

# “No one wants to protect the sea more than those who make a living from it.”

October 6th, 2025

In Brussels this week, Europe’s seas will take centre stage as the city plays host to EU Ocean Week. For many, it will be a moment to discuss ambitious goals and visionary plans. But for us — the small-scale fishers who make up three-quarters of the EU fleet — this is not just another policy debate. It is about whether we and our communities still have a future on the water.

Earlier this year, at the UN Ocean Conference, banning bottom trawling in marine protected areas was at the top of the agenda. Some Member States — Sweden, Greece, and Denmark — have taken meaningful steps to end this destructive practice, where heavy nets are dragged across the seafloor, destroying habitats in their path. These moves are welcome. But the Commission lagged behind this ambition.

Commissioner Kadis, while you claim to stand with small-scale fishers and promise policies that will strengthen our position, your words do not yet match your actions. Without leadership from the Commission, and without a coordinated European response to this systemic issue, our way of life remains in jeopardy. We are left wondering whether our traditions, knowledge, and livelihoods will exist a decade from now.

We are not lobbyists or corporations. We are the people whose small boats leave at dawn from ports and harbours across Europe, whose children may one day hope to follow us to sea, and whose livelihoods depend on the health of the waters just off our coasts. Yet once again, we see Brussels bending to the demands of the largest and most destructive fleets — fleets that plunder the seas with oversized engines and subsidised fuel while claiming to represent “all of Europe’s fishers.”

Like us, the public is not fooled. Citizens across Europe have made their voices clear: they want bottom trawling banned in marine protected areas. Protected must mean protected. They trust small-scale fishers as the true stewards of the sea — no one will want to protect the sea more than someone who makes a living from it — not faceless companies flying foreign flags.

Across Europe, the same story repeats: small-scale fishers using low-impact methods are being crowded out by industrial fleets that take more in a day than we can in a season. Centuries-old traditions are at risk of disappearing. Young people are turning away from fishing, seeing no viable future to inherit. Cultural heritage tied to the sea is eroding, while industrial methods strip our waters bare. This is not only a story of fish and ecosystems — it is a story of communities, culture, and fairness.

That is why we call on you, Commissioner Kadis:

Take a clear stand for Europe's seas and the people who depend on them. Make legally binding targets to ban bottom trawling in marine protected areas a cornerstone of the Ocean Act. Choose a legacy you can be proud of — one that secures healthy seas and gives Europe's fishers a thriving future.

We are not asking for special treatment — only for rules that protect the ocean, reward those who fish responsibly, and give our communities a chance to survive. Europe's coastal communities may feel far away from Brussels, but the decisions made there shape our lives every day.

Europe's seas have vast potential — but only if we choose to cherish and protect them.

Sincerely,

### Protect Our Catch



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