UN environment programme

CMS

CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

UNEP/CMS/COP15/Doc.25.3.3

23 October 2025

Original: English

15th MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
Campo Grande, Brazil, 23 – 29 March 2026
Agenda Item 25.3.3

CONSERVING SEAMOUNT ECOSYSTEMS[1]

(Prepared by Monaco and Panama)

Summary:

This document highlights the unique significance of seamount ecosystems as ecological oases for migratory species and proposes a Resolution and Decision to protect them from destructive fishing practices. By preserving these high-impact sites, CMS Parties can strengthen ecological connectivity, conserve critical migratory habitats, and advance species recovery.

The document proposes a draft Resolution and draft Decisions.

[1] *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CMS Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.*

CONSERVING SEAMOUNT ECOSYSTEMS

Background

1. Seamount ecosystems serve as fixed stations along migratory pathways, acting as ecological oases where species feed, breed, spawn, rest, and navigate. By concentrating prey and sustaining central feeding and aggregation groups, they provide essential services that directly support the survival and recovery of migratory species. Their predictability makes seamounts strategic, high-impact sites for conservation, supporting species across entire trophic webs. However, this also leaves them highly vulnerable to destructive fishing practices that can rapidly degrade their ecological integrity, disrupt essential services, and undermine the resilience of the migratory species that depend on them. Given the CMS Parties' prioritization of critical habitats, ecological networks, and migration corridors over the next five years, the protection of seamounts presents an immediate opportunity to secure known sites that enhance connectivity and promote species recovery across ocean basins. Building on the obligations under the CMS to conserve migratory species and their habitats, as further elaborated in CMS resolutions on ecological connectivity (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.16) and bycatch (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.22), this proposal invites Parties to prioritise the protection of seamounts from destructive fishing practices as vital nodes within migration corridors, thereby enhancing the conservation status of migratory species.

2. In 2004, the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) COP-7 Decision VII/5 (para. 30) recognized seamounts as priority marine features in areas beyond national jurisdiction for protection and called for urgent international action to adopt restrictions on destructive activities (e.g., deep-sea trawling) in seamount and similar vulnerable ecosystems. This urgent call for action underscores the critical need for immediate international cooperation. In 2006, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 61/105, urging Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), which play a crucial role in regulating fishing activities in international waters, to "*protect vulnerable marine ecosystems*, *including seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold-water corals, from destructive fishing practices"* (para 80). Subsequent resolutions, from Resolution 64/72 (2009) to Resolution 79/145 (2024), have reaffirmed the need to protect seamounts, recognizing their inherent ecological importance and their role in supporting associated and dependent species.

3. Protecting habitats that are critical for marine migratory species across their range and life stages, including known aggregation, feeding, breeding sites, and migratory corridors, is a fundamental principle of the Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), as reflected in Article II (1) of the Convention. Affirming this, the Conference of the Parties at its 14th Meeting adopted the Samarkand Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2024-2032 (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.1), which aims to maintain and restore such habitats:

> *"**Target 2.1.** By 2029, all important habitats for migratory species listed in CMS Appendices are identified, assessed, and monitored to ensure their functionality and the ability to support migratory species throughout their life cycles.*
>
> ***Target 2.2.** By 2032, all important habitats for migratory species listed in CMS Appendices are protected, effectively conserved, managed, and restored through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures."*

4. Seamount ecosystems are widely recognized for their exceptional ecological value for many marine species. To support CMS Parties in identifying such vital areas, the Convention recognizes and encourages the use of processes for identifying Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) as outlined in UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.13, and for Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) as detailed in UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.7. These criteria reflect the need for ecologically representative networks, as mandated by the Resolution on Ecological Connectivity (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.16) and identified through the Resolution on Flyways (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 12.11 (Rev. COP13)). These processes also support the identification of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) under the CBD. Seamount ecosystems have been recognized under these processes already as IMMAs (e.g., New Caledonia Southern Seamounts and Banks), as ISRAs (e.g., Cocos Island and Seamounts, Mommon Seamount), and as EBSAs (e.g., Kermadec-Tonga-Louisville Junction, Emperor Seamount Chain, Sala y Gómez–Nazca Ridge), underscoring their ecological importance.

