Portuguese NGOs join Deep Sea Conservation Coalition

CALL FOR TRANSPARENT PORTUGUESE DEEP SEA POLICY

Lisbon, May 30th, 2006 - The Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) 1 today welcomed Portugal's three largest environmental organisations to its membership, at a Workshop organised under the auspices of the Luso-American Foundation for Development2.

The DSCC was formed in 2004 to promote a UN General Assembly moratorium on high seas bottom trawling, one of the most destructive of fishing methods, which destroys vulnerable deep sea ecosystems on seamounts and cold water coral reefs.

The DSCC is a consortium of more than 50 Non-Governmental Organisations from around the world and which now includes GEOTA, LPN and Quercus from Portugal3.

"The participation of our Portuguese friends will make a real difference," said DSCC Policy Adviser Matthew Gianni. "The role of Portugal is critical in the negotiations currently taking place in Brussels and New York on measures to conserve deep sea biodiversity."

The UN General Assembly has been discussing whether or not there should be an interim prohibition on high seas bottom trawling for the past three years. These discussions will resume in New York in two weeks time, with a formal decision expected to be taken in November this year.

"The irreversible damage to deep sea biodiversity resulting from bottom trawling on the high seas is a typical 'out of sight—out of mind issue'," said Mário Diniz from Quercus. "By joining the DSCC, we shall give visibility to this issue in Portugal. Decision and opinion-makers will no longer be able to turn a blind eye."

"There is irrefutable evidence that high seas bottom trawling destroys cold water corals that have taken thousands of years to grow, as well as many known and unknown deep sea species," stated Ricardo Lemos of LPN. "As custodians of the common heritage of humankind the international community through the UN General Assembly has a special duty to adopt the most effective conservation measures; in this case, a moratorium on high seas bottom trawling."

1 See DSCC website: www.savethehighseas.org
2 See www.flad.pt
“The controversy over high seas bottom trawling is a real opportunity for Portugal,” said Joaquim M. Rocha Afonso from GEOTA. “Our country must act in accordance with the national commitment on maritime policy, expressed many times over the last decade, to play a leading role in ocean governance and conservation.”

According to Monica Verbeek, Policy Officer of Seas-at-Risk, a European federation of environmental organizations: “If the European Union countries stop destructive fishing practices, they will act in accordance with their collective commitment to put sustainability first.”

At their Workshop in Lisbon today, DSCC spokespeople expressed their disappointment at the lack of Portuguese leadership on this issue so far. “Watching Portuguese officials in Brussels and New York, we are often left with the impression that Portugal’s position is dictated from Madrid,” stated DSCC Political Adviser Rémi Parmentier. “More attention, public scrutiny and transparency are needed.”

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4 The Spanish Government supports a fleet that accounts for approximately 40% of high seas bottom trawling operations worldwide. Spain’s Fisheries officials have embarked on a campaign to sabotage the UN General Assembly’s efforts to adopt effective measures.