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**RESTRICTED - Expedition Report: Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems identified from
direct observations within the Northwest Challenger Bottom Trawl
Management Area**

Greenpeace

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Organisation Scientific Committee

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Expedition Report: Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems identified from direct observations within the Northwest Challenger Bottom Trawl Management Area

Restricted Observer Information Paper¹

Greenpeace

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¹ This information paper is being submitted to SPRFMO SC Member States in a restricted form and is not to be circulated to any non-members or published on the SPRFMO SC public accessible webpage.

Summary

This expedition report should be read in conjunction with the Central Lord Howe observer paper which builds on the initial voyage report submitted and discussed at the SPRFMO Scientific Committee (SC) Deepwater Working Group in September 2025. The analysis reported in this paper confirms vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) are present within the Northwest Challenger Bottom Trawl Management Area. Direct observational data collected during the Greenpeace Seamount Expedition from six transect dives was analysed using a standardised protocol to identify VMEs from imagery. The Baco et al. (2023) protocol operationalises the five FAO Deep-sea VME criteria. According to the FAO Guidelines only a single criterion needs to be met for an area to be designated as a VME. The results confirm that all surveyed seamount sites within and outside the Northwest Challenger BTMA meet multiple FAO VME criteria, specifically Criterion 3 (fragility), Criterion 4 (life-history traits) and Criterion 5 (structural complexity). Some sites may also meet Criterion 1 (uniqueness or rarity), and Criterion 2 (functional significance) with more investigation. These direct observational findings are intended to provide the SC with the best available scientific information to progress approved SC workplan items, such as listing all known VMEs on Annex 9 as required by CMM03 2025. This expedition report also provides a case study for the SC to consider the Baco et al. (2023) framework to identify VMEs as it meets the FAO Deep-sea Guidelines.

Please email kgoddard@northtec.ac.nz or ellie.hooper@greenpeace.ac.nz if you would like to request a copy of this restricted observer paper, access will be assessed on a case by case basis.