



## Portugal bans bottom trawling on seamounts on the high seas in the North Atlantic

In the lead up to World Oceans Day, Portugal has enacted a ban on bottom trawling and bottom gillnet fishing over 2 million square kilometres of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Last week, the Portuguese Ministry for Agriculture and the Sea issued a new regulation the bans the use of bottom trawling and bottom gillnetting in an area within the 200 mile limits and on the high seas in the area covered by Portugal's extended continental shelf under the UN Law of the Sea. The new regulation, which complements and expands on an EU regulation adopted in 2005 to prohibit bottom trawling below 200 metres in Azores and Madeiran waters, has been issued to protect deep-sea ecosystems such as cold-water corals and seamounts from the harmful impact of bottom trawling and gillnet fishing.

"Deep-sea bottom trawling is widely recognized to be one of the most destructive fishing practices and the most serious threat to deep-sea ecosystems in the Northeast Atlantic" said Matthew Gianni, Co-founder of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. "Now that the new regulation prohibits Portuguese vessels from deep-sea bottom trawling in the high seas surrounding the Azores and Madeira Islands, other countries should do the same."

Two recent studies highlight the ongoing concerns of scientists over the impact of bottom trawling in the deep-sea. New research in May in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that "intensive and chronic bottom trawling is deemed to transform large portions of the deep continental slope into faunal deserts and highly degraded seascapes". The study concluded that bottom trawling "represents a major threat to the deep seafloor ecosystem at the global scale".<sup>1</sup>

A study recently published in Nature by Azorean reseachers found that the negative impact of bottom trawling on deep-waters corals and sponges on seamounts in the Northeast Atlantic is likely to be 296–1,719 times higher than the impact of deep-sea longline fishing – a fishing method common in the Azores and Madeira Islands.<sup>2</sup>

The European Council is currently debating a new regulation for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic to protect deep-sea ecosystems from the destructive impact of seabed trawling. European Commissioner Maria Damanaki has proposed a phase-out of the use of bottom trawls in the deep-sea and a shift to low impact, selective fishing gears and practices.

"With this regulation, Portugal has now protected almost all of its deep-seabed from the most destructive bottom fishing practices. We hope to see this protection extended to the remaining areas along the continental slope of Portugal, and for Portugal to demonstrate real leadership in supporting the European Commissioner's proposal to phase-out deep-sea bottom trawling and gillnetting in all European Union waters" said Gonçalo Carvalho, of the Portuguese NGO Sciaena, a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. "We also hope that this means that Portugal will finally assume a leadership role on deep sea, by promoting research, conservation and the sustainable exploitation of its resources".

For more information, please contact:

Helena César - Speak . helenacesar@speak.pt . +351 21 343 22 34

Matthew Gianni (DSCC - "Deep Sea Conservation Coalition) - [+31 646 16 88 99](tel:+31646168899)

Gonçalo Carvalho (Sciaena - Associação de Ciências Marinhas e Cooperação) - +351 93 625 72 81

---

1

"Pusceddu et al. (2014). *Chronic and intensive bottom trawling impairs deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystem functioning*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States.

<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2014/05/14/1405454111.full.pdf+html?sid=3bf67eb5-90d3-4b3b-b3b5-d151a358cde9>

2

[Pham et al. \(2014\). \*Deep-water longline fishing has reduced impact on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems\*. Scientific Reports, 4, 4837, doi:10.1038/srep04837](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep04837)