

Statement of concern to the United Nations General Assembly regarding the risks to seamounts, cold-water corals and other vulnerable ecosystems of the deep-sea

Deep-sea biologists from around the world met for the 10th Deep-Sea Biology Symposium at the Institute of Marine Biology, University of Oregon, in Coos Bay, 25 - 29 August 2003. We, the undersigned, discussed anthropogenic threats to deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystems in light of the request by the UN General Assembly and the United Nations Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea to 'consider urgently' the risks to the biodiversity of seamounts, cold-water corals and other deep-sea ecosystems. We concluded the following:

- **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;**
- **non-commercial research, within ecologically appropriate constraints, should be promoted and freely conducted to better understand species diversity and life history, community structure, trophic organization and ecosystem processes of the deep-sea;**
- **conservation measures should be established at the global, regional and national levels with an emphasis on developing representative networks of marine protected areas (MPAs) as called for by the World Summit on Sustainable Development and endorsed by the UN General Assembly;**
- **areas critical for baseline scientific research and to furthering the understanding of the deep-sea environment should be designated as Science Priority Areas;**
- **the UN General Assembly should adopt a moratorium on deep-sea bottom trawl fishing on the High Seas effective immediately;**
- **all regulations should be in conformity with the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant instruments, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement.**

[The signatories to this statement listed below have signed in their individual capacity. Institutional affiliations are for identification purposes only.]