

Don't miss the opportunity to be a shining light for the deep sea

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deepsea
conservationcoalition



SCIAENA
Associação de Ciências Marinhas e Cooperação

SEAS AT RISK



Dear Minister Assunção Cristas,

As you host Blue Week, a platform for all those who care about the oceans, Portugal is involved in the negotiations for a new EU Regulation to ensure sustainable deep-sea fisheries and protect deep-sea ecosystems.

The deep sea is a large and important and portion of the ocean, yet the poor regulation of deep-sea fisheries is threatening its incredible and vulnerable biodiversity, putting at risk benefits to humanity ranging from climate regulation to potential pharmaceuticals.

The current EU Regulation, adopted in 2002, is not working. It has failed to maintain most deep-sea fish stocks within safe biological limits, to restore some of the most vulnerable and depleted fish populations in the northeast Atlantic, and to protect vulnerable corals, sponges and seamounts.

The new EU Regulation, currently under negotiation in the European Council of Fisheries Ministers, provides a critical opportunity for Portugal to protect deep-sea ecosystems under its jurisdiction, which are unique in the EU in scale and diversity, and ensure sustainable catches of the deep-sea fish stocks important to Portuguese fishers.

However, the Portuguese government is opposing key provisions in the draft regulation under consideration by the Council that would protect vulnerable deep-sea ecosystems and require the use of low-impact, environmentally sustainable fishing gears (already widely in use by the Portuguese fleet) by all EU deep-sea fishing fleets, including vessels from other EU countries fishing in deep-sea areas claimed by Portugal.

Last year, we applauded your decision to prohibit deep-sea bottom trawling and gillnet fishing in a great expanse of Portuguese waters and legal continental shelf while allowing sustainable and traditional small-scale fishing to continue. Scientific reports have consistently highlighted bottom trawling as the greatest threat to the deep-sea ecosystems such as cold-water corals found in Portuguese waters, many of which provide important habitat for fish species of

commercial value. However, the ordinance only applies to the Portuguese fleet – leaving vessels from other countries free to use these destructive methods to fish for deep-sea species in large areas of the seabed claimed by Portugal.

We had hoped that Portugal was ready to build on its domestic initiative and champion deep-sea conservation and sustainable deep-sea fisheries in the EU negotiations. Unfortunately, the position put forward by Portugal in the EU Council negotiations indicates that this is not the case.

The European Commission has proposed a phase-out of bottom trawl and bottom gillnet fishing for deep-sea species. The regional parliaments of the Azores and Madeira, where deep-sea fisheries are of the utmost importance, support a phase-out of deep-sea bottom trawling. And yet the national government is opposed to this, a position that runs counter to the legislation Portugal has adopted for its own fleets and in disregard of scientific evidence.

Does Portugal believe it can protect the deep-sea of the northeast Atlantic on its own when some of the most important deep-sea stocks for Portuguese fishers, such as the black scabbard fish, are being fished with deep-sea bottom trawl gear by fleets from other EU countries?

There is still time for you to review and improve Portugal's position in the negotiations for the new Regulation to ensure that it better reflects both the positive steps taken nationally and the sustainable practices of its own fishers, and recognises the need to ensure EU wide protection of some of the most biologically diverse and vulnerable ecosystems in Portugal's waters and beyond.

We respectfully urge you to help safeguard the deep sea for the benefit of Portugal's citizens, fishers, consumers and future generations, while making Portugal a global example of innovative stewardship of the deep sea – one of the largest and most diverse ecosystems on Earth.

The full text of the letter is available on :
eu.savethehighseas.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/DSCC-Open-A4-Letter-EN.pdf
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