



Protected on paper,
destroyed in reality.



ClientEarth[®]



Deutsche Umwelthilfe



OCEANA

SEAS AT RISK

PRESS RELEASE

New coalition launches to defend Europe's seas through the courts

Brussels, July 6th - The EU has some of the world's strongest nature laws, but they are routinely ignored: many of its marine protected areas still allow exceptionally destructive fishing. A new coalition of environmental organisations is launching to ensure those laws are finally enforced.

This comes one year after environmental organisations filed landmark legal complaints against six EU Member States for allowing destructive fishing inside marine protected areas, and on which the European Commission has yet to take action.

The Coalition, bringing together twelve organisations, will call on the European Commission to take infringement action against several Member States currently failing to comply with their legal obligations to protect marine ecosystems and will support legal action at the national level.

"Given the European Commission's new political drive to reduce administrative burdens, prohibiting destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling in EU MPAs provides a clear and straightforward rule for all EU fishers, which would greatly simplify and reduce the costs of monitoring and implementation," said the MPA Legal Coalition.

The launch comes at a pivotal moment for EU ocean policy. As the European Commission undertakes an evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, the Coalition argues that the effective implementation and enforcement of these directives will be decisive for meaningful ocean protection. With recent victories in the **Dutch Dogger Bank** protected area and the **Banc des Flandres site**, all eyes are now on EU policymakers to take heed of these rulings.

A year ago, members of the Coalition submitted coordinated legal complaints (1, 2) with the European Commission against Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain for systematically allowing bottom trawling and other destructive fishing activities to take place inside marine Natura 2000 sites. Twelve months later, these ecologically important marine areas, so-called Marine 'Protected' Areas, remain largely unprotected from the destruction they were designated to prevent.

The MPA Legal Coalition has joined forces to change this reality. By coordinating legal action across the EU, sharing scientific evidence and supporting strategic litigation at national and European level, the Coalition aims to strengthen accountability and accelerate the implementation of existing environmental laws. The Coalition will focus on ensuring that governments fulfil their obligations under EU nature legislation, including the Habitats Directive and broader biodiversity commitments.

"By connecting national legal action into a single, coordinated European strategy, the Coalition is building a wave of accountability that no government can ignore," said the MPA Legal Coalition. "The MPA Legal Coalition exists to ensure that Europe's protected seas are protected in practice, not just on paper."

ENDS

Notes to editors

The MPA Legal Coalition brings together environmental organisations working to improve the implementation and enforcement of marine conservation law across Europe. Its first year of activity will focus on advancing ongoing legal proceedings, providing input to the Birds and Habitats Directives stress-test, and strengthening cooperation between legal experts, scientists and civil society to protect marine ecosystems.

Its members include: Blue Marine Foundation, Bund, ClientEarth, Danmarks Naturfredningsforening, Défense des Milieux Aquatiques, Doggerland, DUH, Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), North Sea Foundation, Oceana, OnlyOne and Seas At Risk.

The European Union has committed to protecting at least 30% of its seas by 2030 under the **EU Biodiversity Strategy** and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**.

Yet, around **93% of Europe's marine ecosystems are affected** by multiple human pressures and **Good Environmental Status (GES) has not been achieved**.

Bottom trawling is one of the most widespread pressures affecting marine habitats in European waters and continues to occur within many areas designated for conservation under the Natura 2000 network. **Official data from the European Commission** show that 79% of the coastal seabed is considered physically disturbed, primarily due to bottom trawling.

About Blue Marine Foundation

Blue Marine Foundation is a UK- and Brussels based ocean conservation charity whose aim is to restore life in the ocean by securing marine protected areas and tackling overfishing. Blue Marine's mission is to ensure the effective protection of at least 30 per cent of the ocean by 2030 and the sustainable management of the whole ocean. Blue Marine currently works in 29 countries around the world, with over 200 partners.

