



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **THE SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN NEEDS REAL PROTECTION, NOT VOLUNTARY HALF MEASURES.**

The proposal by New Zealand high seas fishing company Sealord, together with three other fishing companies, to voluntarily refrain from deep-sea fishing in limited areas of the international waters of the Indian Ocean, falls woefully short of the action needed to protect deep-sea corals, seamounts and other unique marine ecosystems in the region.

The proposal occurs at a time when international momentum towards a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling is growing ahead of negotiations on this issue at the UN General Assembly in October and November. Political Advisor to the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition, Matthew Gianni said, "Industry is recognizing that the time will soon come when long overdue multilateral regulations will be imposed as required by international law. This half measure looks like a nod to self-regulation designed to forestall more comprehensive and legally binding regulations".

Under international maritime law, States and not industry are responsible for the management of fisheries on the high seas. That the vacuum exists to enable such limited self-regulation to occur points to the failure of New Zealand and other countries concerned to effectively regulate their high seas fleets. For almost a decade Sealord and the other companies involved in this initiative have engaged in unregulated (IUU) deep-sea bottom fishing on the high seas targeting seamounts and other sensitive deep-sea ecosystems

It is also unclear how much, if any protection, the proposal will afford. Without an independent scientific assessment the industry plan may simply consist of closing areas which have already been fished out or where there is little fish of value in the first place. More importantly, the proposal does not address the lack of regulation and the destructive impact of deep-sea bottom trawl fishing in the remainder of the ocean. Populations of orange roughy targeted by these companies' fleets over the past five years or more have already collapsed in many areas in the region and scientists have expressed clear concern over the damage that is likely to have occurred to deep-sea corals and other unique and vulnerable species in the process.

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Matthew Gianni, ““While this move is encouraging for its suggestion that the fishing industry acknowledges the threat posed by bottom trawling, it is of limited practical value, omitting many if not most of the high seas areas likely to be vulnerable to bottom trawl fishing. If anything, the industry proposal points to the glaring failure of States to effectively exercise control over their high seas bottom trawl fleets to prevent over fishing and damage to the marine environment. ”

Nothing short of a total closure of the high seas of the South Indian Ocean to deep-water bottom trawl fishing until a comprehensive and independent scientific assessment of the biodiversity of the region is carried out and effective regulations are put in place, will protect deep-sea ecosystems on the high seas of the Indian Ocean.

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### **Notes:**

The New Zealand orange roughy fishery in the Southern Indian Ocean is a classic example of exporting over fishing and the destruction of deep-water coral ecosystems from national waters on to the high seas.

The New Zealand industry pioneered the development of the deep-sea bottom trawl fishery for orange roughy in New Zealand waters in the 1970s. By 1988 the catch had reached its peak of approximately 55,000 mt in New Zealand waters according to the UN FAO. The catch has since fallen to approximately 18,000 mt in 2003.

In the same year (1988), New Zealand vessels began deep-water trawl fishing for orange roughy on the high seas between Australia and New Zealand. Since then the New Zealand industry has progressively expanded the scope of the orange roughy fishery on the high seas, moving into the Southwest Pacific Ocean in 1993, then south of Australia in 1997 and into the Southern Indian Ocean off South Africa and Madagascar in 1999.

In 2001 a New Zealand vessel was reported to be fishing orange roughy in the North Atlantic. In every case these fisheries have been characterized by serial depletion – high initial catches followed by a quick depletion or collapse of the fish stocks within a few years.

In the only high seas fishery – the South Tasman Rise fishery for orange roughy south of the Australian EEZ - where observers were on board the vessels and monitoring the catch from the beginning of the fishery, New Zealand boats were bringing up 10 tons of deep-sea coral in their nets for every four tons of orange roughy caught and kept onboard.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, the Australian government science agency, in 2001 stated in reference to the high seas bottom trawl fishery in the Southwest Indian Ocean that, based on bio-geographic patterns in other ocean regions “there is reason to assume that there is high and unique benthic biodiversity, which will be destroyed by unregulated fishing [in the Southwest Indian ocean].” (Butler AJ, Koslow JA, Snelgrove PVR, Juniper SK, Review of the benthic biodiversity of the deep sea. CSIRO Marine Research, Australia 2001)

A map of the industry proposal can be found at:  
[Http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU0607/S00061.htm](http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU0607/S00061.htm)

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