

035 Protection of mesopelagic ecosystem integrity

EMPHASISING the need for protection of mesopelagic ecosystems for their critical role in climate regulation, food webs and biodiversity;

CONCERNED that mesopelagic life is threatened by climate impacts;

ALARMED that increasing interest in mesopelagic fisheries and other activities such as marine carbon dioxide removal and seabed mining may further imperil vital mesopelagic ecosystems and undermine their important climate and ecosystem services;

DEEPLY CONCERNED that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing already poses a significant threat to the health of fish populations;

RECALLING IUCN Resolution 7.107 *Reducing the impact of fisheries on marine biodiversity*; 7.032 *Ocean impacts of climate change*, calling for avoidance of adverse impacts on biodiversity when undertaking climate mitigation and adaptation actions; Resolution 7.114 *Integrated solutions to the climate change and biodiversity crises*, calling for protection, management and restoration of carbon-dense ecosystems; and Resolution 7.122 *Protection of deep-ocean ecosystems and biodiversity through a moratorium on seabed mining* (all adopted in Marseille, 2020);

RECOGNISING that international law, as reflected by the Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), provides the legal framework within which all ocean activities must be carried out and obliges States to protect and preserve the marine environment; that the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement establishes obligations for biodiversity protection, use of the precautionary approach, and assess the impacts of fishing on target and associated or dependent species; that the Port State Measures Agreement of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations provides measures to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing; and that the recently adopted World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies bans subsidies for [illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing [and fishing related activities in support of IUU fishing] ~~unmanaged or unassessed high seas fisheries~~];

WELCOMING the pending entry into force of the 2023 Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement);

NOTING commitments in Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life below Water), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong institutions and 17 (Partnership for the Goals);

NOTING Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) 2030 Targets 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14, 15, 18 and 20 to 23;

CONSIDERING that the mesopelagic system's unique geological features and dynamic processes—ranging from submarine geomorphology to sediment transport and tectonic activity—are fundamental in shaping its habitats and sustaining marine biodiversity, it is crucial to recognize and protect its geodiversity as an integral part of oceanic conservation effort.

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

[1. ENCOURAGE each IUCN Member to consider necessary actions regarding the mesopelagic ecosystem.]

[1. URGES all IUCN Members, individually and collectively, to:

a. implement a precautionary pause on any expansion of mesopelagic fishing or other ocean activities potentially impacting mesopelagic species and ecosystems unless and until the following are in place:

- i. an understanding of the structure and function of mesopelagic communities;
- ii. rules and procedures to prevent mesopelagic fisheries that are unregulated, unassessed or otherwise inconsistent with international legal obligations;
- iii. the requirement for ocean industries, including fishing, deep-sea mining and geoengineering, to demonstrate no adverse impacts to biodiversity or critical functions of this zone; and
- iv. the requirement for transparent and regular reporting of catch and bycatch levels for any mesopelagic fishing; and

b. champion:

- i. the role of mesopelagic communities in climate change policies and actions;
- ii. the use of management measures including marine protected areas to preserve the structure and functions of mesopelagic communities; and
- iii. collaborative research, monitoring and strategic environmental assessments that value diverse forms of knowledge; and]

2. REQUESTS the Director General and Commissions to support and promote these actions, including by:

- a. enabling and engaging IUCN's regional networks, programmes and Commissions including the Commission on Ecosystem Management, the World Commission on Environmental Law and the World Commission on Protected Areas;
- b. supporting conservation, research and strategic environmental assessments; and
- c. promoting adoption of the commitments in United Nations General Assembly Resolutions consistent with 1a. above.