



PRESS RELEASE

REACTION: EU PROTECTS 16,000 KM² OF VULNERABLE DEEP-SEA LIFE

Brussels, September 15th:

Today's announcement by Virginijus Sinkevičius, the European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries will close over 16,000 square kilometres of the deep sea to bottom fishing in EU waters of the Northeast Atlantic. This will bring much needed protection to deep-sea corals, sponges and other habitat forming species off the Atlantic coasts of Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal.

The areas closed by the European Commission are needed to implement the EU deep-sea fisheries [Regulation 2016/2336](#) adopted in 2016. The 2016 Regulation already prohibits bottom trawl fishing below 800 metres in EU waters in the northeast Atlantic. Today's closures add an additional 87 areas where coldwater coral reefs, aggregations of deep-sea sponges, sea pens and other deepwater habitats are known or likely to occur between 400 and 800 metres depth. Despite complaints by some segments of the fishing industry, these closures represent less than 2 percent of the areas shallower than 800 metres depth in the EEZs of the four countries.

These deep-sea habitats, collectively known as Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems under EU and international law, create biologically diverse deep-sea ecosystems highly vulnerable to degradation by deep-sea bottom trawling.

The closures were required to be put into place already in 2018 under the deep-sea fisheries Regulation but the European Commission decided to conduct extensive consultations with scientists, member states, the fishing and seafood industries and NGOs, as well as hold a public consultation before finally making a decision.

"While long overdue, we are pleased to see the Commission take firm action to protect these deep-sea ecosystems", said Matthew Gianni, Political Advisor to the [Deep Sea Conservation Coalition](#).

The move is significant because it reaffirms the importance of measures to protect the deep ocean, despite objections from the Spanish government and some sectors of the fishing industry.

The European Commission adopted the closures, based on scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, under a so-called Implementing Act established in the deep-sea fisheries Regulation. In June, when presented with the proposal for the closures by the Commission, 14 EU Member States voted for the proposal; 9 abstained and only 2 – Spain and Ireland – opposed. Two other States were not present for the vote.

On this basis, the European Commission (after a two-month period of notification with the UK required under the Brexit agreement) has decided to go ahead and finally adopted these closures today.

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