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Fishing fury: Fight launched to ban bottom trawling in UK after supertrawlers battle

A PETITION to ban the controversial practice of bottom trawling in UK coastal waters has been launched after the Government backed down in its threat to outlaw so-called supertrawlers.

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Ministers have admitted they are powerless to stop supertrawlers from fishing Britain's waters but Tory MPs have urged the Prime Minister to reassess the UK's policy on the matter. The Government can only legislate against the type of fishing which occurs, rather than the type of vessel which enters Britain's waters.

Campaigner Stephen Russell has said bottom trawling was easier to legally define than the term "supertrawler" and is urging people to sign a newly-published online petition.

Mr Russell said: "Bottom trawling causes long-lasting environmental damage that reduces the ability of fish stocks to recover.

"I want the Government to ban bottom trawling.

"Fish stocks need to be protected, not just by fishing quotas but by protecting their habitat.

"It's one thing to over-fish but quite another to remove their breeding grounds.

"These areas may never recover leading to sterile British waters."



An EU bottom trawler working off the Cornish coast (Image: PA)

The petition, which can be found on the petition.parliament.uk website, comes after an alliance of environmental groups called on the European Union to ban bottom trawling across all marine protected areas (MPAs) amid warnings of huge gaps in the bloc's Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

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 EU.



Campaigners have launched a petition calling for a ban on bottom trawling (Image: PA)



Campaigners warn bottom trawling destroys breeding grounds off the British coasts (Image: PA)

The group list 10 recommended actions which it says it has sent to "decision-makers" at the EU, such as the European Commission, EU member state ministers 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".

But it urged important legislation be implemented and said enforcement action by all member states "needs to be ramped up dramatically".

One of the key ten recommended actions listed in the paper was a call for an end to what the environmental groups label as "destructive" practises, including bottom trawling in all EU MPAs.

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.

"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."

UK'S MOST COMMONLY LANDED FISH SPECIES

Quantity of fish landed by UK vessels in the UK and abroad in 2019* (tonnes)



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*Excluding shellfish
Source: Marine Management Organisation

Most commonly caught UK fish (Image: EXPRESS.CO.UK)

EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES OF THE UK AND NEIGHBOURING COASTAL STATES



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Source: Institute for Government

EU fishing zones (Image: EXPRESS.CO.UK)

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".