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Multiple EU countries are failing to stop destructive fishing in Protected Areas, analysis finds, as several face legal action

NGOs call for evaluation of Marine Action Plan and new rules to strengthen protection of EU seas

Brussels - No EU country has comprehensive plans to phase out destructive fishing, like bottom trawling, from marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2030, a new analysis released today by marine NGOs Oceana, Seas At Risk and ClientEarth reveals.

This is in spite of both EU nature laws and international biodiversity commitments that bind Member States to rigorously protect their MPAs.

To mark the first anniversary of EU countries' deadline to submit roadmaps outlining how they plan to phase out bottom trawling in their MPAs - a requirement of the EU Marine Action Plan [1] - the analysis looks at the roadmaps submitted by nine countries [2]. It confirms that though countries have some measures in place in some MPAs, many remain threatened by bottom trawling, showing a possible breach of EU environmental laws. NGOs have filed lawsuits against several EU national governments over the last year for failing to protect their MPAs from destructive fishing activities.

The analysis looks at national measures in place in Natura 2000 MPAs designated to protect the seabed and marine species, and those planned to be put in place in all MPAs by 2030. It features Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain, as more than half of EU countries failed to submit a roadmap at all, and Estonia refused to disclose theirs.

Science shows that the EU is falling short of effectively protecting its MPAs, as destructive activities are still allowed in 80% of them [3], including bottom trawling which drags heavy nets along the seabed destroying marine habitats and species in its path. To counter this, marine NGOs are taking governments to court in [France](#), [Germany](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Spain](#) and [Sweden](#) for infringing EU nature laws by failing to protect their MPAs against the impacts of bottom trawling. [Fishers and scientists have also joined forces with civil society](#) to call on Commissioner Kadis to follow the science and ensure that the upcoming EU Ocean Pact paves the way for new binding legislation on proper protection of MPAs.

EU 2030 MARINE PROTECTED AREA SEABED PROTECTION TRACKER

Measures in place

to prohibit bottom fishing in Natura 2000 MPAs*

Has the country reported at least one national measure?

Has it reported fisheries joint recommendations?



Measures planned for 2030

to phase out mobile bottom fishing in all MPAs

Has the country provided a plan?

Does it contain details of the necessary national measures to be adopted?

Does it contain details of the necessary fisheries joint recommendations to be adopted?



Submitted, but refused to disclose:



Countries that have not submitted roadmaps:



* For this analysis, Natura 2000 are Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) designated to protect the seabed and marine species according to the EU Habitats Directive.

- i. All measures reported are only of a regional nature, such as fisheries joint recommendations under the Common Fisheries Policy
- ii. National measures are not needed due to the specific national context
- iii. Measures reported are not of a regional nature
- iv. Measures proposed are insufficient to ensure proper seabed protection in MPAs
- v. Insufficient information to assess if the proposed measures will ensure proper seabed protection in MPAs

OCEANA

ClientEarth

SEAS AT RISK



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NGO analysis of EU countries' roadmaps to protect their MPAs from destructive fishing

Nicolas Fournier, Campaign Director for Marine Protection at Oceana in Europe, said: ***"The roadmaps reveal that EU countries have little intention to actually protect their marine 'protected' areas from the most destructive type of fishing, and are putting at risk the EU's 2030 marine biodiversity targets. With five years to go, we urge Commissioners Kadis and Roswall to publish a full evaluation of the implementation of the Marine Action Plan, and to include new proposals to effectively protect the seabed in EU MPAs in the Ocean Pact, as a fundamental precondition to support a resilient and healthy ocean, and a regenerative blue economy."***

Tatiana Nuño, Senior Marine Policy Officer at Seas At Risk, said: ***"Our seas are in grave danger. Only 12% of EU seas are designated as marine protected areas, and even within these zones, destructive practices like bottom trawling continue unchecked. Member States are failing to***

uphold EU nature laws protecting the ocean, and risk assessments for these precious areas are barely conducted. If Europe is serious about being a true leader in ocean protection, and protecting the livelihoods of millions who depend on the ocean, it needs to step up. At the next UN Ocean Conference, the EU must present an Ocean Pact that calls for new, binding legislation with 2030 targets to protect at least 30% of our seas, including a complete ban on bottom trawling in MPAs.”

The EU has committed in the international Convention on Biological Diversity and in its own 2030 Biodiversity Strategy to conserve and effectively manage 30% of its waters as protected areas by 2030. However, of the countries analysed, only Germany has designated more than 30% of its waters, with some countries far from it - Slovenia, Bulgaria and Cyprus, for example, have only designated 5%, 8%, and 9% of their waters, respectively, as protected areas [4].

In light of the alarming findings of the analysis, Oceana, Seas At Risk and ClientEarth are making an urgent call for the European Commission to carry out the necessary follow-up on the Marine Action Plan, including:

- initiating legal action for failing to respect EU nature laws;
- closing MPAs to bottom trawling under the Common Fisheries Policy (in the absence of necessary regional fisheries measures - known as joint recommendations); and
- putting forward new legislation via the Ocean Pact to ensure that marine areas are truly protected from destructive activities like bottom trawling.

John Condon, Wildlife Lawyer at ClientEarth, said: ***“A proper interpretation of the Habitats Directive would mean that bottom trawling should already not be tolerated in EU Marine Protected Areas. We heard from Commissioner Kadis this month that he is committed to the full enforcement of our nature laws - which we hope means we can expect bottom trawling to be conclusively phased out of EU MPAs designed to protect seabed ecosystems. Science and experience tell us that protecting the seabed has undeniable positive effects for fish stocks and therefore fishers - so this clarity is needed urgently.***

ENDS

Notes to editors:

[1]

https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/policy/common-fisheries-policy-cfp/action-plan-protecting-and-restoring-marine-ecosystems-sustainable-and-resilient-fisheries_en

[2] NGOs obtained the roadmaps submitted by countries to the European Commission via an Access to Information Request, as most were not available publicly despite this being a requirement of the Marine Action Plan

[3] <https://www.cell.com/one-earth/fulltext/S2590-3322%2824%2900364-6>

[4] <https://dopa.jrc.ec.europa.eu/kcbd/EUBDS2030-dashboard/1.1.0.1.2.1/?version=1>

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