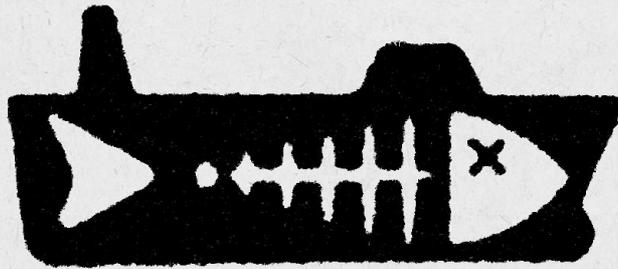


**12 MEGATRAWLERS TEARING UP THE SEA.
30 DAYS TO EXPOSE THEM.**

EXPOSED

DIRTY



DOZEN



EUROPE'S DIRTY DOZEN

The Floating Factories Killing Europe's Fisheries

URGENT

A single large-scale industrial fishing vessel can sweep up hundreds of tonnes of fish in a single day, matching the combined daily catch of an entire fleet of small-scale fishing boats.

These megatrawlers scour European waters, many of them longer than a football pitch and equipped to catch, process and freeze fish at sea: one-stop-shops that don't need to return to port sometimes for months at a time.

And they're not playing by the rules.

Tracking data shows that they spend hundreds of thousands of hours fishing inside marine protected areas (MPAs) every year. That includes zones officially designated to safeguard sensitive habitats and species and together amounts to more than a quarter of all trawling in Europe, at an even higher intensity than fishing outside of them.

Most Europeans will never see these ships. But they play a decisive role in what ends up in fish processing plants, on supermarket shelves and on their dinner plates.

This article shines a spotlight on a dozen of the worst offenders.

Megatrawlers, or supertrawlers, are large industrial fishing vessels typically spanning more than 100 meters end to end. For this article, we're spotlighting 12 fishing vessels **longer than 80 meters with a notorious public record**, so we don't leave out any that fly under the 100-meter threshold, like the Kirkella and Scombrus, which cause as much – if not more – marine destruction than some of their larger counterparts.

In simple terms: megatrawlers are built to extract fish at a monstrous scale, far beyond that of traditional fishing methods.

WHAT ARE MEGATRAWLERS, AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?



**OVERFISHING
IN EUROPE:
FEWER SHIPS,
MORE PRESSURE**



What sounds like efficiency is sloppy in practice: in one fell swoop, fishing zones are ransacked – and that’s not including net after net filled to the brim with bycatch (other marine life swept up in the frenzy).

Megatrawlers include both bottom trawlers (boats with huge, weighted nets that scrape the ocean floor) and pelagic, or mid-water, trawlers (boats with huge, floating nets that can sweep through entire schools of fish at once). Environmental impact be damned.

Severe overfishing is a stark reality in Europe.

According to the European Environment Agency, by the end of 2024, only 28% of assessed fish stocks in the EU were sustainably fished, with numbers in the Mediterranean and Black Seas plummeting to a shameful 9%.

One might hope that the large-scale fishing industry would have taken the hint and implemented safeguards to protect the very product they rely on for their profits. Instead, they’ve gone all in on concentrating their fishing power into larger, more lethal vessels, equipped with state-of-the-art technology to fish as much as possible in the shortest amount of time.

Increased fishing pressure means increased risk of fisheries collapse.

Fully protected MPAs have been shown to increase fish abundance and diversity by up to 400 percent, yet many protected areas in Europe still have their doors open for industrial fishing. Tracking data by Global Fishing Watch, corroborated by years of investigative reporting, repeatedly documents industrial vessels trawling inside protected zones across the North Sea, the English Channel, and the North Atlantic. That this remains legal is an indictment of current management measures in practice.

WHO CONTROLS EUROPE'S FISH?

A few private conglomerates have their hands on the wheel of Europe's entire industrial fishing sector.

A 2025 investigation by BLOOM identified a cluster of large Dutch-based fishing corporations, often referred to as the "Big Five", that collectively control hundreds of industrial vessels and an extensive network of subsidiaries operating across the continent and beyond.

These companies operate across national flags and jurisdictions. Where a vessel may be registered in France or Lithuania, say, ownership itself and strategic control often trace back to corporate structures headquartered in the Netherlands. Research into beneficial ownership and EU fleet registers shows that control extends far beyond the hulls in the water. They hold the lion's share of quota allocations (the government-assigned maximum amount of a species that can be caught in a year), own processing facilities, manage cold storage infrastructure, and operate international distribution chains.



