



press release deepsea conservation

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THE EU COMMISSION STATEMENT ON HIGH SEAS BOTTOM TRAWLING IS GREENWASH

Seas At Risk and the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) today accused the European Commission of greenwashing a set of proposals designed to undermine the growing support for a high seas moratorium on bottom trawl fishing, and noted that it did not seem to reflect the will of all EU Member States.

In a press release issued today, European Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime affairs Joe Borg said, “protecting the vulnerable deep sea environment is essential for the future of fisheries and other marine resources” and that the EU would propose a package of measures for consideration by the UN General Assembly that would contain “realistic, effective and enforceable proposals that can be implemented expeditiously.” Unfortunately, the measures he proposes are none of these.

The centrepiece of the Commission statement is “an immediate prohibition by flag states of destructive fishing methods by their vessels on the sites of sensitive marine habitats in unregulated areas, until they can be guaranteed a high level of protection through the creation of new [Regional Fisheries Management Organisations] RFMOs, or through appropriate interim arrangements.”

According to Monica Verbeek of Seas At Risk, member of the DSCC, “the Commission knows full well that scientists have not yet identified where the sensitive marine habitats are. We invite Commissioner. Borg to show us his map of the sensitive marine ecosystems in the high seas. Until that time we call for a reverse burden of proof: an interim prohibition that can only be lifted for sites WITHOUT sensitive marine habitats.”

The Commission position for areas within RFMOs explicitly recognises that sensitive areas are not well known: “The actions sought include an immediate freeze on the expansion of deep sea fishing in regulated areas with bottom gears, [and] further efforts **to complete the process of identifying and protecting all sensitive ecosystems...**” Verbeek said “if they don’t even know where these places are in RFMO areas where data is more abundant, how can they expect these sites to be known outside the regulated areas? We don’t even know where all of the seamounts are or which ones support vulnerable ecosystems, let alone where other less obvious vulnerable habitats are.”

Verbeek noted that an increasing number of countries now support a moratorium, including Australia which announced last week a proposed package of measures which are far more effective than those being proposed by the European Commission. Moreover, several EU States are also calling for a moratorium, including Germany, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, France and the UK. “When you line up the measures proposed by Australia, Palau and many other countries, it is clear the Commission’s proposal is nothing more than greenwash.”

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