

# 2011-2012 Overview

In a relatively short period of time, the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) has secured a global commitment to protect the deep sea in areas beyond national jurisdiction from the harmful impacts of deep-sea fishing. It has done so by putting the issue of high seas conservation and the destruction caused to deep-sea ecosystems by bottom fishing at the top of the global oceans and fisheries agenda.

As a result of these efforts, 2011 is a critical year. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), for the first time ever, will conduct an open review of regional and national actions to protect deep-sea species and ecosystems on the high seas from the harmful impacts of fishing. The review will specifically assess the extent to which UNGA resolutions adopted over the past seven years have been implemented by high seas fishing nations and regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs).

## Goals, objective and strategies

The DSCC remains focused on achieving two overarching goals:

- i) To substantially reduce the greatest threats to life in the deep seas; and**
- ii) To safeguard their long-term health, integrity, and resilience.**

Our objective also remains unchanged:

Securing permanent protection for vulnerable deep sea ecosystems and species from deep-sea fishing on the high seas.

Toward these ends, we will adopt the following strategies for 2011-2012:

- 1 UN General Assembly:** DSCC will:
  - a. provide an independent global assessment of progress;
  - b. work with key governments to ensure a rigorous UN review and the necessary outcomes;
  - c. call for a halt to deep-sea fishing on the high seas until the required conservation measures are in effect and implemented;
  - d. propose further steps as necessary, to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) and deep sea species;
  - e. raise public awareness and support for protecting high seas biodiversity;
  - f. work with scientists to bring robust and best available scientific information into the UNGA negotiations;
  - g. improve UN oversight of the commitments by countries to protect biodiversity on the high seas from the harmful impacts of deep-sea fisheries – and in so doing set an important precedent for future UN oversight of other high seas activities.
- 2 Regional and national implementation of UNGA bottom fishing resolutions:** We will continue to work on a regional level through RFMOs and other relevant bodies and processes to promote the adoption of legally binding regulations to implement the UNGA resolutions for deep-sea fisheries on the high seas.
- 3 Compliance with the UNGA resolutions and regional regulations:** We will explore options for enhancing State compliance with the UNGA resolutions through the listing of endangered deep-sea species under the annexes of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES); reducing and eliminating subsidies for deep sea fishing on the high seas; designating deep water fishing on the high seas as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing if not in compliance with the UNGA resolutions; and encouraging market restrictions and trade sanctions against vessels and nations for non-compliance.

This high level advocacy work will be complemented by a public campaign, to grow increasing support for high seas and deep-sea conservation priorities, augmenting the pressure on decision makers in the run-up to the UNGA review and negotiations from September through December 2011. The DSCC website, a global and well used reference source, has been restructured to enhance its impact.

- As many as 10 million species may inhabit the deep sea: biodiversity comparable to the world's richest rainforests.
- \* Deep-sea species tend to be slow growing and late-maturing. Some deep water fishes such as the roundnose grenadier and the orange roughy live to 80 and 150 years, respectively.
- \* "Many deep sea stocks have such low productivity that sustainable levels of exploitation are probably too low to support an economically viable fishery." - The European Commission, 2007
- \* Deep-sea corals off the coast of the Hawaiian Islands may be the oldest living marine organisms known to humanity. The longest lived species found is 4,270 years.

## Background

In recent years, the protection of biodiversity in the deep-sea in areas beyond national jurisdiction – the high seas - has been extensively debated by the UNGA and other international fora. The methods used are among the most destructive used in fishing, akin to clear cutting the forest across an entire mountain range to hunt wild birds.

Trawl nets with heavy doors and rollers are dragged across the ocean floor, crushing coral, sponges other bottom (benthic) structures and lifeforms as they go. Deep-sea species in general are slow growing and slow to breed, meaning that fishing in the deep sea is often unsustainable in terms of targeted species, as well as bycatch species such as deep-sea sharks. The deep-sea corals, some of which are thousands of years old, are easily damaged and can take many decades or centuries to recover, if at all.

In addition to the damage caused, deep-sea fishing on the high seas is neither economically significant nor substantial in terms of global fisheries catch production. In 2008, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) published a report that estimated the high seas bottom fishing fleet in 2006 was no more than a few hundred vessels, catching some 250,000 tonnes of fish. This catch was valued at approximately 450 million dollars, representing only 0.3% of the marine capture fisheries worldwide.