**THE VROLIJK-
 PARLEVLIET
 DUOPOLY**

Their reach doesn't stop there. Subsidiaries and associated companies are part of influential European fisheries lobbying bodies such as Europêche and the Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association, ensuring structured and sustained access to policymakers in Brussels that dwarfs the resources available to small-scale fishing communities operating through the same channels.

Leading the Dutch "Big Five" are two family-controlled giant entities: the Cornelis Vrolijk Group and the Parlevliet & van der Plas (P&P) Group. In 2025, the Parlevliet family managed to buy out van der Plas to consolidate the P&P fishing empire entirely.

Multiple investigations show that these two families alone own a striking share of Europe's largest pelagic freezer trawlers and control much of the access to fish stocks.

	PARLEVLIET & VAN DER PLAS (P&P GROUP)	CORNELIS VROLIJK GROUP
YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT	1950	1880
TURNOVER (2023)	1.5 BILLION	499 MILLION
BALANCE SHEET VALUE (2023)	1.3 BILLION	650 MILLION
RESIDENCY	KATWIJK, NETHERLANDS	IJMUIDEN, NETHERLANDS

SOURCE: THE BIG FIVE: THE GRIP OF FIVE DUTCH CORPORATE GIANTS ON THE GLOBAL OCEAN

Fleet mapping and quota analyses suggest that some of the largest active megatrawlers implicated in investigations and controversies around marine protection are linked back, directly or indirectly, to these two groups.

One European Commission-funded study on quota ownership explored the vertical integration and dominance of Cornelis Vrolijk in the UK and EU, illustrating how corporate consolidation translates into unprecedented control over access to fish stocks.

A 2023 investigative report by Follow the Money, supported by the Pulitzer Center, describes how P&P expanded its empire by acquiring vessels, rather than building new fishing capacity, in order to secure the valuable fishing quotas attached to them.

In Portugal, here's what that looked like: P&P purchased aging cod trawlers that were never intended to return to sea, whose quotas granted them access to lucrative North Atlantic and NAFO fishing grounds. Through a system of subsidiary companies, vessel swaps, and strategic reflagging between Germany, the United Kingdom and Portugal, the group consolidated quota rights and repositioned them within its own fleet. Sneaky.

This expansion contributed to a broader trend of consolidated fishing rights that left fewer vessels and fewer independent operators in places such as Aveiro, where local fishers saw access shrink as quotas became transferable assets acquired by the highest bidder.

Between 1994 and 2011, Parlevliet reportedly received around €40 million in European subsidies for trawler and factory construction, expanding the business into a vertically integrated supply chain spanning more than 170 subsidiaries across 19 countries.

This degree of concentration tells a very different story about a sector that likes to portray itself as family-run.



WHAT'S THE STORY?



This article does not argue that fishing itself is destructive, nor that every large vessel is engaged in illegal activity.

It documents the startling reality of industrial fishing in Europe through a compilation of publicly available data, investigative reporting, and official records – though most of the public knows very little about the scale of the damage.

Because the situation is untenable: A small number of large ships continue to harm and wield outsized influence over the world's waters, particularly Europe's. They operate mostly out of sight. Their owners are elusive, their ownership structures complex and suspicious. And their destructive activities, subsidised to the tune of millions by taxpayers, raise fundamental questions about the fairness and future of the marine ecosystems that Europeans overwhelmingly support protecting.

What follows are profiles of **Europe's largest floating fish factories**. Each adds a new layer to the picture of a few powerful people and corporations profiting from the decimation of our seas.

EUROPE'S DIRTY DOZEN

Europe's 12 largest active floating factories, ranked by size.

These are not fishing boats as most people understand them. These are fish factories purpose-built for one thing: extracting as much from the ocean as physically possible.

Each of the dozen vessels profiled in the pages to follow is longer than 80 meters. Each catches colossal volumes of fish, processes them on board, freezes the product while discarding the rest, and stays at sea for weeks at a time. Together, they represent the furthest extreme of industrial fishing in Europe.

They did not enter the scene by accident. These ships are the result of decades of policy choices, technological escalation, and consolidation that rewarded size and indiscriminate reach. Looking at them one at a time reveals a system built to reward scale and power at the expense of sustainability.

01 ANNELIES ILENA THE SHIP FROM HELL

FLAG

POLAND

LENGTH

ABOUT 145 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

2000

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH ATLANTIC,
ENGLISH CHANNEL



At nearly 145 meters long, the Annelies Ilena is the world's largest megatrawler. It's longer than many city blocks, dwarfing the small artisanal boats most people picture when they think of the word "fishing."