5. Seamount ecosystems, mostly remnants of extinct volcanoes,[2] include "true" seamounts, which rise at least 1,000 meters from the seafloor, and seamount-like structures, such as hills and banks.[3] Widespread across the world's ocean basins, seamounts are thought to number from 10,000 to more than 60,000.[4] Yet, astonishingly, fewer than one-tenth of a percent of these remarkable structures have been explored, leaving a vast mystery beneath the waves.[5] Their distinct topography and the complex hydrodynamic processes associated with them, such as nutrient upwelling and retention, create conditions that enhance primary production. These characteristics provide essential foraging grounds in otherwise nutrient-poor regions.[6] As a result, seamount ecosystems are vibrant hotspots of biodiversity, delivering critical ecosystem services and elegantly bridging the depths of the ocean with pelagic zones above.

6. Seamounts, despite being one of the least understood oceanic biomes, are crucial biodiversity hotspots, areas of high biomass, and safe havens for large marine species. Their overall diversity, although significant, is not as extensively studied as that of ecosystems like coral reefs. Shallow seamounts, at a depth of 50 meters, have been found to exhibit biomass levels of large predators, such as sharks, that are three times greater than those found in coral reef environments. However, species shared between coral reefs and deeper-sea ecosystems were primarily comprised of highly mobile, large predators. These seamounts, functioning as critical oases of biomass and refuges for threatened megafauna, underscore the urgent need for their conservation.[7]

7. Seamounts attract a diverse range of pelagic marine megafauna, including concentrations of endangered species. For example, seamounts have been shown to have a 41 times higher abundance of sharks than surrounding open ocean spaces.[8] These ecosystems support different life stages, providing breeding or spawning

[2] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration US Department of Commerce, 'What Is a Seamount? Ocean Exploration Facts: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research

[3] Gevorgian, J., Sandwell, D. T., Yu, Y., Kim, S. S., & Wessel, P. (2023). Global distribution and morphology of small seamounts. *Earth and Space Science*, *10*(4), e2022EA002331.

[4] Yesson et al. (2021). Improved bathymetry leads to >4000 new seamount predictions in the global ocean – but beware of phantom seamounts! UCL Open Environment, 3, e030.

[5] National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration US Department of Commerce, 'What Is a Seamount? Ocean Exploration Facts: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research

[6] Morato et al. (2010). Seamounts are hotspots of pelagic biodiversity in the open ocean. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 107(21), 9707–9711. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0910290107

[7] Florian Baletaud et al, 'Comparing Seamounts and Coral Reefs with eDNA and BRUVS Reveals Oases and Refuges on Shallow Seamounts' (2023) 12(11) Biology 1446, https://www.mdpi.com/2079-7737/12/11/1446

[8] Weber et al. (2025). Shallow seamounts are "oases" and activity hubs for pelagic predators in a large-scale marine reserve. PLoS Biology, 23(2 February).

grounds, feeding sites, migratory stopovers, refugia, and navigational landmarks for a wide range of species, including cetaceans, elasmobranchs, turtles, and commercially valuable fish. This includes CMS species listed on Appendix I, such as sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*), Fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*), sei whales (*Balaenoptera borealis*), blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*), and humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*). Appendix II species that have been recorded on and around seamounts across the ocean basin include scalloped hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna lewini*), blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*), as well as striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) and bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*).

8. Other endangered species, including various seabirds, sharks, and the Hawaiian monk seal (*Neomonachus schauinslandi*), use seamounts for foraging, navigating through ocean basins, or finding shelter. For example, in the Southwest Pacific, seamount chains like the Norfolk Ridge serve as migratory corridors and seasonal refuges for mature tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*).[9] Furthermore, commercially targeted species, such as tunas and swordfish, use seamounts as spawning and hunting grounds. The Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR, its acronym in Spanish) hosts several marine protected areas that safeguard seamounts. In Mexico, Revillagigedo National Park, the abyssal plain on the seaward side of the trench reaches depths of between 3,500 and 4,000 meters and elevations of up to 1,000 meters in the seamounts and fractures with depths of up to 5,886 meters.[10] In Panama, the expanded Cordillera de Coiba Managed Resources Area encompasses a remarkable underwater landscape that includes nine seamount chains, 24 individual seamounts, and a deep-sea trench reaching depths of up to 4,745 meters, flanked by elevated ridges.[11] The region has an average depth of 2,841 meters, with the shallowest areas at approximately 303 meters.[12] This complex seamount ecosystem serves as a critical migratory and feeding corridor for around fourteen marine mammal species.[13] It is also home to sea turtles, billfishes, and numerous shark species—including many classified by the IUCN as Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered.[14]

9. Besides their ecological importance, seamounts and their relationship to migratory species hold significant cultural and subsistence value for Indigenous cultures and local communities.[15] They play a central role in traditional practices, support livelihoods, and have spiritual meaning.[16] For example, the movement patterns of migratory marine species serve as cultural indicators, marking seasonal transitions within traditional calendar systems.[17] The protection of seamounts is thus not only an ecological imperative but also a matter of preserving cultural heritage and the well-being and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples.

