

DSCC Intervention to Present Scientific Paper

Jan 28 2021

Thank you Mr Chair

Firstly, we thank the EU and Australia for their support of transparency in this session, as well as generally, and thank the Chair, Secretariat and Members likewise, and we commend the practice of SPRFMO to include observers in its important work.

Mr Chair and members, we are in a biodiversity crisis. We have focused on VMEs in this meeting as we have in the bottom fishing workshop and the scientific committee because bottom trawling poses an enormous threat to vulnerable marine ecosystems. The UNGA looked at this issue closely over four reviews and two workshops and reached the hard fought and closely negotiated texts which are the UNGA resolutions starting with resolution 61/105. RFMOs across the world have strived to implement those resolutions, and while their implementation varies considerably from region to region, SPFMO is the only RFMO which has adopted a bottom fishing regulation that explicitly permits trawling in areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur. Moreover the measure is heavily dependent on a model which is itself based on far too little data and contains major uncertainties. To justify continued deep-sea bottom trawling on the basis of such a model therefore not only flies in the face of the UNGA resolutions and FAO Guidelines but is in contravention of the precautionary approach.

Scientists Les Watling of the University of Hawaii and Peter Auster of the University of Connecticut have studied VMEs for many decades, and wrote in their paper for the SC that and I quote:

"Habitat suitability models and related geospatial analyses give an impression of precision and quantitative certainty while implicitly ignoring critical but poorly known elements of the ecology of communities and ecosystem dynamics" such as species life histories, species interactions, connectivity, movement ecology and oceanographic processes.

Management decisions, especially given the known characteristics of VMEcosystems, should be made by explicitly addressing the limits to understanding and the consequences of errors in decision-making." end quote

These consequences include the loss of biodiversity, degradation of the resilience of these ecosystems and the risk of species extinctions.

The reason we have emphasised the science surrounding VMEs is to underline that our concerns with the CMM are based on science ,law and policy. Science we have addressed. Law because we must follow our Convention, which itself emphasises the need to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs, as well as the precautionary approach as established in the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and our Convention. And policy because we are in a biodiversity crisis.

For all these reasons, our brief to the Commission has focused on the need to follow the UNGA resolutions, bearing in mind that there will be a UNGA bottom fishing review next year, rather than to continue to go down the so-called spatial management rabbit hole which recent science, led by Dr Roland Pitcher amongst others, has shown to be so problematic. We want to be absolutely clear: there is absolutely no basis for allowing the destruction of VMEs - whether it be 10%, 20% or any other number. The UNGA resolutions require preventing SAIs on VMEs, and this cannot and must not be reinterpreted to mean otherwise.

For these reasons, and we believe recent history gives us ample support, DSCC does consider that bottom trawling on seamounts causes unacceptable damage and should not be permitted.

Thank you for your attention and I am happy to answer any questions.