BIG FIVE, BIG MONEY

When Brexit subsidies fuel electric trawlers
and Dutch fishing majors



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bis repetita. Following the discovery of extensive COVID aid fraud in 2022,[1] BLOOM's explosive new investigation reveals a major financial scandal and serious malfunctions in the industrial fishing sector in the Netherlands, linked to public authorities. Our analysis of the European subsidies granted in the context of Brexit under the Dutch ministerial decrees of 25 July 2022[2] and 12 April 2023[3] reveals how public aid, intended to support struggling fishers, was largely captured by a handful of industrial giants and allocated abusively, even illegally. The 135 million euros in European funds that were supposed to alleviate the consequences of the loss of access to British waters and the reduction in fishing quotas for certain species for Dutch fishers were allocated to 51 vessels for dismantling (97.4 million euros) and to 71 vessels (36.5 million euros) for temporary cessation of fishing activity.[4]

Big Five take the prize

The main beneficiaries of this financial windfall are the supermajors of Dutch industrial fishing, the "BIG FIVE"[5] - Parlevliet & Van der Plas (P&P), Cornelis Vrolijk, Van der Zwan, Alda Seafood and the De Boer family - who received 53.2 million euros of the 135 million euro package, or 40% of all subsidies paid out. Moreover, when we examine these subsidies by fishing method, two big winners stand out:

1 Trawlers that have used electric fishing.

They are the main beneficiaries of Brexit subsidies, having received 69.4 million euros[6]. Bottom trawlers equipped with electrodes from 2007 onwards benefited from exemptions and illegal subsidies[7] for electric fishing (a fishing method that destroys marine ecosystems and artisanal fishing), banned in 2021 following a successful BLOOM campaign. These vessels were bankrupt back in 2006, when the Netherlands managed to secure dishonest exemptions from the EU to authorise the electrocution of marine life.

After illegally developing this destructive fishing method with public funds, and since its ban, electric trawlers are back to square one: bankruptcy. Fuel prices and lower catches make trawling too energy-intensive and unprofitable. BLOOM has lodged a complaint with the European Commission against these illegal subsidies. After years of fighting by BLOOM and artisanal fishers, on November 13, 2024, the European Court of Justice condemned the Commission's inaction in granting these illegal subsidies to Dutch electric fishing.[8] While the procedure to obtain reimbursement of these undue public subsidies is still underway, these new European subsidies constitute a real political and financial scandal. **These vessels were not dismantled because of economic vulnerability caused by Brexit, but due to their extreme dependence on fuel and their inability to be profitable without the artifice of electric fishing's technological hyper-efficiency.** The Brexit scrapping scheme is being hijacked to force European taxpayers to financially compensate the owners of these fraudulent vessels.

1 https://bloomassociation.org/mediapart-fraude-subventions-covid/
2 For the fleet exit plan: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2022-19616.html.
3 For temporary cessations: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2023-9390.html.
4 The remaining million corresponds to small projects and operating costs (not covered by this study).
5 See our report The Big Five: The grip of five Dutch corporate giants on the global ocean: https://www.bloomassociation.org/en/big-five-dutch-fishing-supermajors-predators
6 Some of the trawlers that used electric fishing belonged to the "Big Five".
7 Between 2007 and 2021, the Dutch government granted 84 derogations to the industry to equip trawlers with electrodes, whereas the regulatory framework allowed only 15. What's more, even these 15 "official" trawlers were supposed to carry out "scientific" fishing, which they never did. In this respect, it can be said that 100% of electric trawlers were illegal.
8 https://bloomassociation.org/la-justice-europeenne-condamne-linaction-de-la-commission-sur-les-subventions-illegales-accordees-a-la-peche-electrique/

2 Pelagic trawlers, including giant factory ships, whose fishing activity has not been impacted by Brexit.

Six factory ships, measuring between 94 and 142 meters and all belonging to the industrial groups that make up the "Big Five", received 22.6 million euros alone, i.e. 62% of the 36.5 million euros allocated for "temporary cessations", which were distributed among 71 beneficiaries in total. Besides being unfair, this raid on funds is potentially illegal: **our analyses reveal that these factory ships have not reduced or ceased, even temporarily, their fishing activities.** Their time spent at dock has remained largely unchanged from previous years. Public money has therefore not compensated a loss of activity. On the contrary, subsidies have fed a system that diverts public aid to the detriment of those who need it. Furthermore, these six factory ships were still licensed to fish in British waters.