[9] Matley et al. (2025). Where giants roam: The importance of remote islands and seamount corridors to adult tiger sharks in the South Pacific Ocean. Marine Environmental Research 206 (2025): 107026.

[10] CONANP, Estudio Previo Justificativo Para La Declaratoria Del Parque Nacional Revillagigedo. (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, 2017), https://www.conanp.gob.mx/anp/consulta/3%20EPJ%20PN%20REVILLA%20-%207sept2017%20final.pdf.

[11] HM Guzman and ML Díaz, 'Plan de Manejo Del Area de Recursos Manejados Cordillera de Coiba, http://gacetas.procuraduria-admon.gob.pa/29498-B_57947.pdf.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Delgado et al. (2024). A Forgotten Maritime Highway: Maritime Cultural Heritage of the Emperor Seamounts with Implications for High Seas Conservation. Journal of Maritime Archaeology, 19(1), 41-80.

[16] Du Preez et al. (2024). *A Monitoring Framework for SGáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area, British Columbia, Canada*. Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS).

[17] McLean et al. (2023). Connecting conservation & culture: The importance of Indigenous Knowledge in conservation decision-making and resource management of migratory marine species. Marine Policy, 155.

Emerging research

10. Technological advancements, such as satellite tagging, eDNA sampling, and drone surveys, enable scientists to expand their research and observe behaviours around seamounts, collect relevant environmental data, and record patterns of presence (and absence) over extended periods. While current research has already shown critical ecological connections between seamounts and migratory species,[18] further research is needed to understand these relationships.[19] As knowledge on the ecological connectivity between seamounts and migratory species continues to expand, this information must be translated into targeted conservation efforts.

11. Evidence suggests that undisturbed seamounts support higher biodiversity and more threatened species, reinforcing the need for protective measures.[20] Seamounts exhibit a wide range of geological and ecological characteristics, and although common in oceanic ecosystems, few have been studied in detail. An enhanced understanding of their biodiversity, productivity, and geophysical features can further inform targeted, sustainable management. A combined knowledge of spatial patterns of ecological value and human impact is essential for effective conservation.

Threats and pressures

12. Seamount ecosystems are among the most vulnerable habitats in the ocean because their communities consist of extremely long-lived, slow-growing, and fragile species. Consequently, they are susceptible to disturbance, exhibit low resilience, and may take centuries to millennia to recover from impacts. These habitats support a wide diversity of associated and dependent life, including migratory species listed in the Convention and their prey. Seamounts face multiple threats, most notably heavy fishing pressure. Still, there is growing evidence of climate change impacts, including ocean acidification, deoxygenation, and warming[21], as well as additional pressures from pollution[22] and the potential for deep-sea mining. While a variety of fishing activities affect migratory species around seamounts, the United Nations' Second World Ocean Assessment (2021) underscored bottom trawling as the most significant ongoing threat to seamount ecosystems, with fisheries often collapsing within years as stocks are depleted. Despite their ecological impact, globally deep-sea bottom trawl fisheries contribute less than 0.5% of global landings.[23]

[18] Nisthar, D., Fujioka, E., Dunn, D.C., Curtice, C., DeLand, S.E., Donnelly, B., Harrison, A-L., Heywood, E.I., Kot, C.Y., Ortuño Crespo, G., Poulin, S., Halpin, P.N. and Bentley, L.K., 2025. Migratory connectivity in the Lord Howe Rise and Tasman Sea: Insights from the MiCO system. In: A volcanic lost world: Proceedings of the Lord Howe Rise and South Tasman Sea Research Symposium (pp.32–33). Sydney, Australia.; **AND** Derville, S., Allain, V., Bonneville, C., Garland, E. C., Laran, S., Le Gendre, R., Menkes, C., Oremus, M., Portal, A., Receveur, A., Torres, L. G., Vourey, E., Zerbini, A., & Garrigue, C. (2025). Two decades of research on cetacean seamount habitats in the Southwest Pacific. In: A volcanic lost world: Proceedings of the Lord Howe Rise and South Tasman Sea Research Symposium (pp. 34–36). Sydney, Australia.