Some 285 vessels flagged to 27 countries were estimated to be engaged in high seas bottom fisheries in 2006. Of these, 80% were flagged to only ten States - Spain, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Australia, Japan, France, Portugal, Belize and Estonia. Over one-third were flagged to EU countries with the EU fleet taking half or more of the high seas bottom catch.

## DSCC - who are we?

The DSCC was founded in 2004, to address the issue of bottom trawling on the high seas in the absence of an effective governance regime. Using strategic analysis as the basis for its campaign, the DSCC has effectively and consistently targeted the UNGA and other international fora. The coalition is made up of over 70 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), fishers organizations and law and policy institutes, all committed to protecting the deep sea. A coordination team works together with a Steering Group that currently consists of the Ecology Action Centre, Greenpeace International, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council, Pew Environment Group and Seas at Risk. The DSCC has developed a formidable international team of scientists, policy and communication experts, lawyers and political activists who on behalf of the deep sea have established a strong reputation and profile on the issue at the UN and in other fora.

## DSCC Key Successes

**As a result of the DSCC's work and that of its member organizations and co-operating organizations, the UNGA process has successfully committed high seas fishing nations and RFMOs to implement a series of actions to protect the deep sea from the harmful impacts of fishing.**

- In 2004, the UNGA adopted **Resolution 59/25** calling on high seas fishing nations and RFMOs to take urgent action to protect VMES from destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawl fishing, on the high seas.
- UNGA **Resolution 61/105** adopted in December 2006 went a step further, committing nations that authorise their vessels to engage in bottom fisheries on the high seas to, *inter alia*:
  - o conduct prior impact assessments of bottom fishing on the high seas;
  - o manage bottom fishing activities to prevent significant adverse impacts to VMES;
  - o close areas of the high seas to bottom fishing where VMES are known or likely to occur unless the fishing in these areas can be managed to prevent harm to such ecosystems;
  - o ensure the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks and species; and
  - o implement measures in accordance with the precautionary approach, the ecosystem approach and international law.



MALCOLM PULLMAN / GREENPEACE

In addition to the damage caused, deep-sea fishing on the high seas is neither economically significant nor substantial in terms of global fisheries catch production

- A set of **International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas** was then negotiated under the auspices of the UN FAO and adopted in August 2008. These Guidelines established agreed standards for States conducting impact assessments for high seas bottom fisheries and measuring the impacts.
- In 2009, the UNGA reviewed the implementation of Resolution 61/105 and determined that it had not been implemented sufficiently. As a result, the UNGA adopted **Resolution 64/72** which both reaffirmed previous commitments and called for additional actions. The new resolution made it clear that if the crucial steps, such as prior impact assessments are not carried out, then fishing should not be allowed to continue. The UNGA agreed to review the effectiveness of these measures in September 2011.

Each of the above mentioned resolutions has been progressively stronger than the last. Though much more still needs to be done, this momentum has led to increasing action by States and RFMOs to regulate deep-sea fishing on the high seas, in particular bottom trawling.

The DSCC has been the driving force for this conservation advocacy. Moreover, we have worked with numerous governments as well as relevant RFMOs to establish national-level regulations and multilateral regional regulations, respectively, for high seas bottom fisheries, incorporating the measures called for by the UNGA.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since 2006 the DSCC and its member organizations have been participated in meetings of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the North Pacific RFMO negotiations and the South Pacific RFMO negotiations advocating the adoption of regulations by these treaty organizations to implement the UNGA resolutions on deep-sea fisheries.

