

News Release

Fishing companies announce world's first voluntary closures to high-seas deepwater trawling

Marine species protected in eleven deep-sea areas of the Indian Ocean

Wellington, New Zealand, Rome, Italy and Gland, Switzerland, 6 July 2006 (IUCN) - In a global first, four major fishing companies announced today a voluntary halt to trawling in eleven deep-sea areas of the southern Indian Ocean. This will protect and conserve the bottom of the sea floor, or benthos, associated fish fauna and related biodiversity in one of the largest marine protected area enclosures ever.

"By setting aside an area almost equal to Australia's Great Barrier Reef National Park, these businesses are sending a clear signal that they want to keep fish on people's plates for generations to come," commented **Graham Patchell**, a scientist with the newly formed **Southern Indian Ocean Deepwater Fishers' Association (SIODFA)**, which represents four companies - Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd (Australia), Bel Ocean II Ltd (Mauritius), Sealord Group (New Zealand) and TransNamibia Fishing Pty Ltd (Namibia), the main trawling operators in this area.

Using the scientific knowledge gathered over a decade of activity in the Indian Ocean and in consultation with staff of the Fisheries Department of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), SIODFA have delimited 309 000 km² of ocean floor in eleven separate benthic protected areas where their vessels will no longer fish. The combined zones have an area approximately the size of Norway. To verify compliance with these self-adopted restrictions, the companies will track their vessels' locations and activities via a special satellite monitoring system.

On top of the voluntary establishment of these no-fishing *Benthic Protected Areas*, SIODFA has pledged to share extremely valuable scientific data collected using complex underwater technology with the soon-to-be-formed regional *Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement* and the FAO.

"Such deep-sea habitats are among the least known areas of the oceans and by pledging not to fish in them, these companies have taken a great step towards sustainability," said **Carl Gustaf Lundin**, Head of the Global Marine Programme of the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

By not fishing in these areas, which span the southern Indian Ocean, their deepwater corals and the accompanying benthic fauna will gain protection in one of the least explored and unutilized deepwater areas of the world. He noted that at present, less than one percent of the world's oceans fall within protected areas compared to over 12 percent of the planet's terrestrial surface.

Areas of sea floor whose benthos and habitat are protected on the high-seas, or in areas beyond national jurisdiction, are a novelty and often these areas do not benefit from any formal protection.

“These voluntary closures are a unique innovation for effectively managing and conserving deepwater biodiversity of high-seas areas where there are no regional management arrangements in place. We hope that the governments involved in meetings at the United Nations recognize these voluntary protected areas and follow their example to underpin future efforts of the proposed Southern Indian

Ocean Fisheries Agreement,” concluded **Graeme Kelleher of the High Seas Task Force of IUCN’s World Commission on Protected Areas**. He stressed that *“it is recognized that voluntary actions of this kind are extremely valuable and should be complemented by enforcement arrangements that apply to other fishing companies.”*

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Organizations:

The Southern Indian Ocean Deepwater Fishers’ Association (SIODFA)

SIODFA, the Southern Indian Ocean Deepwater Fishers’ Association, was formed by four major fishing companies: Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd (Australia), Bel Ocean II Ltd (Mauritius), Sealord Group (New Zealand) and TransNamibia Fishing Pty Ltd (Namibia). The objective of the Association is to ensure sustainable fisheries in the southern Indian Ocean in collaboration with the upcoming Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) brings together 81 States, 113 government agencies and 850 plus NGOs in a unique worldwide partnership. The Union’s mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The World Conservation Union is the world’s largest environmental knowledge network and has helped over 75 countries to prepare and implement national conservation and biodiversity strategies. The Union is a multicultural, multilingual organization with 1000 staff located in 62 countries and is based in Gland, Switzerland. <http://www.iucn.org>; press@iucn.org

The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA)

WCPA is the largest worldwide network of protected area managers and specialists. It comprises over 1,200 members in 140 countries. WCPA is one of the six voluntary IUCN Commissions and is administered by the Protected Areas Programme at the IUCN Headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. The WCPA mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a worldwide network of terrestrial and marine protected areas, as an integral contribution to the IUCN mission.