The Annelies Ilena supplies large volumes of frozen fish into commercial supply chains. Its operations happen far offshore, largely invisible to the public, but have a king-sized impact on what fish ends up in European markets and wind up on Europeans' plates.

The Annelies Ilena is more than massive; it's a symbol of how industrial fishing works today, the clearest case of reckless extraction at scale. It raises a simple but uncomfortable question: How many ships like this can Europe's seas sustain?

REPUTATION

According to findings documented by BLOOM, it's capable of catching up to 400,000 kg of fish per day, a volume comparable to the combined daily catch of around 1,000 small-scale fishing boats.

The BLOOM report further highlights the Annelies Ilena's role within a highly opaque and financialised corporate system in which vessels and subsidiaries are transferred between closely linked companies to retain or recover fishing quotas.

One such transfer involved a company connected to Icelandic firm Samherji, later implicated in the Fishrot corruption scandal, a move that allowed quotas to be preserved even as other vessels left European waters.

Another episode in a long series of scandals involving the Ship from Hell revolved around a 2015 conviction in which Irish courts found the Annelies Ilena's skipper guilty of discarding quota species without recording them, and of operating a grading device that exceeded legal specifications, offences the judge described as a failure of the 'king of the seas' to set an example.

The Annelies Ilena illustrates how Europe's largest fishing groups combine an extreme capacity for exploitation with complex corporate structures to maximise short-term profits, while ecological and social costs are borne elsewhere.

WHO OWNS IT

Annelies Ilena is owned by **Atlantex**, a Polish-registered company, and operated under a management agreement with **Parlevliet & Van der Plas (P&P)**, the Dutch conglomerate that previously owned the vessel outright. P&P co-owns Atlantex alongside Icelandic fishing group Samherji. The sale was not a straightforward commercial transaction; it was structured to allow Atlantex to hold onto Polish fishing quotas that were at risk of being lost when another vessel in the network fled to South America. In effect, the Annelies Ilena was used as a quota rescue vehicle.

That connection to Samherji matters. The Icelandic company was later exposed as a central figure in the Fishrot corruption scandal, in which bribes were paid to Namibian government officials in exchange for fishing access. The scandal, revealed by WikiLeaks in 2019, implicated executives across multiple companies in the network.

On the operational side, Compagnie des Pêches de Saint-Malo, a French subsidiary within the P&P structure, manages the vessel's fishing operations.

The convoluted ownership chain – Dutch parent, Polish registration, French operations, Icelandic co-investor – is the system working exactly as designed.

02 MARGIRIS THE DUMP TRUCK

FLAG

LITHUANIA

LENGTH

ABOUT 143 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

1985

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH ATLANTIC,
ENGLISH CHANNEL



The Margiris is the second-largest megatrawler in the world. Like the rest of the Dirty Dozen, its fishing capacity rivals that of entire small-scale fleets.

The Margiris is an example of how Europe's largest floating factories can skate by within existing rules while still exerting intense pressure on marine ecosystems. What does protection really mean when ships like this are still harvesting our seas?

REPUTATION

Environmental groups and journalists have repeatedly pointed to this vessel as a testament to industrial fishing at its most extreme. According to an analysis published by Greenpeace UK, megatrawlers including the Margiris have logged around 7,380 hours per year fishing in UK marine protected areas between 2020 and 2025. These zones are specially set aside to safeguard sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity. How does that square with the presence of vessels of this size and capacity?

In February 2022, the trawler Margiris dumped over 100,000 dead blue whiting into the Atlantic off the French coast after a net rupture, leaving a floating carpet of fish covering about 3,000 square meters. At the time, images released by Sea Shepherd triggered an investigation by French authorities and drew public condemnation from France's maritime minister, who called the scene "shocking."

Representing the vessel's owners, the Pelagic Freezer-Trawler Association (PFA) described the spill as rare and said the lost fish would simply be deducted from the quota. It's a great (read: disturbing) illustration of the way those who profit the most from megatriawling Europe's seas can turn massive waste into an administrative footnote.

The Margiris has become more than a fishing vessel in recent years, frequently evoked in debates about whether current protection rules are meaningful, and whether industrial fishing fleets are compatible with conservation goals. It's a symbol of the system's hypocrisy.

