward in closing the gap in the international regime for the management of high seas fisheries in the North Pacific. The treaty must now be signed and ratified, and in the meantime the interim conservation measures to regulate deep-sea bottom fisheries agreed to this week must be fully and effectively implemented as a matter of urgency. ”

Participating nations agreed to conclude negotiations on the convention text that will act as the framework for the new North Pacific Fisheries Commission. The

commission will manage all fisheries in international waters of the western and eastern North Pacific from an area south of the Hawaiian Islands to international waters off Russia and Alaska, except for those regulated under existing treaties, like tuna and salmon. The convention includes key principles for the long-term conservation and the sustainable use of fisheries, while protecting marine ecosystems. It prohibits fishing for four scientific orders of cold water corals and prevents the expansion of fishing without prior assessment on the long-term sustainability of fish stocks.

The interim conservation measures take effect immediately and will be in place during the period that the treaty is signed and ratified, and the new Commission is formally established. There is additional work to be done to address a 5.1 million square mile gap in international waters between the area managed by the new Commission and the existing South Pacific Regional Fishery Management Organization.

More information on the North Pacific Fisheries Commission can be found at: <http://nwpbfo.nomaki.jp/index.html>

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Oceana campaigns to protect and restore the world's oceans. Our teams of marine scientists, economists, lawyers and advocates win specific and concrete policy changes to reduce pollution and to prevent the irreversible collapse of fish populations, marine mammals and other sea life. Global in scope and dedicated to conservation, Oceana has campaigners based in North America (Washington, DC; Juneau, AK; Kotzebue, AK; Portland, OR; Monterey, CA; New York, NY), Europe (Madrid, Spain; Brussels, Belgium) Central America (Belize City, Belize) and South America (Santiago, Chile). More than 500,000 members and e-activists in over 150 countries have already joined Oceana. www.oceana.org

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Livingston, Montana, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org.

The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition is a coalition of over 70 organizations worldwide advocating protection of the deep-sea in international waters from the destructive impact of deep-sea fishing. www.savethehighseas.org