



**For the attention of Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius**  
European Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries  
European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

Paris, 8 December 2021

Dear Commissioner Sinkevičius,

We are writing to draw your attention to an urgent problem, on which we are calling for priority political action. The fishers of the North of France (Hauts-de-France) and Normandy are experiencing major difficulties due to the development of demersal seines in their fishing zone, particularly in the Channel, over the last ten years. They are turning to BLOOM because their situation is desperate and the authorities have so far been deaf to their demands.

The fishers of Boulogne-sur-Mer and Etaples practised conventional trawling until around 2016/2017.<sup>1</sup> Within a period of five years, they abandoned their fishing methods in favour of the demersal seine. They nevertheless denounced this method for being too efficient, but it was presented by the industry as a technique that would save fuel and allow them to land better quality fish. Encouraged financially by public authorities,<sup>2</sup> they succumbed to the siren song of “progress” and converted to the “Danish seine” (demersal seine).

However, the increase in catches was only temporary and was followed by subsequent decreases. Today, fishermen’s testimonies are unequivocal: their catches are falling and the size of the fish caught is decreasing.<sup>3</sup> The difficulties faced by French seiners are so severe that some of them have already turned to other métiers and are themselves calling for a ban on the fishing method they use.

Around 75 European vessels are licensed to use demersal seines. The environmental impact of this fishing technique is unacceptable: the spatial footprint of the seine is 1.6 km<sup>2</sup> per hour! The situation for fishers is very similar to what happened with electric fishing: the efficiency of the new methods promoted by the industry temporarily masks the serious ecological degradation of European seas, while they increase pressure on the already depleted fish populations. The time has come to face the truth: increasing technological efficiency is incompatible with the imperatives of ecological restoration and the need to safeguard jobs in the fishing sector. Researchers know which fishing methods have the lowest ecological impact and create the most jobs. These are

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<sup>1</sup> For example, read this article (in French) in *La Voix du Nord* entitled “*Les pêcheurs étaplois adoptent la senne, après l’avoir bien critiquée*” (“Etaples fishers adopt the seine, after criticising it greatly”), available at:

<https://www.lavoixdunord.fr/art/region/les-pecheurs-etaplois-adoptent-la-senne-apres-l-avoir-ia31b49030n3421821>

<sup>2</sup> On the inauguration of a Scopale seiner: “*The former Minister for the Sea, Frédéric Cuveillier, stated that the financing of the vessel benefited from the mechanism of capital gains exemption on the sale of a fishing company in the event of reinvestment in a new tool, decided upon during the Interministerial Committee on the Sea in Boulogne on 22 October 2015. The President of the Hauts-de-France Region, Xavier Bertrand, made a point of assuring the fishers of the Côte d’Opale that he was ‘by their side’.*”

Translated from: <https://www.gazettenpdc.fr/article/bientot-cinq-chalutiers-pour-scopale>

<sup>3</sup> “*When I started targeting red mullet, we were catching ten times more than usual. And more easily, faster, saving fuel. I was afraid, I said to myself that the resource could not support this.*” (Bruno Thomines-Mora, OPN President)

Translated from: <https://lemarin.ouest-france.fr/secteurs-activites/peche/41263-lorganisation-des-pecheurs-normands-demande-un-moratoire-sur-la-senne>



also the methods favoured by consumers, but they are not the ones that are encouraged and supported by public authorities.

Today, fishers who use demersal seines themselves are calling for a European moratorium on this fishing technique.<sup>4</sup> They firmly denounce the madness of the unbridled technological escalade of fishing fleets, which is encouraged by national and European institutions, often using the fight against global warming as a pretext for transitions which, far from improving the ecological state of the marine environment, fragilize it further. Fishers denounce the lack of political will on the part of national and EU authorities to curb the stranglehold of industrial lobbies, particularly the Dutch, on European fisheries. Artisanal fishers are the victims of unacceptable and unfair competition with powerful industrial actors, who reign over decision-making processes in the fishing sector and have become the preferred, if not the only, interlocutors of institutions. This situation generates deep resentment among small-scale fishers, who still represent the majority of fishers in terms of employment.

European fishers in the North Sea have recently experienced similar episodes with the case of electric fishing. Although the EU banned electric fishing thanks to the joint mobilisation of BLOOM and European small-scale fishers, this ban came too late to protect them from the disastrous consequences of public decisions. In less than 10 years, half of the gillnetters in Northern France have gone bankrupt, ceased their activities or sold their boats. Ironically, the Dunkirk fish auction and cooperative closed in November 2020 and now, the Dutch industrial actors responsible for this bankruptcy want to buy it to land the catches of their seiners. There is great bitterness in our territories.

The difficulties faced by coastal fishers are caused not by fate but by inconsistent public policies that encourage technological efficiency at all costs and the resulting sequential overexploitation of fish populations, the destruction of the environment, and the bankruptcy of artisanal fishers with their traditional know-how. The national and European laissez-faire approach translate at the local level into an environmental and socio-economic situation that is the exact opposite of the EU's stated objectives for the management of the fishing sector.

We alert you to the urgent need to end these catastrophic scenarios, which undermine the credibility of public authorities and European institutions, and which cause environmental destruction and socio-economic devastation in certain regions of the Union. We ask you to use all executive and legislative means at your disposal to put an end to the current disaster as soon as possible. Given the economic fragility of coastal operators, we do not have several years ahead of us. We call for prompt, resolute and clear political action to repair the fatal errors caused by public authorities: **we call for an immediate European moratorium on demersal seining.**

After electric fishing, it is no longer acceptable that the environment and fishers should once again pay the price for the failure of public policies to apply the precautionary principle, as should have been done. The Institutions' blind faith in technological innovation has led to family tragedies and economic insecurity for small coastal fishers. We expect you to take urgent action to remedy these injustices.

Yours sincerely,

Frédéric Le Manach,  
BLOOM's Scientific Director

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<sup>4</sup> Read the article (in French) in *Le Marin*: <https://lemarin.ouest-france.fr/secteurs-activites/peche/41039-les-pecheurs-bouonnais-demandent-un-moratoire-sur-la-senne-danoise>