



**Attention:**

Director General, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Charlina Vitcheva  
Director General, Environment, Florika Fink-Hooijer

Brussels, 12 July 2022

**Re: Urgent meeting request on the *EU Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems***

Dear Directors General Charlina Vitcheva and Florika Fink-Hooijer,

We are contacting you in order to follow up on the conversations we had with Commissioner Sinkevičius and Director General Charlina Vitcheva at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon. We are deeply worried to hear that the European Commission has decided to postpone again the release of the *EU Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems*, which was announced originally for 2021. We are concerned about the apparent lack of willingness to address the impacts of the most destructive fishing gears on marine biodiversity. We are equally concerned that certain inaccurate figures and unscientific arguments about the climate and biodiversity impacts of bottom-contact fishing methods, such as their supposedly beneficial “ploughing” effect on marine ecosystems, are used by the European Commission in the public space.

At a time when the European Commission is preparing the release of the EU Ocean Action Plan, we call for an urgent meeting with you. In order to refer to the most advanced and reliable science in the conduct of public maritime affairs, we propose we also invite several scientists to this meeting.

As you know, civil society and scientists expect the European Commission to deliver an ambitious strategy to tackle the impacts of destructive fishing, such as the use of bottom-contact gears in EU waters, including inside Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in line with international objectives and scientific warnings pertaining to the protection of marine biodiversity and coastal ecosystems, and to the urgent need to preserve the ocean carbon sink in order to fight climate change.

There is overwhelming evidence showing that the ocean is in a dire state that requires a full and resolute plan of action to allow it to recover its lost biodiversity, habitats, and geophysical functional capacity. In Lisbon, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke of the “ocean emergency”. Some leaders rose to the occasion: France’s President Emmanuel Macron unexpectedly called for a ban on deep-sea mining in the High Seas, Norway released its VMS data in the public sphere, and Thailand announced a moratorium on new commercial fishing licenses for bottom-trawling and a \$40 million USD budget for a decommissioning programme.

The EU is one of the planet’s strongest environmental leaders. The time has more than come for bold public action, and the Commission should fully embrace its stewardship role to steer our interactions with the natural world towards true ecosystem sustainability, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and its aim to “reverse the degradation of ecosystems.” Delivering such ambition cannot be met without eliminating the devastating impacts of bottom-contact gears inside MPAs, as a starting point, in line with the European Parliament’s call to “prohibit all environmentally damaging extractive industrial activities”, including industrial fishing and thus bottom-trawling, in MPAs (2021/2188(INI)). Furthermore, banning bottom-trawling in MPAs is also the only long term economically viable option in line with the Commission’s Sustainable Blue Economy Strategy, to ensure positive long term net benefits to society, including through recovered fish stocks, enhanced tourism and increased ecosystem services<sup>1</sup>. It is an opportunity for the EU to inspire the world by setting a vision about the future of European fisheries in 2030 and beyond that reconciles environmental and socio-economic considerations by laying out a just transition to low impact fisheries.

We would therefore like to request an urgent meeting with you concerning the upcoming *EU Action Plan to conserve fisheries resources and protect marine ecosystems*. Depending on the date you suggest, we will see which scientists are available to join us at this meeting, which we count on you to make a priority.

We look forward to your quick response and to a fruitful discussion to make sure the adoption of this EU Action Plan responds to the urgency of the biodiversity and climate crises we face.

Sincerely yours,

Claire Nouvian, Founder, BLOOM  
Rebecca Hubbard, Program Director, Our Fish  
Pascale Moehrle, Executive Director, Oceana in Europe  
Monica Verbeek, Executive Director, Seas At Risk  
Ariel Brunner, Deputy Director and Head of Policy, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia

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Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius  
Deputy Director General, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Kestutis Sadauskas  
Deputy Director General, Environment, Patrick Child

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<sup>1</sup> New Economics Foundation, *Valuing the impact of a potential ban on bottom-contact fishing in EU marine protected areas*, March 2021. See the summary of the study on <https://seas-at-risk.org/press-releases/benefits-quickly-outweigh-costs-of-banning-bottom-trawling-from-marine-protected-areas-2/>