BLOOM warns the media, citizens and politicians of all nationalities about the system of misappropriation of public funds organized by the Dutch authorities to benefit rapacious fishing industrialists who use European money to finance their destructive practices and models. **This systemic collusion between the industrial fishing sector and public authorities has serious consequences for the European Union's budget.**

Brexit, an alibi to bail out unprofitable fleets at the taxpayers' expense

Most of the public aid analyzed by BLOOM was not used to compensate vessels affected by Brexit, but to finance the scrapping of obsolete, unprofitable vessels. The decrease in quotas due to Brexit did not impact the fishing capacity of bottom trawlers. The fish stocks they target, such as sole and plaice, two species crucial to their turnover, are in such poor condition that the vessels were already unable, even before Brexit, to fish their allocated quotas. These bottom trawlers were structurally doomed: extremely energy-hungry, the use of electricity enabled them in extremis to postpone their demise by a few years. **Therefore, Brexit did not weaken them: it merely provided a political opportunity to justify massive subsidies. Electric fishing is an emblematic case of the privatization of profits and the socialization of losses at the public's expense.**

The financial support given to these electric fishing vessels is all the more worrying given that European Commissioner Costas Kadis and several Dutch MEPs have openly declared their desire to reintroduce electric fishing. If this method were to be reauthorized, then shipowners who have benefited from Brexit aid could reinvest the money they have received to buy new vessels as early as 2028.[9]

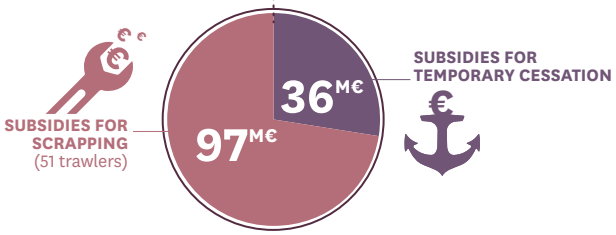
Faced with industrial predation that threatens the ecological transition and the survival of artisanal fishers, public money must protect marine biodiversity and the ocean, the world's greatest climate regulator, and not be misappropriated to finance the destruction of our common good.

9 A shipowner who has received dismantling aid has to wait five years before being able to reinvest in a vessel.

KEY FIGURES

TOTAL BREXIT SUBSIDIES ALLOCATED TO THE FISHERIES SECTOR IN THE NETHERLANDS

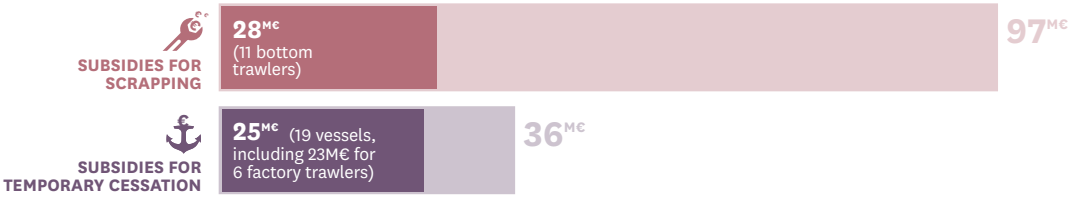
≈135 M€



≈1M€ for other projects

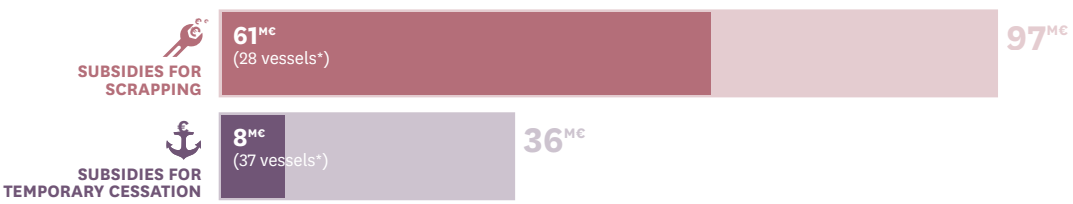
... FOR THE 'BIG 5' COMPANIES ALONE

≈53 M€



... FOR ELECTRIC TRAWLERS

≈69 M€



*equipped before 2021

METHODOLOGY

The data on the "permanent reduction in the fishing capacity of the marine fishing fleet" (code SA.64737; hereinafter "fleet exit" or "scrapping") and the "aid for temporary cessation of fishing activities" (code SA.104968; hereinafter "temporary cessation") was retrieved from the European Commission's "EC Search Aid Award data" platform.[10] This data contains the names of the vessel owners, but not the vessel registration numbers. Work was then carried out to associate owners with vessels in order to connect the subsidies allocated to specific vessels.

For the "fleet exit" section, the vessels scrapped between September 2022 (start of the boat scrapping scheme) and July 2023 (end of the scheme) – 51 in total – were extracted from the European fleet register,[11] then linked to their owners using the 2021 *Visserij Jaarboek* (fisheries directory). This list of vessels was then crossed with the "fleet exit" data previously retrieved, thus linking the subsidies received to the corresponding vessels and owners. It is important to note that this work has been carried out on a conservative basis, as the “fleet exit” data actually contained 67 subsidy lines, compared with only 51 vessels identified as having been scrapped during the period in question. To the best of our knowledge, the remaining 16 vessels are still active and we assume that the relevant subsidies have not been used. However, this raises a critical question regarding the transparency and quality of the data provided by the Dutch State.

