

Call to halt seabed mining plans

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A NEW multisector marine alliance has called for a moratorium on seabed mining for phosphate, arguing it will wreck fragile deep-sea ecosystems and commercial fisheries.

The Safeguard our Seabed coalition includes 11 conservation, fishing and labour organisations and companies including the South African branches of the World Wildlife Fund and Birdlife SA, the SA Deep Sea Trawling Industry Association, Sea Harvest, I&J and Oceana, and the Food and

Allied Workers Union.

It was formed after the Department of Mineral Resources approved three marine phosphate prospecting rights. All three applicants argued a key link between their proposed mining and food security. Vancouver-based Diamond Fields International said “phosphate rock is the source of phosphorus used to make phosphatic fertilisers, essential for growing food”.

But the importance of the seabed underpinned the health of the ocean, said Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University marine bi-

ologist Nadine Strydom.

“We are at the coalface right now of trying to understand the seabed, which will allow us to be better prepared for exploitation proposals, which could have far-reaching effects for life on the seafloor. Until then we need a precautionary approach,” Strydom said.

The coalition said: “Our major concern is the type of technology that would be used for bulk marine sediment mining — trailing suction hopper dredging — is the equivalent of strip mining the ocean floor,” said SOS spokesman Saul Roux.