



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate D – Biodiversity
The Director (acting)

Brussels

Dear Petitioners,

Thank you for your petition sent to Commissioner Roswall about the need to strengthen the implementation of EU environmental laws within marine protected areas (MPAs), in particular for urgent measures to put an end to destructive fishing practices in those areas. Commissioner Roswall asked me to respond on her behalf.

The EU environmental legislation mandates the designation and effective management of MPAs. The major driver is the EU Natura 2000 network, the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world, based on the EU Habitats ⁽¹⁾ and Birds ⁽²⁾ directives. As part of achieving good environmental status of marine waters, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive ⁽³⁾ requires Member States to implement spatial protection measures within their programmes of measures.

Under the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 ⁽⁴⁾, the EU has committed to expand the MPA network and to strengthen their conservation. By 2030, Member States should expand the network of marine protected areas to protect at least 30% of EU seas' area and to strictly protect at least one third of this area, creating a coherent and effectively managed MPA network.

The EU Action Plan "Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries" ⁽⁵⁾ reaffirms this commitment for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries. And finally, an overarching

⁽¹⁾ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, pp. 7–50

⁽²⁾ Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (Codified version). OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, pp. 7–25

⁽³⁾ Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive) (Text with EEA relevance). OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, pp. 19–40

⁽⁴⁾ COM/2020/380 final Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 Bringing nature back into our lives.

⁽⁵⁾ COM/2023/102 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries.

objective of the Nature Restoration Regulation ⁽⁶⁾ is to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050.

Addressing all pressures within MPAs is crucial for effectively preserving and restoring marine biodiversity. Fisheries is one of the significant pressures on MPAs through overfishing and/or illegal fishing, bycatch of protected species, disturbance of the seabed, and impacts on sensitive habitats. To facilitate adoption of necessary fisheries management measures under EU common fisheries policy, the Commission has recently adopted a new guidance document on Natura 2000 and fishing ⁽⁷⁾. It aims to enhance cooperation between fisheries and environment authorities in the establishment of necessary measures.

It is important to underline, however, that the designation and day-to-day management of MPAs, the adoption and application of site-specific conservation and fisheries measures, and the control and enforcement of those rules in waters under national jurisdiction, rest primarily with the Member States. The European Commission's role is to oversee the correct application of EU law, in accordance with the Treaty on European Union, and, where appropriate, to initiate infringement procedures if it considers that a Member State has failed to fulfil its obligations.

The Commission will continue to monitor and support Member States' implementation of the relevant fisheries and environmental legislation and may act where there is clear evidence of serious, systemic non-compliance, using the instruments provided by the Treaties.

We hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Electronically signed

Ion Codescu
Acting Director

⁽⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation (EU) 2022/869 (Text with EEA relevance). PE/74/2023/REV/1. OJ L, 2024/1991, 29.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1991/oj>

⁽⁷⁾ European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment, Natura 2000 and fishing – Application of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and Article 4 of the Birds Directive to marine fishing activities – Commission notice, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/1449747>