

### **XIII/3. Options for preventing and mitigating the impacts of some activities to selected seabed habitats, and scientific and ecological criteria for marine areas in need of protection and biogeographic classification systems**

Life on this planet began in the ocean and as much as 80% of it still lives in the sea. Almost half of the planet is covered by the international waters of the high seas. These waters beyond the limits of national jurisdiction are the least regulated and least protected places on Earth.

In the past, vast tracts of our seas were inaccessible to fishermen and other human activities, providing natural refuges for many marine species. As a result of developments in modern technology, fishing trawls, gillnets and longlines are now capable of penetrating depths of 2000-3000 metres. Fish are being removed at rates far beyond those at which populations are able to renew themselves. As a result populations of large fish, such as swordfish, tuna, marlin and sharks have plummeted, falling on average to one tenth of their abundance in the 1950s. Recent data published in the journal *Science* also shows that more than 40% of the world's oceans are heavily impacted by human activities, with few pristine areas remaining<sup>1</sup>.

Our oceans are not inexhaustible, but vulnerable, complex and finite. Destructive and unsustainable fishing practices, such as bottom-trawling, as well as illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, deep-sea mining and scientific and commercial exploration of deep-sea areas are all threatening vulnerable marine habitats. Combined with the unpredictable effects of a changing global climate, these pressures make the outlook bleak for the oceans.

The CBD's Programme of Work on protected areas requires States to address the shortfall of marine sites in the global network of protected areas by the end of this year. However, recent figures released by the MPA Global database,<sup>2</sup> housed at the University of British Columbia (UBC), reveal that marine protected areas cover just 0.65% of the world's ocean. Less than two years are left before the 2010 deadline by which Parties agreed to significantly reduce the global loss of biodiversity. And in just 4 years from now, States should have in place a global network of protected and well-managed marine areas spanning all of the Earth's seas and oceans.

**With this in mind, we urge Parties attending the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP9) of the Convention on Biological Diversity to:**

- **ADOPT the criteria and steps for the identification of marine areas in need of protection in open ocean waters and deep-sea habitats;**
- **URGE Parties and relevant organisations, including Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, to cooperate in applying these criteria, using existing political instruments and the best available scientific knowledge to identify and protect priority areas for conservation, in particular on the high seas; and**
- **RECOMMEND that states put a process in motion that will address the gaps in high seas governance and apply the precautionary principle and ecosystem approach to conserve and protect areas beyond national jurisdiction.**

The failure to adopt the scientific criteria and recommended steps for the protection of ecosystems that cover more than half of this planet by COP9 would seriously undermine and question the CBD's role and commitment to the protection of biodiversity. Provided the political will is there, and using the best scientific data currently available, an effective network of marine reserves can be established immediately.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nceas.ucsb.edu/GlobalMarine>

<sup>2</sup> <http://mpaglobal.org>



In order to support the Pacific in ensuring the long-term future of their precious marine resources, it is important that the international community support the introduction of strong management and conservation measures, in particular the establishment of marine reserves in the region.