[19] Weber et al. (2025). Shallow seamounts are "oases" and activity hubs for pelagic predators in a large-scale marine reserve. PLoS Biology, 23(2 February).

[20] Morato et al. (2012). Seamount physiography and biology in North-East Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea. Biogeosciences Discussions, 9(12).

[21] Jones et al. (2014)."Global reductions in seafloor biomass in response to climate change." Global change biology 20.6: 1861-1872.; AND Ross et al. (2020). Rapid deep ocean deoxygenation and acidification threaten life on Northeast Pacific seamounts. Global change biology, 26(11), 6424-6444.

[22] Pereira et al. (2025). Sinking microplastics at a deep-sea seamount in the North Atlantic: a year-long flux study. Microplastics and Nanoplastics, 5(1), 37.

[23] Clark, M.R. and Koslow, J.A., 2007. Impacts of fisheries on seamounts. Seamounts: Ecology, fisheries & conservation, pp.413-441; AND Koslow, J.A., 2001. Fish stocks and benthos of seamounts. Managing Risks to Biodiversity and the Environment on the High Sea, Including Tools Such as Marine Protected Areas-Scientific Requirements and Legal Aspects, p.43.; AND Victorero, L., Watling, L., Deng Palomares, M.L. and Nouvian, C., 2018. Out of sight, but within reach: A global history of bottom-trawled deep-sea fisheries from> 400 m depth. Frontiers in Marine Science, 5

13. Destructive fishing practices on seamounts can have severe impacts on migratory species, as many rely on these features for essential life-history functions such as feeding, resting, and spawning. Damage to benthic habitats, including corals and sponges, can persist for centuries,[24] degrading substantial feeding and breeding grounds for migratory and other associated species.[25] Bottom trawling indiscriminately removes large quantities of fish, reducing prey availability for migratory predators that depend on seamounts as resource-rich feeding areas during their migrations.[26] This loss of prey can significantly reduce the survival and reproductive success of these species. Bycatch and entanglement from bottom-set longlines and gillnet fisheries can reduce populations of non-target species such as sea turtles, sharks, and seabirds.[27] It can also disrupt population structures by removing key age classes, which destabilizes populations and interrupts future migrations, ultimately threatening the long-term survival of these species.[28] High fishing activity in migration corridors can cause animals to alter their migration behaviours, leading to increased energy costs that reduce survival.[29] Many of these species, including sharks, rays, and turtles, are long-lived and slow-maturing, making them particularly vulnerable to rapid recovery from population declines or habitat loss. Noise generated by fishing vessels can disrupt the navigation and communication of species that rely on sound, such as whales.[30]

14. Protecting seamounts is crucial for maintaining key ecological functions that support migratory species and prevent disruptions to vital life-cycle processes, thereby aiding the survival and recovery of vulnerable populations. For example, fished seamounts have shown 50% less biodiversity than undisturbed seamounts and a 7-fold lower biomass in benthic species[31], while in the Indo-Pacific, remote seamounts serve as some of the last remaining refuges for sharks.[32] By conserving seamount habitats, migratory species are ensured access to predictable feeding, breeding, spawning, and resting areas along their routes. Given that migratory species face cumulative pressures across their wide-ranging habitats, safeguarding seamount “oases” where they can feed, sleep, and reproduce is critical to reducing overall impacts and providing the essential stepping-stone resilience needed for their continued survival.

15. Many known seamounts (approx. 58%) are located in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJs), thereby requiring international collaboration for their protection.[33] Currently, less than 1% of these ecosystems are effectively protected, which reduces the resilience of migratory species on their long journeys and leaves them vulnerable at seamounts that should serve as vital refuges. Progress in establishing spatial management

[24] Goode, S.L., Rowden, A.A., Bowden, D.A. and Clark, M.R., 2020. Resilience of seamount benthic communities to trawling disturbance. Marine Environmental Research, 161, p.105086.ence

[25] Clark, M.R., Althaus, F., Schlacher, T.A., Williams, A., Bowden, D.A. and Rowden, A.A., 2016. The impacts of deep-sea fisheries on benthic communities: a review. ICES Journal of Marine Science, 73(suppl_1), pp.i51-i69.
and Rogers, A., 2012. An ecosystem approach to management of seamounts in the Southern Indian Ocean: volume 1: overview of seamount ecosystems and biodiversity.

