

032 Protecting seamounts and vulnerable marine ecosystems from destructive practices

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 3.066 *The protection of seamounts, deep-sea corals and other vulnerable deep-sea habitats from destructive fishing practices, including bottom trawling, on the high seas* (Bangkok, 2004);

REMEMBERING that many seamounts are the result of unique geological processes on planet Earth and that they contain a rich geodiversity with a geological heritage that we must acknowledge and conserve;

RECALLING ALSO United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolutions 61/105 (2006) and 64/72 (2009) that committed States to closing areas to bottom fishing in areas beyond national jurisdiction where vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) such as seamounts are known or likely to occur, unless conservation and management measures have been established and effectively implemented to prevent significant adverse impacts on VMEs, acknowledging different regional ecological characteristics, including areas without seamounts or deep-sea features, such as shallow shelf seas and hyper-arid marine environments;

RECOGNISING the progress made since 2004 in protecting VMEs from damage caused by bottom trawling, particularly through the efforts of regional fisheries management organisations and arrangements (RFMO/As), which have closed some seamounts, sections of oceanic ridge systems and other areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur;

NOTING the requirement in Article 194, paragraph 5, of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to take measures “necessary to protect and preserve rare or fragile ecosystems as well as the habitat of depleted, threatened or endangered species and other forms of marine life”;

NOTING that the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 79/145, recognised “the immense importance and value of deep-sea ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain”;

ACKNOWLEDGING the 2021 United Nations Second World Ocean Assessment’s acknowledgement that “fishing, especially bottom trawling, constitutes the greatest current threat to seamount ecosystems”

NOTING that the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 79/145, emphasised the need for full and urgent implementation by all States and relevant RFMO/As of their commitments;

RECALLING FURTHER the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) adopted by the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), and the Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) to enter in force in January 2026; and

NOTING ALSO the importance of protecting VMEs, including seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold-water corals, across all RFMOs regulatory areas, the Antarctic Southern Ocean under CCAMLR, and all areas beyond national jurisdiction;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General and Commissions, in implementing the IUCN Programme 2026–2029, to promote this Resolution in engagement with RFMOs, multilateral agreements and other relevant legal instruments, including CCAMLR and regional seas conventions and frameworks, and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies (IFBs) and individual States; and

2. CALLS on all State Members, individually and through relevant RFMO/As and IFBs, to:

a. fully implement UNGA resolutions (including 61/105 (2006), 64/72 (2009), 66/68 (2011), 71/123 (2016) and 77/118 (2022) that call for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems, including

seamounts, cold-water corals and hydrothermal vents in areas beyond national jurisdiction from significant adverse impacts caused by destructive fishing practices, including as bottom trawling, recognising the immense importance and value of deep-sea ecosystems and the biodiversity and geodiversity they contain;

b. support and advocate for the protection of seamounts, based on the best available science, and interconnected seamounts (networks) for species associated with seamounts, such as marine mammals, elasmobranchs, as well as associated vulnerable marine ecosystems and pelagic fish stocks, at RFMO/As and other relevant IFBs;

c. Support and activate a transition away from bottom trawling on seamounts at the UN General Assembly bottom fishing review at the end of 2026; and

d. support, generate, share and collate scientific, technical and cultural knowledge on the functions and importance of VMEs to facilitate regionally appropriate conservation and to understand their heritage and to make inventories of seamounts that can support their effective protection.