

European parliament votes to ban 'fly shooting' fishing in part of Channel

Campaigners hail step towards end of practice in French territorial waters that has had 'devastating' effect on local fishers



📷 A fly-shooting vessel in the Channel. The boats tow lead-weighted ropes along the seabed at either end of a net that captures entire shoals of fish. Photograph: Andrew McConnell/Greenpeace

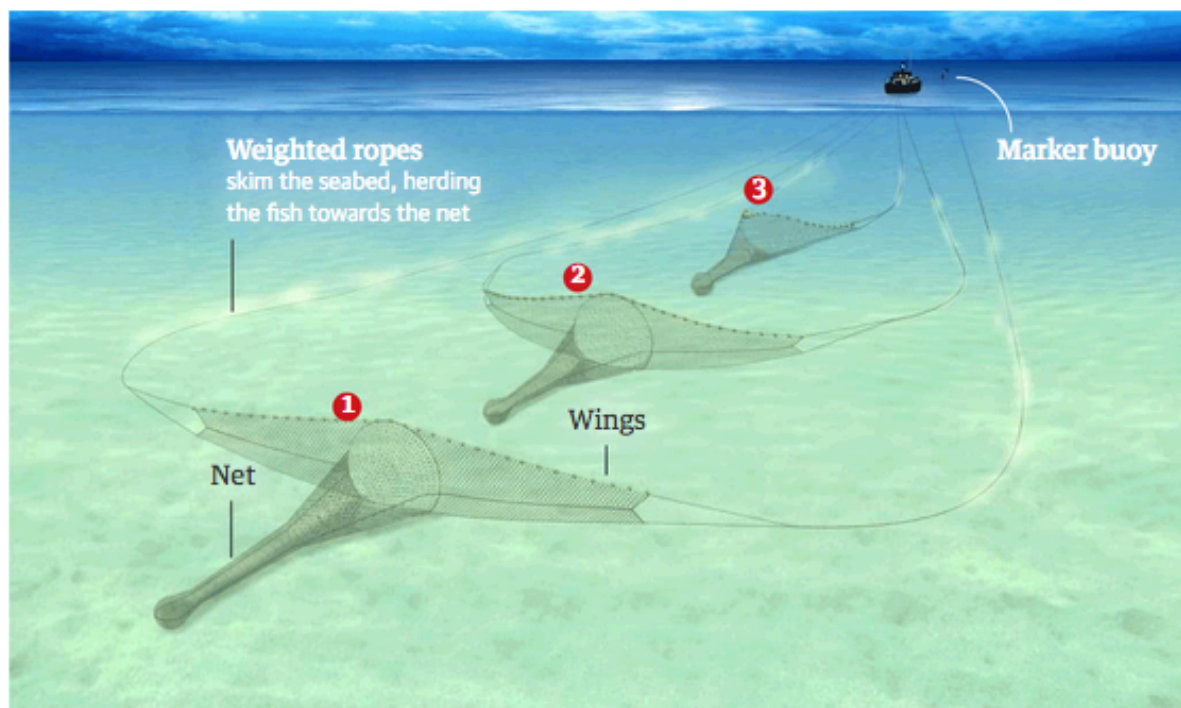
The European parliament has voted to ban “fly shooting” fishing in French territorial waters in the Channel, [following reports](#) that the technique, also known as demersal seining, was having a “devastating” effect on local fishers.

Campaigners described the result as a victory for small-scale fishers. Organisations representing coastal fishing communities on both sides of the Channel have warned that industrial trawling methods, including fly-shooting, are decimating their livelihoods and the marine ecosystem.

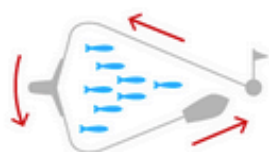
While the European parliament does not have the power to ban the fishing method, MEPs said the vote on Tuesday sent an important message to decision-makers about the impact of fly-shooting on coastal fishing communities. The vote on an amendment to the common fisheries policy, involving access to territorial waters, will now be considered by the European Commission, the parliament and EU member states.

Last year the UK was accused of allowing vessels using the fishing method “unfettered access” to the Channel without proper assessment of the impact on fish, the seabed or the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Fly shooters can catch up to 11 times more fish than inshore fishing vessels



1. Setting the net



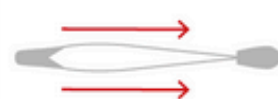
The vessel plays out the rope and net around the area where fish are located

2. Hauling the net



The ropes are hauled, increasing in speed to herd the fish into the path of the net

3. Closing the net



When the ropes are nearly closed, they are then fast-hauled, catching the herded fish in the net

Guardian graphic. Image: Seafish. Source: Seafish, FAO

“This is a very important day for the ocean and coastal fishing communities,” said Laetitia Bisiaux, a project manager for the French environmental organisation [Bloom](#). “MEPs were told about the destructive impacts of demersal seining by fishers who practice this technique themselves. The MEPs listened to the warnings that have long been ignored.”

“The vote is a good political message from the EU parliament to the fishers, and to member states to ban this destructive technique,” she said.

Fly-shooter fishing boats, also known as Danish, Scottish or demersal seiners, tow lead-weighted ropes along the seabed at either end of a net that encircles and captures entire shoals of fish.

One expert told the Guardian that the method had between four and 11 times the “killing power” of inshore fishing boats.

The amendment to the fisheries policy was tabled by the French Green MEP Caroline Roose, who said it was an “important first step” towards a ban.

Roose said: “Yesterday’s vote sends a clear message in support of the fishers and NGOs calling for a moratorium on demersal seines in the Channel. The amendment itself allows the French government to ban its use off the French coast.

“This is only a first step as any decision to limit or ban the demersal seines in the Channel would need to be negotiated with the EU Commission and the member states. Public pressure will be key to make sure yesterday’s decision is actually implemented.”

Campaigners and organisations representing small-scale fishers in the UK welcomed the news, and said it was time for the British government to act.

In June 2021, the Department for Environment, [Food](#) and Rural Affairs said it was considering the potential impact of fly-shooting on the UK fishing industry. The UK licensed 15 fly-shooting boats between 2011 and 2021.

Jeremy Percy, a founding director and senior adviser at Low Impact Fishers of [Europe](#), said: “It’s a long road towards getting something done, but at least Europe seems to be addressing the issue. We’ve become very efficient at catching fish, but management and regulations have not kept up.

“We are all fishermen and we all need and deserve to make a living, but it should never be at the expense of another fishing sector and especially one that is so vulnerable, such as the UK’s smaller-scale fleet.

“It is all the more frustrating as we have left the EU, yet still allow whole-scale destruction by larger EU vessels to continue unabated.”

Fiona Nicholls, an oceans campaigner at Greenpeace UK, said: “Encouraging news from France – French fishermen are being listened to. Now it’s time for UK politicians to listen to what our fishermen need at home.

“Banning destructive industrial fishing like fly-shooting to properly protect the UK’s marine protected areas must be a priority for the government in 2022. Using post-Brexit licensing powers set out in the Fisheries Act, they could easily take swift action to protect our oceans and fishing communities.”

A Defra spokesperson said: “We recognise the concerns raised about fishing pressures in the English Channel, including methods such as fly-seining, and are working with industry on these issues.

“We have already stopped [pulse trawling](#) by EU and English-registered vessels in UK waters and any decisions on managing fisheries in future will be based on the best-available evidence.”

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