



EBFA calls for balanced marine policies that protect both oceans and fishers

Brussels, 2 July 2025

At this week 3rd Meeting on the Implementation of the EU Action Plan to Protect and Restore Marine Ecosystems, the European Bottom Fishing Alliance (EBFA) called for a more realistic and science-driven approach to marine protection—one that secures both environmental progress and the future of the European fishing sector. Delivering a comprehensive statement on behalf of the Alliance, the Chair of EBFA emphasized that the current political mandate marks a pivotal shift, offering a chance to rethink policy direction in light of the newly launched EU Ocean Pact, the UNOC3 Declaration and other interconnected initiatives.

Iván Lopez, chair of the Alliance, declared: *‘Our sector has already undergone a profound transformation — the fleet has decreased by 30% since the year 2000. Combined with the adoption of new technologies and mitigation measures, this has led to a significant reduction in our environmental footprint. Yet, how much of this progress has been truly acknowledged in EU environmental policies? Especially considering that, according to UNCTAD, emissions from our sector have dropped by 52% since 1990.’*

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): science over headlines

The Alliance endorsed the EU Ocean Pact’s vision of tailored management plans for each MPA involving fishers to identify compatible fishing methods based on local ecological needs.

The Chair stated: *‘This is particularly relevant since countries like Greece have been recently praised for banning bottom trawling in MPAs. However, the Commission is now urging Greece to comply with a 2020 Court of Justice ruling for failing to establish conservation objectives and measures for 239 Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive¹. This contradiction highlights a fundamental issue: there are no quick fixes. What is needed are evidence-based, site-specific management plans — not emotionally driven announcements designed for social media. Without this approach, EU fishers will be pushed aside while nature will not be effectively protected, these are the real ‘empty MPAs’ of the EU.’*

Call for science, innovation and real investment

EBFA called for an environmental protection strategy that focuses more on science and innovation than on eliminating fishing activity, which is sadly occurring in Europe. Also to increase associated funding to find new technologies, adapt new gears and renovate the fleet.

Closing gaps: food sovereignty, socio-economic impact and mapping

The Alliance flagged serious policy gaps still present in the Action Plan:

- Food security and self-sufficiency remain overlooked, despite repeated calls from both the Council and the Parliament and the new political mandate.

- The sector's contribution to the energy transition is at risk, as policies threatening bottom fishing undermine private investment and banking confidence.
- EBFA called for improved high-resolution mapping of trawling footprints and the establishment of gear-based buffer zones to help reduce socio-economic impact of area closures.
- Lack of recognition of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), which are acknowledged under international biodiversity and high seas agreements (CBD and BBNJ) as equal in status to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Level playing field

The Alliance highlighted inconsistencies in the Nature Restoration Law, which grants derogations to industrial offshore energy projects while placing full restrictions on fishers and farmers. *'How can we accept different rules for blue economies under the same horizontal environmental legislation? This undermines confidence and fairness,'* the Chair stated.

Looking ahead: constructive engagement

EBFA reaffirmed its commitment to working constructively with the European Commission and Member States to achieve shared goals of healthy oceans and resilient coastal communities. In return, the Alliance calls for balanced policies that do not pre-emptively ban specific fishing gears. Trade-offs must be properly assessed to ensure future benefits translate into real, present-day gains.

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¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_25_1241