WHO OWNS IT

The Margiris is owned and operated by companies linked to the **Parlevliet & van der Plas Group**, one of Europe's largest privately held fishing conglomerates. The group is controlled by the long-established Dutch Parlevliet fishing family.



03 WILLEM VAN DER ZWAN **THE "DARLING" OF UK MPAs**

FLAG

NETHERLANDS

LENGTH

ABOUT 142 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

1998

CURRENT STATUS:

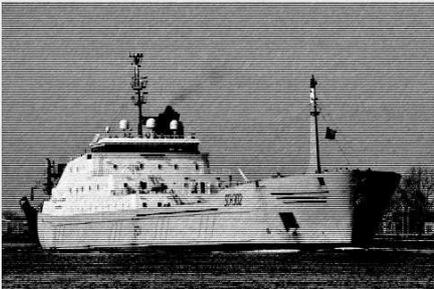
ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

IRISH SEA, NORTH
SEA, NORTH ATLANTIC



At more than 142 meters long, the Willem van der Zwan is nearly the same size as the Margiris and ranks among the biggest megatrawlers on the planet.

Built for endurance and volume, the vessel is capable of catching hundreds of tonnes of pelagic fish in a single day, processing and freezing its catch on board, and remaining at sea for extended periods without returning to port.

REPUTATION

The Willem van der Zwan has been explicitly named in multiple independent probes examining the impact of giant pelagic trawlers inside marine protected areas.

In March 2025, an investigation by Greenpeace UK identified the Willem van der Zwan as one of the five megatrawlers that spent the most time fishing inside UK offshore marine protected areas (MPAs) between January 2020 and January 2025.

The Willem van der Zwan was named alongside Margiris, Helen Mary, SCH 81 Carolien, and Afrika as the vessels with the highest fishing effort inside MPAs during that period. Many of the MPAs most heavily fished were designated to protect sensitive habitats such as deep-sea sponge belts, reefs, and seamounts, as well as species including harbour porpoises and seabirds.

The vessel has also been cited by BLOOM in its investigation into giant trawlers operating inside protected areas. BLOOM documented how vessels of this size were active in zones officially designated for conservation, presenting what the organisation described as evidence of intense industrial fishing pressure inside areas specifically created to limit ecological damage.

Together, these inspections reveal a track record of the Willem van der Zwan industrially fishing inside protected waters.

WHO OWNS IT

The Willem van der Zwan is owned and operated by **W. van der Zwan en Zonen**, one of Europe's largest independent industrial fishing groups.

The vessel is registered to Afrex Fisheries BV, a subsidiary of W. van der Zwan en Zonen, based in The Hague, Netherlands. Ownership and control of the group are concentrated within the Van der Zwan family, who have operated the company since 1888.



04 MAARTJE THEADORA THE FINE COLLECTOR

FLAG	LENGTH
GERMANY	ABOUT 140 METERS
CONSTRUCTION:	CURRENT STATUS:
2000	ACTIVE
FISHING METHOD:	KNOWN WATERS (EU):
PELAGIC TRAWLING	NORTH ATLANTIC, ENGLISH CHANNEL

Built to operate as a floating factory, the Maartje Theadora is capable of holding as much as 6,000 tonnes of fish without returning to port for extended periods of time.

Over the past 25+ years, it's built an infamous reputation.

REPUTATION

The Maartje Theadora has repeatedly appeared in legal cases and activist campaigns, making it one of the more publicly scrutinised supertrawlers operating under a European flag.

In 2012, the vessel's operating company was fined €595,000 by a French court for fisheries-related offences after being stopped with €1.2 million of illegally caught fish in freezers in Cherbourg. The French ruling followed investigations into fishing practices that authorities concluded breached regulatory requirements, underscoring that even the largest industrial operators are subject to enforcement.

The vessel has also featured in campaigns by Greenpeace Australia Pacific, which listed the Maartje Theadora among a group of supertrawlers linked to repeated regulatory breaches across global fisheries. Greenpeace highlighted the ship as part of a broader pattern of industrial fishing operations associated with fines, detentions, or legal action in multiple jurisdictions.



The Maartje Theadora has become a recurring target of direct-action protest. Sea Shepherd Scandinavia has documented confrontations at sea involving factory trawlers like the Maartje Theadora, framing them as symbols of industrial overexploitation and using their sheer size to draw public attention to the ecological footprint of vessels of this scale.

Wherever it sails, the Maartje Theadora drags along a sustained trail of legal scrutiny, activist action, and public controversy across European waters and beyond.

