

Mongabay Series: Oceans

## Mongabay Explains: What's all the brouhaha over bottom trawling?

by [Mongabay.com](https://www.mongabay.com) on 23 December 2022



- *A new episode of "Mongabay Explains" examines the controversial fishing method known as bottom trawling, in which vessels drag a net across the seafloor to scoop up bottom-dwelling marine life.*
- *Ever since the 14th century, fishers who use other gear types — later joined by conservationists and scientists — have objected to bottom trawling, saying the gear takes too many fish and destroys seafloor habitat that's essential to the functioning of marine ecosystems.*
- *Proponents of bottom trawling, however, argue that the practice provides an important share of our*

- *In this video, Mongabay takes a look at bottom trawling and the reasons it's so controversial.*

When it comes to news about fishing, bottom trawling sparks some of the most dramatic stories.

In September, for instance, Greenpeace activists took it upon themselves to drop 18 boulders weighing up to 1.7 metric tons apiece in a U.K. conservation zone, according to media reports

(<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/2/greenpeace-drops-boulders-in-uk-sea-against-destructive-fishing>).

The point was to prevent bottom trawlers from fishing inside the zone, and to chide the UK government for permitting the practice there in the first place because of the damage it inflicts on the marine environment.

In fact, people have been vociferously objecting to this fishing method since at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century, soon after it was introduced.

Bottom trawlers drag heavy nets across the seafloor to scoop up marine life living there.

The nets don't discriminate and a lot of the catch winds up being discarded as bycatch or turned into food not for people but for farmed fish, livestock or pets. Meanwhile, down below, the gear scraping over the bottom churns up sediment, releases carbon stored there, and overturns rocks, reefs, and other critical habitat for sea life.

Today, bottom trawling is a huge industry. It is an important source of protein for the growing human population, providing around one-quarter of the wild-caught seafood people consume every year, according to the Sea Around Us Project (<https://www.seaaroundus.org/data/#/global?chart=catch-chart&dimension=gear&measure=tonnage&limit=10>) at the University of British Columbia, Canada. And millions of people around the world find employment in bottom trawling or industries that depend on it.

Can bottom trawling be made more sustainable or should it be scrapped altogether? Watch our short explainer video above to find out more.

## Conversation

*Pierre Gleizes / Greenpeace.*

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