

Open letter from Australian Scientists concerned with the protection of deep-sea biodiversity

The Hon. John Howard, MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

4 November 2005

Dear Prime Minister,

We urge you to take advantage of an historic opportunity to secure significant protection for the world's deep-ocean ecosystems on the High Seas – the two-thirds of the world's oceans that lie beyond the jurisdiction of any nation. There is growing international support for a United Nations General Assembly resolution to put in place a global moratorium on High Seas bottom trawling.

We are calling on you to promote the negotiation of a moratorium on High Seas bottom trawling at the United Nations General Assembly this year, and to show leadership in regional fora to secure support for that moratorium.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that over the past several years the scientific community has expressed increasing concern over the impact of bottom trawl fishing on cold-water corals and other vulnerable deep-sea species and ecosystems.

At the 10th Deep-Sea Biology Symposium and the 2nd International Symposium on Deep Sea Corals, both held in 2003, over 100 scientists signed a letter of concern to the United Nations General Assembly. The letter stated:

- populations of numerous commercially important species of deep-sea fish and precious corals associated with seamounts, ridges, plateaus, continental slopes, coral reefs and sponge fields in the deep-sea have been serially depleted by fishing;
- benthic habitats and communities have been severely damaged by fishing activities;
- the biological characteristics of most deep-sea species render the deep sea particularly sensitive to anthropogenic disturbance and exploitation;
- although knowledge of deep-sea biodiversity is limited, evidence to date suggests that deep water habitats such as coral, seamount, seep and vent ecosystems are likely to harbour distinct assemblages of diverse and highly endemic species.

The lack of effective international regulations for the conservation of natural systems and the protection of the biodiversity of the deep sea on the High Seas, as well as within areas

of national jurisdiction (EEZs), is a cause of great concern. In this regard, consistent with the precautionary approach, we recommend that:

- the conservation and protection of the biodiversity of the deep sea is the responsibility of all nations, in particular on the global ocean commons – the High Seas;
- the UN General Assembly should adopt a moratorium on deep-sea bottom trawl fishing on the High Seas effective immediately.

Subsequently, 1,136 scientists from 69 countries, including over forty marine biologists from Australia, endorsed the *Scientists' Statement on Protecting the World's Deep-sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems* released at the February 2004 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, calling on the UN General Assembly to adopt a moratorium on bottom trawl fishing on the High Seas. In December 2004, the UK Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution expressed similar concern with respect to deep-sea bottom trawl fishing, urging that it be banned in national waters of the UK.

Prime Minister, the resolution of this issue requires strong international leadership, something which the Australian government has shown in its determined efforts to end commercial whaling. We ask you to again take the lead on an international marine conservation issue by building support at the UN General Assembly for a moratorium on High Seas bottom trawling. This is a vital action needed to protect deep-sea corals and other vulnerable species before more of these ecosystems are irreparably destroyed and their wealth lost to present and future generations.

The following individuals have signed the letter (affiliations are for identification only, and do not imply endorsement by the signers' institutions):

Name	Surname	Qualification	Institute
Paul	Adam	Dr	University of New South Wales
Phil	Alderslade	Dr	Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Helen	Arundel	Dr	Deakin University
Nicola	Beynon	M.Sc.	Humane Society International, Sydney
David	Booth	Dr	University of Technology, Sydney
Samantha	Burgess	Ph.D. candidate	South Australian Research and Development Institute
Jeremy	Colman	Ph.D.	Woodside Energy, Perth
Sean	Connolly	Dr	James Cook University
Grey	Coupland	Dr	University of Western Australia
Andy	Davis	Dr	University of Wollongong
Celine	De Silva	Dr	Deakin University,
Matt	Edmunds	Dr	Australian Marine Ecology, Victoria
Simon	Foale	Dr	The Australian National University,
Karina	Hall	Dr	Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre
Rick	Hamilton	Dr	The Nature Conservancy, Brisbane

Rob	Harcourt	Dr	Macquarie University
Euan	Harvey	Dr	University of Western Australia
Peter	Harrison	Dr	Southern Cross University
Julia	Howitt	Dr	Deakin University,
Pat	Hutchings	Dr	Australian Museum
Sarah	Irvine	Ph.D. candidate	CSIRO Marine Research, WA
Geoff	Jones	Dr	James Cook University
Katherine	Kemper	Dr	South Australian Museum
Mike	Kingsford	Prof	James Cook University
Helen	Larson	Dr	Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Laurie	Laurenson	Dr	Deakin University
Jeffrey	Leis	Dr	Australian Museum
Helene	Marsh	Prof	James Cook University
Mark	Norman	Dr	Museum of Victoria
Michael	Mackie	Dr	WA Department of Fisheries
Justin	McDonald	Dr	University of Western Australia
Tom	McRae	Dr	Deakin University
Alan	Mainwaring	Dr	Deakin University
Julie	Martin	Dr	NT Dept of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines
John	Paxton	Dr	Australian Museum
Alisatair	Poore	Dr	University of New South Wales
Garry	Poore	Dr	Museum Victoria
Hugh	Possingham	Prof	The University of Queensland
Gerry	Quinn	Prof	Deakin University
Garry	Russ	Dr	James Cook University
Barry	Russell	Dr	Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
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Iain	Suthers	Dr	University of New South Wales
David	Sutton	Dr	University of Western Australia
Stephen	Swearer	Dr	The University of Melbourne
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Lynne	van Herwerden	Dr	James Cook University
John	Veron	Dr	Australian Institute of Marine Science
Di	Walker	Dr	University of Western Australia
Geoff	Wescott	Dr	Deakin University
David	Williams	Dr	Australian Institute of Marine Science
Joel	Williams	BSC(Hons)	Australian Marine Ecology
Jane	Williamson	Dr	Macquarie University
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Joanne Wilson Dr
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