

Open Letter to Commissioner Costas Kadis
European Commissioner for the Oceans and Fisheries

Urgent Call to Uphold Deep-Sea Protections Against Fishing Industry Pressure

Brussels, 9th July 2025

Dear Commissioner Kadis,

We, the undersigned environmental organisations, write to you with deep concern regarding the mounting pressure from parts of the Spanish fishing industry and Spanish Members of the European Parliament to weaken the protections established in 2022 for [87 vulnerable deep-sea areas](#) across EU waters.

As you are fully aware, these closures were grounded in the best available scientific advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), aimed at preserving vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs) from the irreversible damage caused by destructive fishing practices such as bottom-contact gears. The EU's Deep-Sea Access Regulation ([EU 2016/2336](#)) was a milestone achievement in aligning fisheries management with environmental sustainability and the EU's broader responsibility to implement international commitments to marine biodiversity protection.

We welcome the [ruling of the European Court of Justice](#) (ECJ) on 11 June 2025, which unequivocally upheld the legality and legitimacy of the Commission Implementing Regulation closing these deep-sea areas. The Court's decision rejected the claim of disproportionate economic harm and firmly validated the scientific methodology employed by ICES. This ruling represents a crucial moment in the defense of science-based marine policy in the EU. It must be respected in both letter and spirit.

However, the recent exchange of views in the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee on 24 June is profoundly concerning. The joint complaint submitted primarily by Spanish MEPs and their political allies against the ECJ ruling, and their subsequent demands for the Commission to reopen discussions on the closures, signal a deeply troubling attempt to politicise what should remain a process firmly grounded in science, law and the application of the precautionary principle. These developments threaten to undermine not only the integrity of the Deep-Sea Access Regulation but also the EU's credibility as a global leader in ocean governance.

After two years of socio-economic assessment, the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) has found no conclusive evidence of widespread economic harm caused by the closures. Despite repeated claims by the fishing industry, no clear or consistent evidence of socio-economic losses have been demonstrated. It is essential that political decisions remain grounded in verifiable evidence, not industry rhetoric.

Commissioner, reopening any of these areas to bottom-set longlines or other bottom-contact fishing methods would set a dangerous precedent, both within the EU and for its reputation internationally. It would signal that legal rulings, scientific advice and environmental commitments can be disregarded under pressure from a single industry.

This is a critical moment. Just weeks ago, the EU launched the European Ocean Pact at the third UN Ocean Conference, in Nice, recommitting to the preservation and restoration of ocean health. At the same time, the world's leading deep-sea scientists, through the One Ocean Science Congress, have issued a clear and urgent directive to Heads of State: prevent harmful human impacts in the deep ocean and take decisive action to protect and restore marine ecosystems. Any rollback or move to weaken deep-sea protections would directly contradict this ambition and risk damaging the EU's stewardship on the global stage.

We urge you to remain steadfast in your commitment to the Deep-Sea Access Regulation and to uphold the protections for these 87 deep-sea areas without compromise. These ecosystems are among the most fragile and least resilient marine habitats on Earth. To permit their degradation - damage that will endure for centuries, even millennia - for minor economic interests would be an irreversible loss—not just ecologically, but morally and politically, with consequences that extend beyond EU waters.

The EU must not step backwards on ocean protection. The credibility of its environmental leadership depends on it.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition * Blue Marine Foundation * Bloom * ClientEarth * Deepwave e.V. * Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz (DSM) * Deutsche Unwelthilfe DUH * Ecologistas en Acción * Environmental Justice Foundation * Europe Jacques Delors * Fair Oceans * Gesellschaft zur Rettung der Delphine (GRD) * Greenpeace * KYMA sea conservation & research * Marine Conservation Institute * M.E.E.R. e.V. * Oceana * Oceano Azul Foundation * Project Manaia * Pro Wildlife e. V. * Sciaena * Seas At Risk * Submon * Whale and Dolphin Conservation



