

November 7, 2025

Joint scientists' letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Commission in support of a bottom fishing closure of the
Emperor Seamounts

To the North Pacific Fisheries Commission:

We, the 105 undersigned scientists – from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Chinese Taipei, Ecuador, the European Union (Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, & Spain), India, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America - are writing to RFMOs to take steps for greater protection and conservation of Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) within their Convention Areas' and management jurisdiction. Collectively, we have spent thousands of hours investigating the extremely vulnerable marine species, habitats, and ecosystems of the North Pacific Ocean, or of the world's seamounts. As formally recognized by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)¹ and as noted at the 10th CBD Conference of Parties, EBSAs may require enhanced conservation and management measures, as well as cooperation by intergovernmental organizations, to support effective policy action for increased protection and sustainable management.²

The World Commission on Protected Areas and many others have called for the Emperor Seamounts to receive priority protection³ and based on our experience and our knowledge of the best available scientific evidence, we conclude that:

- vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), comprised of vulnerable habitats and species, including deep sea coral gardens, scleractinian coral reefs, and sponge fields, occur or are likely to occur over most of the NW Hawaiian Ridge and the Emperor Seamount Chain seamounts,⁴
- significant adverse impacts on VMEs in the region have occurred and are likely to continue to occur and,⁵
- coral ecosystems damaged by bottom fishing can recover over time if protected from such fishing.⁶

Given the significant advances in scientific understanding of the occurrence, vulnerability, and the long-standing impacts of bottom fishing on VMEs in the region, which have accrued over several decades,⁷ we believe -- at minimum -- a precautionary, temporary closure of all fishing using gear that may contact the seafloor is warranted. Such a closure would allow additional conservation and management measures to be considered and adopted to ensure that bottom fishing does not cause further significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems in the region.

Sincerely,

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- ⁸ Signature does not necessarily represent endorsement by former employer, NOAA, or the U.S. government.