WHO OWNS IT

Maartje Theadora is owned and operated by companies linked to the **Parlevliet and Van der Plas Group (P&P)**, one of Europe's most powerful privately held fishing groups.

The group is controlled by long-established Dutch fishing families and operates through a dense network of subsidiaries across Europe.



05 AFRIKA
THE OLD GUARD

FLAG

NETHERLANDS

LENGTH

ABOUT 126 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

1991

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC FREEZER
TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH ATLANTIC, NORTH
SEA, ENGLISH CHANNEL



Built in 1991, the Afrika belongs to an earlier generation of industrial supertrawlers that helped normalise the idea that fishing vessels could function as fully self-contained factories at sea.

As a factory equipped to catch, process, and freeze fish on board, the Afrika was engineered to follow fish stocks wherever they are available, rather than rely on proximity to port or local markets.

Vessel tracking data shows that, like other decades-old vessels on this list, the Afrika has for years been doing what it was designed to: Fish at scale, across borders, from the tropics to the North Atlantic – largely out of public view.

REPUTATION

The Afrika has been repeatedly cited in reporting and investigations as an example of how industrial fishing fleets operate across borders, often far from public oversight.

In Europe, the vessel was identified by Greenpeace UK as one of the five supertrawlers that spent the most time fishing inside United Kingdom offshore marine protected areas between 2020 and 2025. Greenpeace's analysis of vessel tracking data showed that Afrika was part of a small group of ships responsible for a disproportionate share of industrial fishing effort inside areas designated for conservation.

Earlier reporting by The Guardian highlighted how European industrial trawlers, including vessels like the Afrika, operated off the coast of West Africa under European Union fishing agreements, depleting local fish stocks in Mauritania to export catch abroad. EU trawlers were banned in 2014.

The contrast between fishing in European protected areas and operating in distant waters under international agreements has made the Afrika emblematic of a globalised fishing model that eschews regulatory frameworks and in which vessels can move between regulatory regimes, following fish and opportunity rather than scientifically established environmental limits.

WHO OWNS IT

The Afrika is operated by companies linked to the **Cornelis Vrolijk Group**, one of Europe's largest industrial fishing groups.

The group is controlled by the Cornelis Vrolijk family and operates through a network of subsidiaries across Europe and beyond. As with many vessels of this scale, ownership and control are private and spread across closely connected entities.



06 FRANK BONEFAAS
"CRIME PAYS"

FLAG

UNITED KINGDOM

LENGTH

ABOUT 120 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

1994

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE *Operated from the UK registry*

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC FREEZER
TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH SEA, ENGLISH
CHANNEL *Including mackerel and
herring fisheries*

The Frank Bonefaas is the kind of ship that makes the word "boat" feel misleading. At nearly 120 meters, it's built to stay out for long trips, vacuum up dense schools of fish, and freeze its catch onboard so it can keep fishing instead of racing back to port. This floating fish factory can hold up as much as 6,000 tonnes of fish in a single trip.

REPUTATION

The Frank Bonefaas is one of the rare supertrawlers whose paper trail is unusually easy to follow. In 2014-2015, the vessel became the focus of a UK government enforcement case after being boarded by Royal Navy fisheries officers. According to the Marine Management Organisation, inspectors found 632,166 kilograms of illegal mackerel on board that had been caught inside the regulated "mackerel box," an area subject to strict controls. The catch was estimated to be worth around £436,000. A court later ordered the payment of over £102,000 in fines and penalties. You do the math.



The case drew criticism not only because of the breach, but because the fish itself was still allowed to be sold, when the value of the catch far exceeded the penalty. It begs the question: are fines alone an effective deterrent for vessels operating at this scale?

More recently, the Frank Bonefaas has appeared in analyses of industrial fishing inside protected areas. Research cited by BLOOM indicates that the vessel spent around 123 hours fishing in marine protected areas in 2024, representing approximately 19 percent of its fishing effort during the period assessed. The finding places the vessel at the centre of ongoing debates about how “protected” such areas are in practice.

The Frank Bonefaas is a clear case of how large industrial vessels can remain legal, profitable, and active even as public concern over overfishing and marine protection grows.

WHO OWNS IT

The Frank Bonefaas is operated by the UK-based **North Atlantic Fishing Company (NAFISH)**, which is itself owned by the Dutch fishing group **Cornelis Vrolijk**, through group structures and beneficial ownership schemes described in detail by a Follow the Money report. The group holds a dominant share of England’s rights to key pelagic species like mackerel, herring and blue whiting in the North-East Atlantic.



