



CIVIL SOCIETY URGES IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PROTECT FRAGILE DEEP-SEA ECOSYSTEMS

PRESS RELEASE

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Six years after the adoption of the EU deep-sea fishing Regulation that prohibited bottom trawling below 800 meters in EU waters, the EU has finally adopted an 'Implementing Act' to begin closing coldwater coral and other biologically diverse deep-sea vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) below 400 meters depth to bottom fishing.

Civil society welcomes this long-awaited protection of VMEs. The adopted protective measures are, however, already under threat.

At the end of June, after a delay of four years, EU Member States finally took the last steps to begin implementing the provisions of the 2016 EU deep-sea fishing Regulation to protect highly sensitive deep-sea ecosystems from destructive bottom fishing practices in EU waters of the Northeast Atlantic. The adopted Implementing Act requires closing areas to bottom fishing where deep-sea corals, sponges and other habitat forming species are known or likely to occur, based on scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES).

The Implementing Act is set to officially enter into force in September, when the conclusion of a two month 'notification period' to the United Kingdom is over. Since its adoption in June, however, the Spanish bottom trawl industry has virulently called to delay the entry into force of the Implementing Act or even to invalidate the vote during which a majority of EU Member States (14) voted in favor of the Act.

Matthew Gianni, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) Co-Founder and Policy Adviser commented: *"The protection of deep-sea VMEs in the face of likely irreversible destruction is long overdue and should have been implemented by January 2018 as is required under the EU regulation. The DSCC and its members are eager to see the Act officially come to law, and without any further delays. Despite criticism by some sectors of the fishing industry, the Commission should stand firm in its decision to implement the closures and should not hesitate to protect deep-sea biodiversity hotspots in EU waters."*

Deep-sea VMEs are often home to slow growing, long-lived species and rare or endemic species making them highly vulnerable to the impact of bottom trawl fishing. Moreover, recovery rates can be very slow, in some cases decades or hundreds of years. Bottom trawl fishing in these areas may result in species extinctions and the permanent loss of biologically diverse habitats.

Cecilia del Castillo Moro, Ecologistas en Acción Policy Officer said: *“It is now crucial that EU Member States act to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the deep sea in line with what Ursula von der Leyen and the Heads of all EU States, including Spain, committed to do when signing the Leaders Pledge for Nature, and implement without delay the closures to protect and restore these areas of high biodiversity value. Our natural heritage cannot depend on the short-term socio-economic interests of a small fraction of the fishing sector. Our representatives have the responsibility to conserve our most precious seabed biodiversity”.*

After official entry into force of the Implementing Act, the Commission is expected to review the list of closures annually and, where appropriate, amend it, based on the precautionary principle and the best scientific information available. In light of this ongoing process, civil society urges the Commission to ensure that ICES, the scientific advisory body to the EU on this issue, is able to continue providing scientifically robust advice in identifying areas where VMEs are known or likely to occur.

Claire Nouvian, founder of BLOOM, said: *“These four years of delay in implementing the deep-sea fishing Regulation have allowed the most destructive vessels to continue destroying the most fragile ecosystems in the ocean. These unique habitats that host long-lived animals such as millenary corals should have been strictly protected as of 2018, as the legislation dictated, but EU Member States have been lagging behind to avoid closures. This is unacceptable. Deep-sea fisheries are heavily subsidized and destroy public finance, biodiversity and the climate, as they dislodge the carbon naturally stored in deep marine sediments. Now EU Member States: get to work and protect deep-sea biodiversity from the harm caused by bottom trawling!”*

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About the DSCC

The DSCC is made up of over 100 non-government organizations, fishers organizations and law and policy institutes working together to protect vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems. We aim to substantially reduce the greatest threats to life in the deep sea and to safeguard the long-term health, integrity and resilience of deep-sea ecosystems.

Our main focus is on ensuring the sustainability of deep-sea fisheries and addressing the potential threat of deep-sea mining.

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