

NGOs demand action not promises as EU accused of ‘failing to protect seas’

Environmental groups propose urgent plan to stop overfishing and safeguard marine life, as existing laws go unenforced



A net is hauled to the surface after being dragged along the seabed. The large amount of bycatch involved in ‘bottom trawling’ harms biodiversity. Photograph: Colin Munro/Alamy

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A coalition of NGOs is calling for an urgent ban on destructive bottom trawling in EU marine protected areas, after the failure of member states to defend seas.

The ban is part of a 10-point action plan to “raise the bar” to achieve biodiversity targets, which they say will not be met by current promises, such as last year’s high-profile pledge by world leaders at the UN [summit on biodiversity](#) in New York to reverse nature loss by 2030.

A raft of EU laws to safeguard marine life – including a duty on EU member states to achieve “good environmental status” in seas by 2020, to achieve healthy ecosystems and to introduce sustainable fisheries management – have not been enforced, says the group, which includes Oceana in **Europe**, Greenpeace and ClientEarth.

They warn that this failure, combined with existing pressures on Europe’s seas, including climate change, risks triggering irreversible changes to the ecological conditions under which humanity has evolved and thrived.



Auditors decry 'marine protected areas' that fail to protect ocean
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/dec/03/auditors-slam-eu-for-marine-protected-areas-that-fail-to-protect-ocean>

The 10-point **call to action**, which the group will present to EU leaders, MEPs and member states, follows the **commitment** of Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European commission, and many EU heads of state or government, to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

The call was published in response to a European parliament **draft report** on the EU’s biodiversity strategy for 2030. That draft report, which will be presented to the environment committee on Thursday, expresses strong regret that the EU

has “neither fully met the 2020 biodiversity strategy objectives nor the global **Aichi biodiversity targets**”.

While the NGOs welcomed the draft report, they said it does not go far enough to ensure enforcement of current EU laws or to set action plans to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

Rebecca Hubbard, programme director of Our Fish, which aims to end overfishing, said: “The EU has failed to achieve good environmental status for EU seas and the EU biodiversity strategy must be implemented if we are to have a chance of saving it – this implementation needs to include the 10 action points we have in our report.”

She said the EU has also failed to end overfishing, and to protect marine habitats from bottom trawling. “What we really need to do is go from strategies and goals and action and outcomes. National pledges, goals and agreements are important for setting a direction but if we are going to save the planet we need action.”

The 10-point action plan calls for a network of fully and highly protected ocean sanctuaries covering at least 30% of the oceans by 2030 and a drastic improvement in fisheries protections. It urges the EU to commit resources to dramatically ramp up, implement and enforce existing legislation to safeguard marine life.

The groups also call on the EU to carry out environmental impact assessments of fishing activities, to set fishing limits with “precautionary buffers” for climate change and mandatory remote monitoring systems for all fishing fleets. It calls for measures to mitigate bycatch and for protections of the deep sea, such as closing sensitive areas to hydrocarbon exploration. And it calls for an end to harmful fishing subsidies and controls on underwater noise.

Nicolas Fournier, the campaign director for marine protection at Oceana Europe, said: “The EU 2030 biodiversity strategy is strong on marine protection targets, but we want the European parliament to raise further the EU’s ambition on biodiversity, both internationally to champion the 30% of ocean protection and support the UN treaty for the high-seas, but also in Europe to call for a ban

of all destructive fishing gear inside marine protected areas, starting with bottom-trawling.”

Fewer than 1% of European marine protected areas are fully off-limits to fishing. Last month, the European court of auditors warned the EU had **failed to halt marine biodiversity loss** in Europe’s waters and to restore fishing to sustainable levels. In 2019, the European Environment Agency found **“signs of stress at all scales”** and warned the current and historical use of Europe’s seas was “taking its toll” on marine ecosystems

The call for action comes just days after warnings from international scientists that the planet is facing a **“ghastly future of mass extinctions**, declining health and climate-disruption upheavals” that threaten human survival.