07 PRINS BERNHARD
THE BEACH BUM

FLAG

FRANCE

LENGTH

88 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

1983

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC FREEZER
TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

ENGLISH CHANNEL,
NORTH SEA, NORTH
ATLANTIC

The Prins Bernhard may be smaller than Europe's largest megatrawlers, but at nearly 90 meters it earns its place on the Dirty Dozen list as a supersized floating fish factory. Built to catch, process, and freeze pelagic fish on board, it can deliver up to 200 tonnes of fish per trip into industrial supply chains.

REPUTATION

The Prins Bernhard has repeatedly been cited in reporting and campaigns focused on industrial fishing pressure in the English Channel and nearby protected areas.

In late 2024, BLOOM named the Prins Bernhard in its reporting on giant pelagic trawlers operating in and around protected zones in the Channel, including areas designated under the Natura 2000 network. BLOOM highlighted the presence of vessels like the Prins Bernhard fishing close to shore in areas officially set aside to protect sensitive habitats, arguing that these zones were protected in name only.



The vessel has also featured in wider public debate about the growing footprint of industrial pelagic fleets in the Channel. Reporting by fishing industry and environmental outlets has linked the Prins Bernhard to a broader pattern in which large freezer trawlers operate near coastal communities while landing most of their catch into international markets.

French small-scale fishers have named vessels like Prins Bernhard when calling for stronger limits on industrial trawling, arguing that the scale of these operations undermines local fisheries and coastal livelihoods.

Taken together, the Prins Bernhard's reputation is tied less to a single enforcement case and more to its repeated appearance in stories about contested waters. Is industrial pelagic trawling compatible with marine protection and small-scale fishing in the Channel? The Prins Bernhard sure seems to think so.

WHO OWNS IT

The Prins Bernhard is operated by France Pélagique SAS, a French-registered industrial fishing company. France Pélagique is part of the wider **Cornelis Vrolijk group**, one of Europe's largest pelagic fishing conglomerates, with interests spanning vessels, quotas, processing and distribution across multiple countries. The Cornelis Vrolijk group is controlled by the Vrolijk family, a force behind many of Europe's largest pelagic fleets.



08 JAN MARIA THE "UPGRADE"

FLAG

GERMANY

LENGTH

88 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

2024

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

FACTORY STERN
TRAWLING

*that includes
bottom trawling*

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

FAR NORTH ATLANTIC

The Jan Maria is a new arrival in Europe's industrial fishing fleet, but it's already a heavyweight. Just over 88 meters long and built as a fully equipped factory stern trawler, the Jan Maria was built to replace another large industrial vessel, the Gerda Maria.

REPUTATION

Because the Jan Maria only entered service in 2024, it doesn't yet have a long rap sheet. Its reputation so far is defined less by controversy than by what it represents: one of the most modern trawlers to enter the North Atlantic demersal (bottom-trawling) fleet, set to continue the work of its predecessor to fish as much as possible, in as little time as possible. The handover was presented as a routine fleet renewal, but trained eyes see right through it. This is a clear move to supersize fishing pressure in the EU.

Coverage in fishing trade publications highlighted the Jan Maria's advanced design, efficiency, and suitability for harsh northern waters. At the same time, the quiet exit of the Gerda Maria from European waters illustrates a nasty pattern in industrial fishing: when older vessels leave, newer and more destructive ones often take their place.

In that sense, the Jan Maria has already acquired a symbolic role. It's an example of how industrial fleets adapt to scrutiny and regulation by putting on a shiny new coat instead of sizing down or redesigning with an eye towards sustainability.



WHO OWNS IT

The Jan Maria is operated by **Nordbank Hochseefischerei GmbH**, a German industrial fishing company. Ownership information in ship registries links the vessel to financing and fleet structures associated with Nordbank.

Background literature and fleet analysis have linked Nordbank Hochseefischerei to the wider **Parlevliet and Van der Plas Group**, one of Europe's most powerful industrial fishing groups. As with many vessels in this segment, ownership and control are structured through layered corporate arrangements rather than a single holding.



09 MARK
THE PUPPET

FLAG

GERMANY

LENGTH

86 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

2015

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

FACTORY STERN
TRAWLING

*that includes
bottom trawling*

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH ATLANTIC

The Mark's modern design (by Skipsteknisk, a naval architecture firm with a mark on much of the EU fleet) reflects a broader shift in European fishing toward fewer, larger, and more advanced vessels capable of sustained industrial extraction.

