

# As EU Ocean Days conclude, civil society, fishers, and the scientific community call on Commissioner Kadis to affirm that bottom trawling has no place in marine protected areas

Following the conclusion of EU Ocean Days, leading ocean advocates BLOOM, Blue Marine Foundation, Défense des Milieux Aquatiques, Empesca't, National Geographic Pristine Seas, Oceana, Only One, and Seas At Risk, in collaboration with fishers and scientists are urging Commissioner Kadis to call for a ban on destructive fishing practices like bottom trawling in MPAs, following his comments when asked about the regulation of bottom trawling in marine protected areas (MPAs), Commissioner Kadis stated, “my answer is: it depends.”. Their message is clear: destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling not only negatively impact marine ecosystems but also undermine economic sustainability, deplete fish stocks, and undermine the capacity of the ocean to mitigate climate change.

“As scientists, we cannot accept a ‘case-by-case’ approach when the evidence is overwhelming—destructive fishing such as bottom trawling is incompatible with marine conservation and has no place in MPAs. The science is clear: bottom trawling devastates the seafloor, depletes fish populations, and releases vast amounts of carbon dioxide, contributing to the warming of our planet. Allowing exceptions into protected waters undermines efforts to replenish European seas and threatens Europe’s environmental leadership. We hope that Commissioner Kadis will clarify his position and commit to a full ban on bottom trawling in all protected areas,” said Enric Sala, Explorer in Residence and Executive Director at National Geographic Pristine Seas.

Dr Monica Verbeek, Executive Director at Seas At Risk said: “Science celebrates the ocean as one interconnected system. For too long, EU Member States have defied rules on the protection of marine habitats and continue to allow destructive bottom trawling in supposedly protected areas. The Oceans Pact is Commissioner Kadis’s chance to right this wrong – not only by ensuring proper enforcement of existing restoration and fishing rules, but also by introducing new rules to properly protect MPAs. As a fellow biologist, I encourage the

Commissioner to follow the science and ensure real protection. Until then, the dire state of marine ecosystems will be the sword of Damocles dangling over all EU marine activities and coastal communities.”

“The whole ocean should be sustainably managed (as Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity agreed upon with Global Biodiversity Framework Target 10). Marine protected areas are, by definition, meant to protect biodiversity and bottom trawling is incompatible with the conservation of marine biodiversity. It is not selective and physically harms species’ habitats. Abandoning practices that are not sustainable is not only important to conserve biodiversity but also to sustain fisheries themselves. While transitions are not always easy, fisheries will be the first beneficiaries,” [said Joachim Claudet, Research Director of French National Centre for Scientific Research.](#)

### Years of Evidence Support an End to Bottom Trawling in MPAs

The science is clear on the negative impacts of destructive fishing, such as bottom trawling, and scientists have repeatedly spoken out publicly to call for an end to this destructive practice in European MPAs and to expose the EU’s shortcomings. Over 250 scientists agreed that allowing bottom trawling in MPAs is a fundamental contradiction to conservation goals<sup>[1]</sup>. Studies show that the seabed is the largest carbon store on the planet, and bottom trawling is the main disturbance of this store, releasing critical amounts of carbon into the marine environment and possibly the atmosphere<sup>[2]</sup>. Scientists also warn that less than 1% of European waters are effectively protected, as most MPAs continue to permit destructive fishing practices<sup>[3]</sup>.

[Vera Coelho, Deputy Vice President for Oceana in Europe, said:](#) “More than three decades after EU laws were adopted to protect marine life, most EU marine protected areas remain mere lines on maps—where even the most destructive activities such as bottom trawling are allowed. In 2023, more than 250 scientists called for a ban on such activities in EU MPAs, because destructive fishing is simply not compatible with the notion of ‘protection’. With just a few months to go until the United Nations Ocean Conference in June, the European Commission must show political leadership to save the ocean and commit to fully enforcing EU nature laws as a key measure under the EU Ocean Pact.”

The economic case for banning destructive fishing, in particular bottom trawling, is just as strong as the environmental one. A socioeconomic analysis finds that removing bottom trawling from MPAs would result in a net economic gain of €8.4

billion over two decades and that for every €1 invested, there would be a €3.41 return, with benefits outweighing costs within just four years<sup>[4]</sup>.

Ensuring the transition of the fisheries sector away from destructive fishing practices in favour of an ecologically and socially sustainable model based on low-impact and small-scale fisheries is as much an environmental as an economic priority.

#### Small-Scale, Low-impact Fishers Demand Protection of Traditional Fishing

“Local knowledge and scientific research go hand in hand. Fishers see changes in the ocean firsthand, and science helps us understand them. Both tell us the same thing—bottom trawling has no place in marine protected areas if we want to protect marine life and the future of fishing.” Renato Galeotti, President, Associazione Casette dei Pescatori, Vada, Italy

“We depend on a healthy ocean to make a living. Bottom trawling in MPAs damages the seabed and disrupts marine life, making it harder for sustainable fishers to survive.” Isaac Moya, Fisherman and Co-Founder of Sustainable Fisheries Collective, Empesca’t, Catalunya, España.

Fishers argue that industrial bottom trawling not only depletes fish stocks but also undercuts the sustainability and future of coastal communities that depend on responsible fishing practices.

#### Fishers, Scientists, and NGOs Call for Immediate Action

With just over three months to go until the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 2025), which will take place in Nice from June 9–13, and where Europe is preparing to present its Ocean Pact, NGOs remain firm that implementation and new regulations will be essential to ensure the health and well-being of the ocean. To align with the EU’s commitment to protect 30% of its ocean by 2030, the European Commission needs to:

- Implement a ban on destructive fishing practices, and in particular bottom trawling in EU MPAs, ensuring these areas actually protect biodiversity and support fish populations.

- Strengthen enforcement and protection measures to stop destructive fishing fleets from exploiting loopholes that render MPAs meaningless.

With the UN Ocean Conference in Nice on the horizon, the EU must let science guide its decisions. The evidence is clear—bottom trawling destroys marine ecosystems and has no place in MPAs. If the European Commission wants to be a global leader in ocean protection, it must commit to banning destructive fishing in protected waters.

[1] [Scientists declare support for the banning of destructive industrial fishing methods in the European Union's Marine Protected Areas](#), Pristine Seas National Geographic

[2] Atwood, Trisha B., et al. "[Atmospheric CO2 emissions and ocean acidification from bottom-trawling](#)." Frontiers in Marine Science 10 (2024): 1125137

[3] [EU countries not on track to meet international marine protection targets, warn NGOs](#), Seas At Risk

[4] [Valuing the impact of a potential ban on bottom-contact fishing in EU marine protected areas](#), New Economics Foundation