

15/18. DEEP SEA MINING AND ESTABLISHMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS OF THE DEEP OCEAN

OBSERVING that the United Nations General Assembly has declared the deep seabed beyond the limits of national jurisdiction to be the Common Heritage of Mankind;

NOTING that deep sea mining has begun on an experimental basis in the Pacific Ocean and that commercial scale exploitation for minerals is envisioned by the early 1990s;

NOTING ALSO the recent discovery of natural concentrations of copper and other metals in the eastern Pacific on undersea ridges; AWARE that the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea has agreed that negotiations should be completed in 1982, and that the new Convention will provide a basic structure for regulating deep sea mining to protect the marine environment; CONSIDERING the scale of our present lack of knowledge about marine ecosystems in the deep ocean and the rapid pace of discovery of new forms of deep ocean life which have existed for millenia free from interference by human activities;

CONCERNED that exploitation could disrupt these ecosystems, impede further understanding of their role and destroy potential alternative values;

The General Assembly of IUCN, at its 15th Session in Christchurch, New Zealand, 11-23 October 1981:

RECOMMENDS the establishment of large sanctuaries in the areas where mining is contemplated in order to further knowledge of the areas of the ocean beyond national jurisdiction and to protect the common heritage of mankind;

FURTHER RECOMMENDS that these sanctuaries or protected areas be established before licensing to explore and exploit the deepocean begins;

URGES the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, by resolution, to call upon the Preparatory Committee for the new Convention to develop the concept of such protected areas of the deep ocean;

RECOMMENDS ALSO that appropriate international scientific organizations such as IUCN, the International Oceanographic Commission and the Scientific Committee on Oceanographic Research be involved at an early stage in helping to formulate selection criteria for protected areas, recommending suitable areas and preparing research and monitoring proposals and that particular emphasis be given to protection of species and special features such as deep trenches, areas of high volcanism, discontinuities of temperature and chemical composition, and concentrations of deep sea organisms;

URGES that comprehensive ecological surveys be conducted prior to any commercial deep sea mining, and that appropriate areas be designated for baseline reference purposes; and

FURTHER URGES governments, given the unpredictable effects of deep sea mining on marine ecosystems, to ensure that research on the environmental effects of mining, in exclusive economic zones on the continental shelf as well as in the areas beyond national jurisdiction, be increased and that appropriate environmental regulation be imposed based on such research.