REPUTATION

The Mark is not yet widely known to the general public, but it appears repeatedly in technical, investigative, and advocacy reporting that takes a closer look under the hood of Europe's industrial fishing sector.

Reporting supported by the Pulitzer Center has examined how a small number of large fishing groups, particularly Dutch-based conglomerates, have steadily increased their control over European fishing capacity through acquisitions, financing arrangements, and fleet renewal. Vessels like the Mark are part of that trend, even when they operate under German flags and ownership structures.

The vessel has also been called out by environmental organisations concerned about the expansion of industrial fishing capacity in European waters.



While the Mark itself is not the subject of a specific enforcement case, it's cited alongside other large trawlers in discussions about the cumulative pressure exerted by modern factory vessels on marine ecosystems and smaller-scale fishing communities.

In this sense, the Mark's reputation is defined less by scandal than by symbolism. It represents how industrial fishing power is maintained and expanded through continual investment in newer, more capable ships.

WHO OWNS IT

The Mark is operated by **Warnemünder Hochseefischerei GmbH**, a German industrial fishing operator. Ownership information is drawn from ship registries and project documentation linked to the vessel's design and construction.

Vessel registration information databases link Warnemünder Hochseefischerei to **Parlevliet & van der Plas Group**, citing specifically that the "Mark" was named after the grandson of the company's founder. As with many vessels of this size, ownership and influence extend beyond a single company name.



10 LODAIRO WORLD'S MOST INSPECTED

FLAG

SPAIN

LENGTH

86 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

2015

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

DEMERSAL TRAWLING

AKA bottom trawling!

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

NORTH ATLANTIC

At 86 meters long, the Lodairo is designed for offshore operations and prolonged trips, with the capacity to bulldoze seafloors far from its home port.

REPUTATION

In 2021, The Fishing Daily reported that the Lodairo was inspected 14 times by Norwegian fisheries authorities in a single year while operating in Norwegian waters. According to the story, the inspections were part of intensified controls on foreign bottom trawlers fishing in the North Atlantic. The unusually high number of inspections drew attention within the fishing industry, even though no single major sanction was highlighted in the coverage.

In May 2022, The Fishing Daily reported that the Lodairo was inspected 14 times by the Norwegian Coast Guard in 2021. All the while, the vessel continued to hold a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certificate for the Barents Sea cod fishery, according to a surveillance audit published just days prior. What's more, that audit states, "the Norwegian Coast Guard reports on an unchanged level of inspections in 2021." Something's not adding up.

Where is this figure ("close to an unwanted record" according to the article) in the audit? Whether the 14 inspections were related to this fishery is not established in the public record. But their absence may highlight a greater issue: The audit's assurance of compliance rests entirely on what authorities choose to disclose, at the level of aggregation they choose to disclose it.



So even if one vessel racks up 14 inspections, it could fly under the radar if the fishery's total inspections remained the same year-over-year. By focusing on fleet-level, rather than vessel-level data, the public is in the dark about the nature of inspections on any given megatrawler. The Lodairo case didn't break the MSC audit process; it showed exactly what the process is – and isn't – built to catch.

WHO OWNS IT

This vessel, now sailing under the Spanish flag, was until 2018 registered in Hull and known as the Kirkella. But it's not the same as the current Kirkella (Dirty Dozen No. 12).

When UK Fisheries commissioned its replacement, it transferred this vessel to Spanish company Pesquera Ancora (more on them below), which renamed it the Lodairo.

So where does that leave us? The Lodairo is currently registered to **Pesquera Ancora S.L.**, a Spanish fishing company. Operational and historical notes in ship registries point to links with **Deutsche Fischfang Union**, suggesting chartering or fleet management arrangements rather than simple single-entity ownership.

And according to The Fishing Daily, the vessel is jointly owned by Icelandic fishing company **Samherji** and Dutch conglomerate **Parlevliet & Van der Plas**, operating under the Spanish flag via Pesquera Ancora. If you see, Pesquera Ancora and UK Fisheries, read "P&P".

Samherji. Again. The Icelandic company whose involvement in the Fishrot corruption scandal was exposed by WikiLeaks in 2019 appears here multiple times, linked to the Annelies Ilena (Dirty Dozen No. 1), the Kirkella (Dirty Dozen No. 12), and the Lodairo. Parlevliet & Van der Plas appears throughout the list. Different flags. Different operating companies. Different names on the hull. The same network, shuffling vessels and quotas between jurisdictions while the fish disappear.

