



Press Release

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO CALL FOR GREATER PROTECTION OF THE DEEP SEA

The UN General Assembly will today (4th December) call upon all high seas fishing nations to intensify their efforts to protect vulnerable deep-sea life in the international waters of the world's oceans.

Gathered for the annual Oceans and Law of the Sea debate, the General Assembly will adopt a resolution which requires high seas fishing nations to conduct impact assessments to determine the potential impacts of deep-sea bottom fishing on the seabed and adopt and implement regulations to prevent damage to vulnerable deep ocean habitats *before* they permit, or authorize, their fishing fleets to engage in deep-sea fishing on the high seas. The General Assembly will also call on fishing nations to publicize the impact assessments to allow the international community as a whole to judge whether sufficient protections are in place.

“Bottom trawl fishing, the most common method of bottom fishing on the high seas, involves dragging heavy steel plates, cables and large nets across the ocean floor which can severely damage deep-sea coral reefs, sponge fields and other vulnerable deep-sea habitats” said Matthew Gianni of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC). “The UN Resolution is designed to ensure that high seas fishing nations prohibit bottom fishing on the high seas unless environmental impact assessments have been conducted and regulations are put into place beforehand to prevent the destruction of deep-sea biodiversity.”

The 2009 resolution reaffirms and strengthens a landmark resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006. States and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) have been slow to implement the measures in the 2006 resolution which called for the management of high seas bottom fisheries to protect cold-water corals, seamounts and other areas of deep-sea biodiversity. The UN General Assembly will agree to a review, in 2011, of the actions taken by States and RFMOs to implement the 2009 resolution.

A report released by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in last year estimated that eighty percent of the high seas bottom fishing fleet was flagged to only ten countries: Spain, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, Australia, Japan, France, Portugal, Belize and Estonia. Over one-third of the fleet was flagged to European Union (EU) countries with the EU fleet taking half or more of the total global high seas bottom fishing catch. Most deep-sea species targeted in high seas fisheries are either overexploited, depleted, or their status is unknown.

“The UN General Assembly is effectively calling for fisheries management on the high seas to be brought into the 21st century - any other large-scale industrial activity in the marine environment would require prior environmental impact assessments before being permitted” said Gianni. “Moreover, deep-sea corals, like their shallow water counterparts, are under threat from the acidification of the world’s oceans due to the increased absorption of CO2 from the atmosphere. This is all the more reason to prohibit the senseless and entirely unnecessary destruction of deep-sea corals by bottom trawling so as to allow these ecosystems the maximum capacity possible to survive the deleterious impacts of global climate change.”

ENDS

Notes:

The 2009 UN General Assembly Oceans and Law of the Sea Debate commences Friday 4th December and is expected to conclude that day. The resolution was negotiated and agreed in November.

For further information please contact:

Mirella von Lindenfels + 44 (0) 7717 844 352

Matthew Gianni + 31 646 168 899