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By [Natasha Kumar](#)

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Bottom trawling denounced as the worst fishing technique

Activists from the Ocean Rebellion association denounce bottom trawling during COP26, in Glasgow, Scotland, on October 30, 2021. ANDY BUCHANAN / AFP

While the European Union is preparing, for the spring, an “action plan for the ocean” intended to protect marine ecosystems, environmental organizations are focusing their efforts on one fishing technique in particular: the seabed trawling. It consists of scraping the ocean floor with heavy machinery, capturing species almost indiscriminately, all with a lot of fuel. It is considered to be “*The most harmful to the environment and the climate*” by a coalition of NGOs – Oceana, Seas at Risk, Our Fish, Environmental Justice Foundation among others.

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As part of the public consultation open until January 10, it submitted on December 20, 2021 a petition, with more than 152,000 signatories, to the European Commissioner in charge of this sector, Virginijus Sinkevicius. It calls for the immediate ban of bottom trawling in all marine protected areas – this is currently far from being the case in Germany, the Netherlands, or France. This practice is also denounced in a detailed summary published on December 9, written by some forty academics, NGOs and environmental consultants, with the financial support of American foundations (Oceans 5, Oak Foundation and Oceanskind).

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Globally, bottom trawls – whatever the size of the boat and the type of net – make up a large share of all fisheries: around 26%, report the authors. Each year, these nets haul up at least 30 million tonnes of seafood, roughly the equivalent of what all artisanal fishermen catch. The rest corresponds to various other gears: mid-water midwater trawls, nets set, longlines, etc., industrial or not. Bottom trawlers operate almost exclusively in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of coastal countries, rarely venturing beyond 200 nautical miles. They are even partially confined within 12 miles of the shore where they take 20% of their catch. They then find themselves in direct competition with the small boats of the craftsmen and the canoes of the local communities.

Fierce rivalry between states

“Global catches could increase if there was less trawling. When you overfish, the yields decrease for everyone ”, says Daniel Pauly. This internationally recognized specialist is behind the Canadian University of British Columbia Sea Around Us program, which reconstructed decades of seafood catches from 1950 to 2018. The Bottom Trawl Impacts Report is based on this exceptional database, as well as on a review of the scientific literature. Its authors find that this fishing method peaked at 36.5 million tonnes in 1989, before declining all around the globe. Except in Asia, which did not follow the same trend, on the contrary.

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By [Natasha Kumar](#)

Natasha Kumar has been a reporter on the news desk since 2018. Before that she wrote about young adolescence and family dynamics for Styles and was the legal affairs correspondent for the Metro desk. Before joining The Times Hub, Natasha Kumar worked as a staff writer at the Village Voice and a freelancer for Newsday, The Wall Street Journal, GQ and Mirabella. To get in touch, contact me through my

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