The Lodairo used to be British. Now it's Spanish. Tomorrow it could be something else entirely.



11 SCOMBRUS BORN VILLAIN

FLAG

FRANCE

LENGTH

81 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:

2020

CURRENT STATUS:

ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:

PELAGIC FREEZER
TRAWLING

KNOWN WATERS (EU):

ENGLISH CHANNEL,
NORTH ATLANTIC

*Small pelagics including herring,
mackerel, horse mackerel, blue whiting*

REPUTATION

The Scombrus is a post-pandemic pelagic freezer trawler, designed to catch and freeze small mid-water species at sea.

The Scombrus attracted attention from the moment it entered service. In **October 2020**, the launch of the Scombrus prompted widespread protests in Ireland, reported by Irish maritime press, which framed the vessel as part of a growing wave of large pelagic freezer trawlers expanding industrial fishing capacity in European waters.

Industry coverage from the same period followed the Scombrus on its first fishing trips, describing it as a technologically advanced addition to the pelagic freezer fleet and highlighting its role in modernising industrial pelagic fishing rather than reducing overall capacity.

More recently, in December 2024, the Scombrus was explicitly named by BLOOM in reporting on large pelagic trawlers operating in and around marine protected areas in the English Channel, including the Natura 2000 Flanders Bank. BLOOM listed the Scombrus among industrial vessels active in zones officially designated for conservation, using vessel tracking data to illustrate how pelagic trawling continues inside areas labelled as protected.



The *Scombrus* has been denounced by Sea Shepherd Scandinavia, which detailed the ecological risks posed by large-scale pelagic freezer trawlers operating close to sensitive marine habitats.

WHO OWNS IT

The *Scombrus* is linked in fleet materials to **France Pélagique**, which forms part of the wider **Cornelis Vrolijk** family industrial fishing group. The vessel is also associated with **NAFISH**, reflecting the cross-border structure typical of this group's pelagic plundering.



12 KIRKELLA
THE FALSE FLAG

FLAG
UNITED KINGDOM

LENGTH
81 METERS

CONSTRUCTION:
2018

CURRENT STATUS:
ACTIVE

FISHING METHOD:
FREEZER TRAWLING
Cod and haddock

KNOWN WATERS (EU):
BARENTS SEA, GREENLAND
SEA, NORWEGIAN SEA



The Kirkella is the United Kingdom's largest and last remaining long-range freezer trawler. At just over 81 meters, the Kirkella is built to operate far from home ports for months at a time, catching and freezing whitefish on board before returning directly to the UK with processed fish products.

Unlike most of the vessels in this series, the Kirkella is regularly presented in the British press as a national outlier. It's often described as the final survivor of a once-larger UK distant-water fleet, operating in Arctic and sub-Arctic waters rather than close to British coasts.

REPUTATION

And so the Kirkella has enjoyed a remarkably comfortable reputation for a vessel on this list, largely because it has been handed one. UK Fisheries Limited, the vessel's operator, repeatedly presented the Kirkella to Parliament and the press as a Brexit casualty – a proud British ship shortchanged by failed negotiations, operating with around 50 percent of its previous quota in Norwegian and Arctic waters, a framing reported by the BBC, The Guardian, and trade outlets.

What that narrative conveniently omits: The vessel continued to undertake multi-month industrial expeditions – pressuring Arctic cod and haddock stocks regardless of the political theatre unfolding in Westminster. The complaints about reduced quota were, in effect, a Dutch-Icelandic company lobbying the British government to secure more access to its fish.

WHO OWNS IT

The Kirkella is operated by **UK Fisheries Limited**, which is a joint venture between Dutch conglomerate **Parlevliet & Van der Plas** and Icelandic fishing company **Samherji**, now managed under Samherji's foreign operations arm, **Alda Seafood Group**. The vessel flies a British flag and its crew is predominantly British. But its ultimate owners are the same Dutch and Icelandic interests that appear throughout this list.

That Icelandic connection is worth pausing on. Samherji, co-owner of UK Fisheries and therefore a beneficial owner of the Kirkella, is the same company implicated in the Fishrot corruption scandal – in which bribes were paid to Namibian government officials in exchange for fishing access, revealed by WikiLeaks in 2019. The scandal is prominently linked in this report to the Annelies Ilena. The Kirkella shares the same ownership tree. The document of Britishness that accompanied the Kirkella's launch (the Union Jack branding, the royal naming ceremony) does not change where the money ultimately goes, or who it ultimately serves.



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