For more information, please contact Sally Cusack **bluemarinefoundation@theprophets.co.uk**

About BUND

Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND) is the German member of Friends of the Earth and an independent federal NGO that has been dedicated to protecting nature and the environment since the mid-1970s. With over 670,000 members and supporters, 16 state organisations and 2,300 local and regional groups, BUND is one of the largest environmental associations in Germany today.

About ClientEarth

ClientEarth works in over 60 countries across Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe. We shape, implement and enforce the law, to build a future for our planet in which people and nature can thrive. We are tackling climate change, protecting nature and stopping pollution, with partners and citizens around the globe. We hold industry and governments to account and defend everyone's right to a healthy world.

About Défense des Milieux Aquatiques (DMA)

DMA's primary focus is to take legal action before French administrative courts to reduce pressures on aquatic environments. We fight in particular against the overexploitation of these ecosystems, for instance regarding migratory fish (salmon, shad, lamprey, eel), bottom trawling, the diversion of watercourses, or migratory birds. DMA has succeeded in shortening the bottom trawling season in the three-mile zone of Arcachon from 12 to 5 months, and later in excluding this fishing technique from marine protected areas along these shores. It is essential to build on this momentum to safeguard all marine protected areas, but also the entire three-mile zone. Our major project is to free this zone from all non-selective fishing gear, that is, from all nets. This is the 'Golden Miles' project, which has already been a reality for decades in the USA and other countries.

For more information, please contact: maigre42@gmail.com.

About Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V (DUH)/Environmental Action Germany

Environmental Action Germany is an independent non-profit association founded in 1975, entitled to bring legal action and campaigning mainly on a national and European level. The organisation supports all sustainable ways of life and economic systems that respect ecological boundaries. At the same time, the organisation fights for the preservation of biological diversity and the protection of natural assets as well as for climate protection. Our marine team is dedicated to protecting ocean health by addressing overfishing, promoting nature-friendly offshore wind development, and advancing sustainable marine spatial planning. We work for healthy seas in Germany and in close partnership with our European allies.

For more information please contact: info@duh.de

About Doggerland

Doggerland Foundation combats violations of legislation for marine nature conservation through legal interventions and addresses the lack of ambition with nature restoration projects, while improving the representation and rights of the sea in decision-making processes.

About the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF)

Our work to secure environmental justice aims to protect our global climate, ocean, forests, wetlands, wildlife and defend the fundamental human right to a secure natural environment, recognising that all other rights are contingent on this. EJF works internationally to inform policy and drive systemic, durable reforms to protect our environment and defend human rights. We investigate and expose abuses and support environmental defenders, Indigenous Peoples, communities and independent journalists on the frontlines of environmental injustice. Our campaigns aim to secure peaceful, equitable and sustainable futures. Our investigators, researchers, filmmakers and campaigners work with grassroots partners and environmental defenders across the globe.

For more information, please contact media@ejfoundation.org.

About Oceana

Oceana is the largest international organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Our mission is to rebuild abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies that stop overfishing, protect habitats and threatened species, curb oil and plastic pollution, and increase transparency at sea. With more than 350 victories, Oceana's campaigns are delivering results – for the oceans, for coastal communities, and for the planet. A restored ocean means that 1 billion people can enjoy a healthy, climate-smart seafood meal every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world.

For more information, please contact efairless@oceana.org

About Seas At Risk

Seas At Risk (SAR) is a Brussels-based umbrella organisation representing 41 environmental NGOs in 19 European countries, collectively speaking for millions of citizens. SAR works to secure ambitious EU policies that protect the marine environment and support resilient coastal communities. Our organisation brings more than thirty years of experience working with national civil society organisations across Europe. This long-standing network provides a strong foundation for coordinated advocacy across multiple governance levels. By linking national campaigns with EU and international level policy engagement, we are able to translate local realities into European policy debates. Our established relationships with EU institutions and decision-makers allow us to engage directly in legislative and policy processes, while the strength of our national members ensures that advocacy efforts are grounded in local expertise and political legitimacy.

For more information, please contact stironi@seas-at-risk.org