

Statement summary

Ad Hoc Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction

New York, 28 April – 2 May 2008

- IUCN notes that much new and useful information about marine biodiversity has been developed in recent years. **We currently have a good basis of information in our hands to allow us to act.**
- We urgently need to focus on – and agree to – steps and actions that we can take collectively to ensure the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of this biodiversity, these resources, for all peoples today and for future generations.
- A series of recent scientific reports have shown that the environmental impact of anthropogenic activities on marine biodiversity is real, is growing and is severe.
- **Unsustainable fishing practices, including Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing, overfishing and other destructive fishing practices remain a major threat to marine biodiversity.**
- Unregulated fishing remains a concern; several regions of the ocean are not under the management of any RFMO, and existing RFMO arrangements focus on certain target species, thus ignoring effects on ecosystems and on many other vulnerable and important species.
- **Climate induced changes in the ocean go beyond ocean level rise.** Changes in water temperature and pH levels (ocean acidification) are already affecting marine biodiversity and ocean currents and thus will likely affect global climate and weather patterns.
- **Climate change is impacting on the entire ocean food chain and will seriously affect food ocean sources.** The ability of some microorganisms, coral and shellfish to fix calcium and other minerals, which they need to flourish, is being hindered. Already, certain fish stocks migration routes are being altered.
- In addition, **climate-induced changes in the oceans are contributing to increasing rates of species invasions by altering the physical environment in ways that favor non native species.**

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- **Marine biodiversity is also affected by new and emerging activities, some of which are currently unregulated.** Iron and urea fertilization of the ocean and other geoengineering schemes are being proposed as a solution to capture carbon, while no thorough assessments have as yet been completed to evaluate the impacts they may cause to the marine ecosystems. Scientists warn that they may do more harm than good.
- **Marine biodiversity and genetic resources are disappearing before we have a chance to discover and study them. Urgent measures need to be taken to ensure the conservation of these potential resources.**
- The management regimes for our oceans have long suffered from an ad-hoc and patchy application. **We now need to move to an integrated approach to management based on precautionary and ecosystem approaches.**
- Marine protected areas (MPAs), including marine reserves, represent a useful tool to help better conserve and manage the oceans and their biodiversity in an integrated way. **We need to effectively progress towards the establishment of representative networks of marine protected areas based on the best available scientific information.**
- Several international and regional organizations have developed useful tools to help establishing networks of MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction. **We urge States to increase their collaboration to apply these tools and to start establishing MPAs in the high seas.**
- In this regard, **IUCN urges States to welcome and endorse in relevant fora the scientific criteria for identifying ecologically or biologically significant marine areas in need of protection and scientific guidance for establishing MPA networks developed at a workshop in the Azores under the Convention on Biological Diversity.**
- IUCN urges States to welcome and encourage further work in developing biogeographic classification systems and bioregionalizations, identifying potential sites for consideration as protected areas and establishing pilot MPAs.
- States should also take immediate measures to regulate the actions of their nationals on the high seas and to monitor their compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Indeed, States have a duty to do so in order to ensure that the actions of those subject to their jurisdiction respect the rights of other legitimate uses of the sea.
- A sensible first step would be for all States to require of their nationals and their vessels that they provide advance notification of all activities in the high seas that may harm biodiversity (e.g. collection of species; marine scientific research; dumping or placement of matter; fertilization with iron, urea or other substances and other geoengineering schemes). States should require the application of a prior environmental impact assessment procedure for all major activities, and all emerging and intensifying uses, of the oceans. Such assessments should be made publicly available to all on national web sites and should require follow-up monitoring, as appropriate.
- To ensure that marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction is conserved and sustainably and equitably used, consideration should be given to ways to protect the interests of all States, including those that do not as yet have the full capacity to conduct research and to benefit from marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.
- It is necessary to continue discussion on how to better protect marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction and to consider ways to address and close governance, regulatory, implementation and enforcement weaknesses and gaps. **IUCN urges a continuation of this United Nations General Assembly Working Group to this end.**