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## EU fish species face extinction: Von der Leyen handed bombshell order to save industry

ENVIRONMENTAL groups have turned on the European Union, demanding lucrative bottom trawling fishing be banned in all marine protected areas (MPAs) as part of warnings of huge gaps in the bloc's Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

By **PAUL WITHERS**

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A coalition of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including BirdLife Europe, BLOOM, ClientEarth, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition and the Greenpeace European Unit, have published a paper entitled 'Back to the Source - Saving Europe's Biodiversity Starts in the Ocean'. They warn "tangible and binding" actions must be taken to ensure the proposed biodiversity strategy ensures "the long-term health" of oceans throughout the bloc. The group lists ten recommended actions which it says it has sent to "decision-makers" at the EU, such as the European Commission, EU member state ministers and MEPs.

'Back to the Source - Saving Europe's Biodiversity Starts in the Ocean' said, under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, EU member states have a responsibility to ensure their seas are in "good environmental status" by 2020, stating the controversial Common Fisheries Policy (CCP) is supposed to follow an "ecosystem-based approach".

The document stated: "Include actions in the EU action plan to protect marine ecosystems and fisheries resources to protect the habitats of marine biodiversity by tackling the most destructive fishing gear - bottom-trawling - including a prohibition on bottom trawling in all EU marine protected areas; spatial restrictions and closures on near-shore bottom trawling to protect sensitive habitats."

The next recommendation also added: "Protect deep sea ecosystems by effectively implementing EU Deep Sea Regulation, and particularly: delineating the bottom fisheries footprint in areas between 400 and 800 metres' depth; closing areas, based on a precautionary approach, where Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems are known or likely to occur."

The paper also recommended dedicating "more resources to ensuring sound implementation and enforcement of existing laws and objectives, including vigorously pursuing infringement action against non-compliant Member States".

It also recommended developing an "EU action plan to protect marine ecosystems and fisheries resources that supports productive, resilient fish populations".

This included "precautionary buffers for climate change when setting fishing limits; environmental impact assessments of fishing activities that include considerations such as impacts on the food web, on non-target and associated species, protected species, physical disturbance, and the ecosystem's capacity to mitigate or adapt to climate change".

**READ MORE: Greedy SNP orders Boris to hand over £1.3bn due to EU exit**



EU news: Environmental groups have warned there are huge gap in the bloc's Biodiversity Strategy 2030

(Image: PA)

Further steps included "increased measures to minimise non-target bycatch; a clear and transparent set of environmental and social criteria for allocation of fishing quotas to maximise benefits for the environment and coastal communities; a drastic improvement in the control of fishing activities, including a transition to mandatory remote electronic monitoring systems (REM) for all fleets".

Another step recommended ensuring the EU action plan to protect marine ecosystems and fisheries resources protects sensitive species includes: "A focus on robust long-term monitoring of sensitive species; adequate data collection of fisheries interactions; application of measures to prevent and mitigate bycatch of sensitive species."

The group also recommended ending further destructive fishing practices, such as hydrocarbon exploration in MPAs, ensuring "at least 30 percent of EU oceans fully or highly protected, as recommended by science in the next decade".

The environmental coalition wanted a strategy of restoring EU marine biodiversity by "setting a restoration target of at least 15 percent of EU seas" and having more of a "focus on those ecosystems with the most potential to capture and store carbon, and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters, in particular to restore seabed integrity".

The paper called for "harmful subsidies" in the fishing sector to be ended, claiming its estimations show that in 2018, the EU handed out \$2billion in "capacity-enhancing subsidies", many of which go to "suppliers and vessel owners".

It warned: "Yet there is a weak link between harmful fishing subsidies and improving the living standard of fishers, because a large share of money goes to suppliers and vessel owners instead of increasing the income of fishers."

The final action recommended ensuring the EU's international reach "does not worsen destruction of ocean ecosystems".