To date, States and RFMOs have not fully implemented the UNGA resolutions and much of the high seas still remains unprotected from the unregulated and destructive impact of deep-sea fishing. Nonetheless, as result of our work and that of our partners, significant changes have already occurred on the water. Tangible results achieved include:

- o measures in **Antarctic** waters prohibiting bottom trawling and bottom gillnet fishing (beginning in 2006), as well as establishing requirements for *environmental impact assessments* (EIAs) as a pre-condition for bottom longline fisheries;
- o closure of over half of the **Northeast Atlantic**'s deep-sea areas at fishable depths (i.e. < 2000m) on the high seas south of Iceland to bottom fishing, including a number of areas where cold water coral reefs are known to occur; the prohibition of deep-sea bottom gillnet fishing; and EIAs required for bottom fishing in most of the remaining high seas areas;
- o closure in the **Northwest Atlantic** of 12 deep-sea areas along the continental slope to all bottom fishing, to protect concentrations of corals and sponges as well as closure of six seamount areas to bottom fishing (with the proviso that up to 20% of each area could be fished on an exploratory basis), and prior EIAs required for any bottom-fishing in previously unfished areas;
- o closure of 10 seamount areas in the **Southeast Atlantic** in 2006 (revised in 2010), and prohibition of bottom gillnet fishing;
- o prohibition of bottom trawling below 1000m in the **Mediterranean**, and closure of three areas to bottom fishing at lesser depths;

- o negotiation of a new treaty to establish a **South Pacific** RFMO to regulate deep-sea fisheries; a temporary prohibition on the expansion of bottom fishing in the South Pacific into new high seas areas; the closure of some 40% of the area previously bottom trawled by New Zealand's orange roughy fleets on the high seas; and a ban on bottom gillnet fishing;
- o negotiation of a new treaty to establish a **North Pacific** RFMO to regulate deep-sea fisheries and a requirement for EIAs to be conducted for all high seas bottom fisheries in the region.

The DSCC will continue to engage the RFMOs, relevant States and the UN process to work to ensure that high seas fishing nations deliver on the commitments they have made to sustainably manage deep-sea fisheries and ensure the protection of deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystems.

The DSCC has encouraged collaboration across diverse groups, prompting a willingness to employ a range of different tools and strategies. Although global in nature, its strength is founded in a grassroots approach, maximising use of existing capacity and knowledge within its set of member organizations.

An independent evaluation in 2008 concluded that *"the campaign coordinated by the [Deep Sea Conservation] Coalition was a prime mover in making bottom trawling the dominant agenda item of the UN General Assembly's (UNGA) fisheries deliberations by 2006... a significant step forward for ocean conservation."*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010

## For more information:

A shortlist of selected publications and reports available on our web site includes:

- The Implementation of UNGA Resolutions 61/105 and 64/72 in the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries on the High Seas. June 2010 <http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/61105-Implementation-finalreport.pdf>;
- Review of the implementation of the provisions of UN GA resolution 61/105 related to the management of high seas bottom fisheries: Submission to the UN Division for Oceans Affairs and the Law of the Sea. June 2009 [http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/DSCC\\_report\\_12June09\\_web.pdf](http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/DSCC_report_12June09_web.pdf);
- Why the World Needs a Time Out on High Seas Bottom Trawling. June 2005; [http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/TimeOut\\_english.pdf](http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/TimeOut_english.pdf);
- High Seas Bottom Trawl Red Herring: Debunking Claims of Sustainability. June 2005 [http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/DSCC\\_RedHerrings.pdf](http://www.savethehighseas.org/publicdocs/DSCC_RedHerrings.pdf);
- High Seas Bottom Trawl Fisheries and their Impacts on the Biodiversity of Vulnerable Deep-Sea Ecosystems: Options for International Action, Nov 2004 [http://www.illegal-fishing.info/uploads/High\\_seas\\_bottom\\_trawl\\_fisheries\\_-\\_Gianni.pdf](http://www.illegal-fishing.info/uploads/High_seas_bottom_trawl_fisheries_-_Gianni.pdf).

## Or contact:

Matthew Gianni, tel: +31-646 168 899, email: [matthewgianni@netscape.net](mailto:matthewgianni@netscape.net)

Duncan Currie, tel: +1-202-643 9351 or +64-221-632 335; email: [duncanc@globelaw.com](mailto:duncanc@globelaw.com)

Sian Owen, tel: +31-648 502 659, email: [sian@sustainabilityoptions.net](mailto:sian@sustainabilityoptions.net)

With thanks for the generous support of:



and all of the DSCC Member Organisations.

**The DSCC has developed a formidable international team of scientists, policy and communication experts, lawyers and political activists**

**deepsea  
conservationcoalition**