[26] Clarke, M., 2007. Seamounts and cephalopods. Seamounts: Ecology, Fisheries & Conservation, pp.207-229.

[27] Lewison, R.L., Crowder, L.B., Wallace, B.P., Moore, J.E., Cox, T., Zydelis, R., McDonald, S., DiMatteo, A., Dunn, D.C., Kot, C.Y. and Bjorkland, R., 2014. Global patterns of marine mammal, seabird, and sea turtle bycatch reveal taxa-specific and cumulative megafauna hotspots. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(14), pp.5271-5276.

[28] Lewison et al. (2004). Understanding impacts of fisheries bycatch on marine megafauna. Trends in ecology & evolution, 19(11), 598-604.

[29] Munneke (2024). The impact of bottom trawling fisheries on marine mammals-A review.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Letessier et al. (2019). Remote reefs and seamounts are the last refuges for marine predators across the Indo-Pacific. PLoS Biology, 17(8), e3000366.

[33] Thompson et al. (2024). Remote seamounts are key conservation priorities for pelagic wildlife. Conservation Letters, 17(1).

measures and identifying sensitive seamount ecosystems has so far been limited.[34] Inconsistent approaches among RFMOs in recognizing and protecting seamounts as vulnerable marine ecosystems continue to hinder effective conservation and management efforts.[35]

Discussion and analysis

16. Prioritizing seamount protection represents a significant conservation opportunity to protect migratory species across their entire habitat range. As migratory species face increasing threats from human activities, preserving seamount ecosystems — key habitats that support vital life stages and maintain ecological connectivity across ocean basins — is essential for the long-term survival of many migratory species. Given their importance, seamounts warrant a strong, coordinated global focus on protection. The CMS is uniquely positioned to lead international efforts to safeguard seamounts from destructive practices. The CMS's Strategic Plan (2024–2032) envisions a future where "migratory species are thriving and live in fully restored and connected habitats" (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 14.1). Fulfilling this vision for seamounts and their associated species will require urgent, coordinated, and decisive action.

17. Acknowledging the significance of seamounts for CMS-listed species can enhance international commitments to protect their habitats, prey, and potentially at-risk species that might be considered for listing in the future if their conservation status deteriorates. This includes collaboration with other relevant international instruments and processes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, regional fisheries bodies, and the future agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea regarding the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

18. Increased cooperation in research efforts through the CMS and other associated processes and instruments can enhance our understanding of the ecological connection between seamount ecosystems and migratory species. This, in turn, will improve the scientific foundation for decision-making.

19. Strengthening seamount protection also acknowledges the customary and ancestral ties that Indigenous knowledge holders and communities have with seamounts and the migratory species that depend on these features.

Recommended actions

20. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:

    a) adopt the draft Resolution in Annex 1 of this document; and

    b) adopt the draft Decision in Annex 2 of this document.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Bell et al. (2019). Scientific Approaches for the Assessment and Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries and Ecosystems in RFMOs and RFB : Final Report (Publications Office of the European Union). Available at: http://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0f2b559b-4610-11e9-a8ed-01aa75ed71a1 (Accessed June 28, 2025) **OR** Thompson, A.B. and Reid, K. 2024. Review of the implementation of the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 703. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0243en

ANNEX 1

DRAFT RESOLUTION

CONSERVING SEAMOUNT ECOSYSTEMS

Recognizing the significance of seamounts as essential habitats and navigational landmarks for various migratory marine species, including those listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention, such as whales, dolphins, sharks, and turtles,

Recalling the fundamental principles of the Convention as expressed in Article II, which encourages individual or cooperative actions to conserve migratory species and their habitats, and Article I (1), which defines "range" for the Convention as all-encompassing, including all areas of land or water that a migratory species inhabits, temporarily occupies, crosses, or overflies during its migratory route,

Emphasizing Resolution 14.16 on Ecological Connectivity, which urges CMS Parties to identify critical areas like Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) and consider ecological linkages when designing and implementing conservation measures, including in areas beyond national jurisdiction through collaboration,

Recalling UNGA Resolutions 61/105 (2006) and 64/72 (2009), 66/68 (2011), 71/123 (2016), 77/118 (2022), which require States to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, including seamounts, from bottom trawling in areas beyond national jurisdiction,