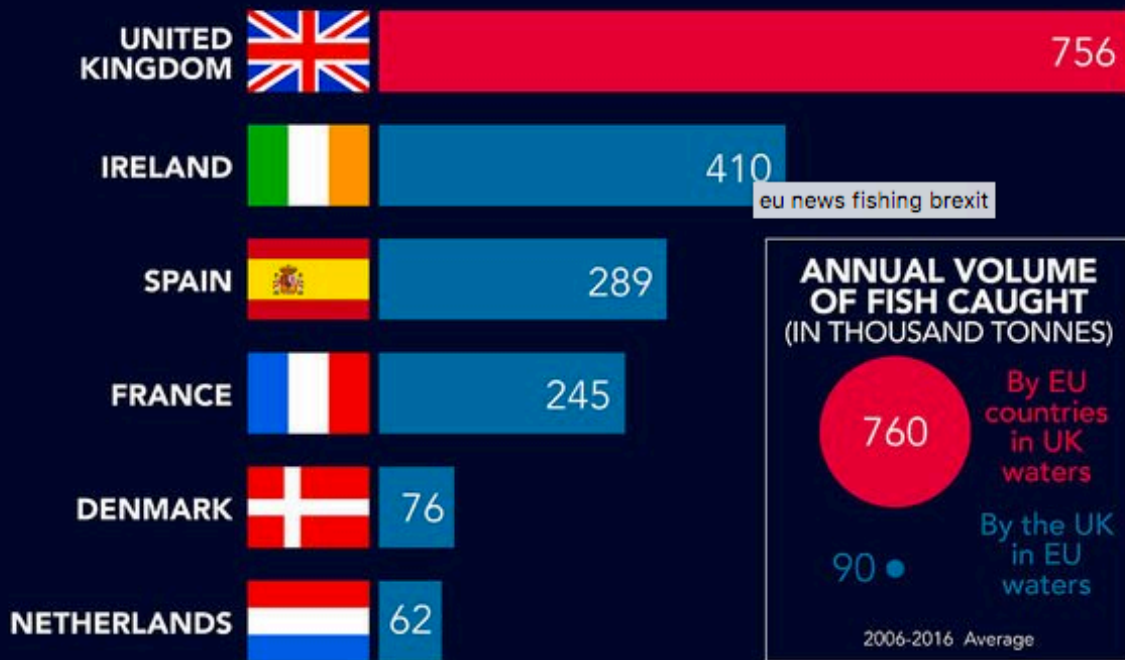
It added: "Reviewing and updating Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements for EU vessels fishing in distant waters so they do not contribute to overfishing or bycatch of sensitive species, and do not negatively impact the economic activities of local coastal communities and artisanal fleets."

Our Fish, which works to "end overfishing and restore a healthy ocean ecosystem" and has published the report, warned: "These are turbulent times."



# EUROPEAN FISHING DEPENDENCE ON BRITISH WATERS

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surface area on the Atlantic coast, English Channel and North Sea by country (in thousand km<sup>2</sup>)



**EXPRESS**

Sources: French National Assembly & French European Affairs Committee via Le Télégramme

EU news: European fishing dependence on British waters (Image: EXPRESS)

"One million species are at risk of extinction and the ecosystems supporting our lives are on the verge of breaking down; we are embroiled in the worst pandemic the world has experienced for 100 years; and climate change impacts are already biting with unprecedented heating, ice melting and climate refugees.

"EU seas are feeling the heat: Member States have failed to achieve 'good environmental status' for our seas and the combined impacts are on a path to cross complex planetary boundaries — triggering irreversible changes to the ecological conditions under which humanity has evolved and thrived.

"President von der Leyen and many EU Heads of State or government joined the Leaders Pledge for Nature at the UN Summit on Biodiversity, committing to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

"The European Commission's Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies are a blueprint for delivering on that pledge.

"This document is a toolkit of ocean-related solutions that EU decision-makers, including the Commission, Member State ministers and MEPs, can use to translate those two strategies into tangible and binding action.

"All life on the planet came from the ocean, and all life on the planet depends on the ocean. Without a healthy and functioning ocean, life would be unbearable. We need to help it, to help ourselves."