Also recalling the CBD COP7 Decision VII/5 (2004) on marine and coastal biodiversity, urging Parties to work together to protect seamounts both within and beyond national jurisdiction,

Acknowledging IUCN Recommendation 3.099 on the protection of seamounts from bottom trawling, and noting the recently adopted 2025 IUCN WCC motion 032, which calls for the protection of seamounts and other vulnerable marine ecosystems from destructive fishing practices and a transition away from bottom trawling on seamounts by the end of 2026,

Acknowledging further the Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) and Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) initiatives, developed under IUCN and recognized by CMS as tools to assist Parties in identifying key habitats and areas of conservation concern, and noting that these processes have increasingly identified seamount ecosystems as essential habitats for migratory species,

Expressing concern over the negative impacts of destructive fishing practices that affect migratory species on seamounts, as well as the increasing pressures on these ecosystems that jeopardize their ecological functions and interactions with migratory species,

Stressing the urgent need for collaborative and coordinated efforts by nations, regional groups, global institutions, and other stakeholders for the conservation and sustainable management of vulnerable marine ecosystems, including seamounts,

Affirming the commitment of Parties to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework adopted under the CBD in 2022 (CBD/COP/DEC/15/4), particularly Targets 3 and 4,

Considering the interactions and shared mandates between the CMS and regional fisheries management bodies, along with the shared responsibilities to protect migratory species and their habitats,

Recognizing that the protection of seamounts in areas beyond national jurisdiction requires the combined efforts of Parties, other Range States, international organizations, and regional fisheries management bodies,

Welcoming the adoption and increasing ratification of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction,

The Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals:

1. *Encourages* Parties to acknowledge the importance of seamount ecosystems as vital habitats and navigational landmarks for migratory marine species, including those listed in Appendices I and II of the Convention, such as whales, dolphins, sharks, and turtles, and to recognize their significance for Indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge holders;

2. *Urges* Parties to prioritize the protection of seamount ecosystems from destructive fishing practices, both within and beyond their national jurisdiction, to enhance the conservation status of migratory species and protect the ecological integrity of seamount ecosystems, recognizing their environmental connectivity;

3. *Calls upon* Parties, other Range States, and relevant organizations and regional bodies to prioritize seamounts in implementing the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, including addressing inconsistencies in the protection of seamounts in areas beyond national jurisdiction;

4. *Encourages* Parties and other Range States to conduct collaborative research on seamounts to improve understanding of their biodiversity, vulnerability, and ecological functions, in relation to migratory species. This knowledge should inform decision-making for the protection of seamounts;

5. *Calls upon* Parties to actively engage with Indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge holders, scientists, civil society, and industry to enhance public awareness and understanding of the importance of seamount ecosystems to the health of migratory species populations; and

6. *Requests* the Secretariat to promote international cooperation and coordination for the conservation and sustainable management of seamounts that support migratory species, through existing regional mechanisms, such as the Barcelona Convention, and collaboration with other relevant international instruments and processes, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, Regional Fisheries Management Bodies, and the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

ANNEX 2

DRAFT DECISIONS

CONSERVING SEAMOUNT ECOSYSTEMS

Directed to Parties

15.AA Parties are requested to:

a) prioritize the protection of seamount ecosystems from destructive fishing practices in both areas within and beyond their jurisdiction, in accordance with international law;

b) focus research efforts on the role of seamount ecosystems in supporting migratory species throughout their life cycles and habitat ranges;

c) report progress, through national reports, to the Conference of the Parties at its 16th meeting.

Directed to Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

15.BB Parties, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are encouraged to collaborate in the protection of seamount ecosystems from destructive fishing practices.

Directed to the Scientific Council

15.CC The Scientific Council is requested to:

a) collaborate with international experts to identify and protect essential seamount ecosystems, ensuring that the ecological connections between these ecosystems and migratory species are maintained and protected;

b) report to the 9th Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council on the progress in implementing this decision.

Directed to the Secretariat

15.DD Where appropriate, the Secretariat shall, in collaboration with Parties and subject to the availability of resources:

a) develop and disseminate guidelines and management tools for the conservation, sustainable management, and research of seamount ecosystems that are particularly important for marine migratory species, with a focus on maintaining ecological connectivity and migratory pathways;

b) report to the Conference of the Parties at its 16th meeting on the progress in implementing this Decision.