For the "temporary cessations" section, we have reconstructed the list of vessels affected using the names of the owners identified in the 2023 *Visserij Jaarboek*. In the few instances where a beneficiary owned two vessels, the amount of the subsidy was allocated equally to both vessels. As a result, 71 beneficiaries received temporary cessations, for between 71 and 87 vessels, depending on whether the subsidy was allocated to just one of the vessels or to both. We then analysed whether the conditions described above for the allocation of this aid had indeed been met, i.e. a minimum of five consecutive seven-day periods of port stoppage. This verification work was carried out using the *Global Fishing Watch platform*,[12] which tracks the activities of fishing vessels on an hourly basis.

For each of the two types of subsidy, we identified whether the vessels concerned were on the list of the 84 vessels that had been equipped for electric fishing (the list we drew up during our campaign to ban this destructive fishing method) and whether their owners were one of the Big Five.

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10 The subsidy file can be downloaded here: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/competition/transparency/public/search. Select your preferred language, then tick ‘Netherlands’ to search for aid granted to this Member State. In the ‘Aid measure case number’ field, enter: ‘SA.64737’ for the fleet exit plan, or ‘SA.104968’ for temporary cessations.

11 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fleet-europa/search_en

12 https://globalfishingwatch.org/

A FUND INTENDED TO COMPENSATE FISHERS AFFECTED BY BREXIT

Since its exit from the European Union (EU) on 1 January 2021, the United Kingdom has ceased to be subject to the EU's Common Fisheries Policy. For British fishers, Brexit held the promise of regaining control of their waters. Until then, around 60% of fish catches in UK waters were made by other EU Member States. A post-Brexit agreement introduced a transition period, running until 30 June 2026, during which EU fishing quotas in UK waters are to be progressively reduced by 25%.[13] During this transition period, European vessels can continue to access UK waters, provided they obtain a licence issued by the national authorities. For some EU fishers, Brexit has meant a loss of access to British waters and a reduction in quotas for certain species.



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On 6 October 2021, the EU released a €5.4 billion fund to compensate the economic sectors most affected by Brexit, including fisheries. It was then up to each Member State to define, at the national level, how this package was to be distributed.[14] **The Dutch government has allocated almost €135 million[15] to the fishing industry** through two main schemes:

1. **A "fleet exit" plan, i.e. the scrapping of vessels: €97.4 million and affecting 51 vessels.**[16] This scrapping plan was eagerly awaited by the sector because, following the ban on electric fishing[17] secured by BLOOM's campaign, the Dutch government had announced a €200 million fleet exit plan in January 2020,[18] which was, however, never implemented;

2. **"Temporary cessations" in fishing activity:**[19] **€36.5 million to compensate 71 beneficiaries whose vessels were expected to remain in port** for between five and eighteen periods of complete and uninterrupted inactivity (168 consecutive hours, or seven days, equating to one period of complete and uninterrupted inactivity).

13 https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-withdrawal-agreement_en

14 https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stcrt-2022-19616.html

15 A further €1 million, corresponding to small projects and operating costs, is not covered by this study.

16 The full list of beneficiaries published online by the Netherlands contained 67 subsidies, totalling €145.7 million. The difference is explained by vessels that appear not to have been scrapped. These 16 additional subsidies are therefore not included in this analysis out of prudence. See the section on Methodology.

17 Within just a few years, this fishing method became the standard among Dutch beam trawlers.

18 https://www.schuttevaer.nl/nieuws/visserij/2020/01/30/200-miljoen-voor-sanering-noordzeevisserij/

19 p.6 https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/cases1/202303/SA_104968_305DBF85-0000-CDE6-A891-21D7D9E837DC_36_1.pdf

ELECTRIC FISHING THE BIG WINNER FROM BREXIT SUBSIDIES

28 former electric trawlers received €61.5 million euros

All the vessels scrapped as part of the Brexit plan are bottom trawlers measuring between 22.5 metres and 46 metres (→ figure 1). Of the 51 beneficiaries of this scrapping scheme, trawlers that used electric fishing predominate. In total, **28 vessels received €61.5 million to be scrapped and 37 vessels received €7.9 million for temporary cessations as part of the Brexit process.** Of these vessels, 10 belonged to the Dutch companies we have dubbed the "Big Five" (see next section) and received €16.7 million. **These subsidies were allocated to these vessels in an unjustified, perhaps even illegal, manner.**

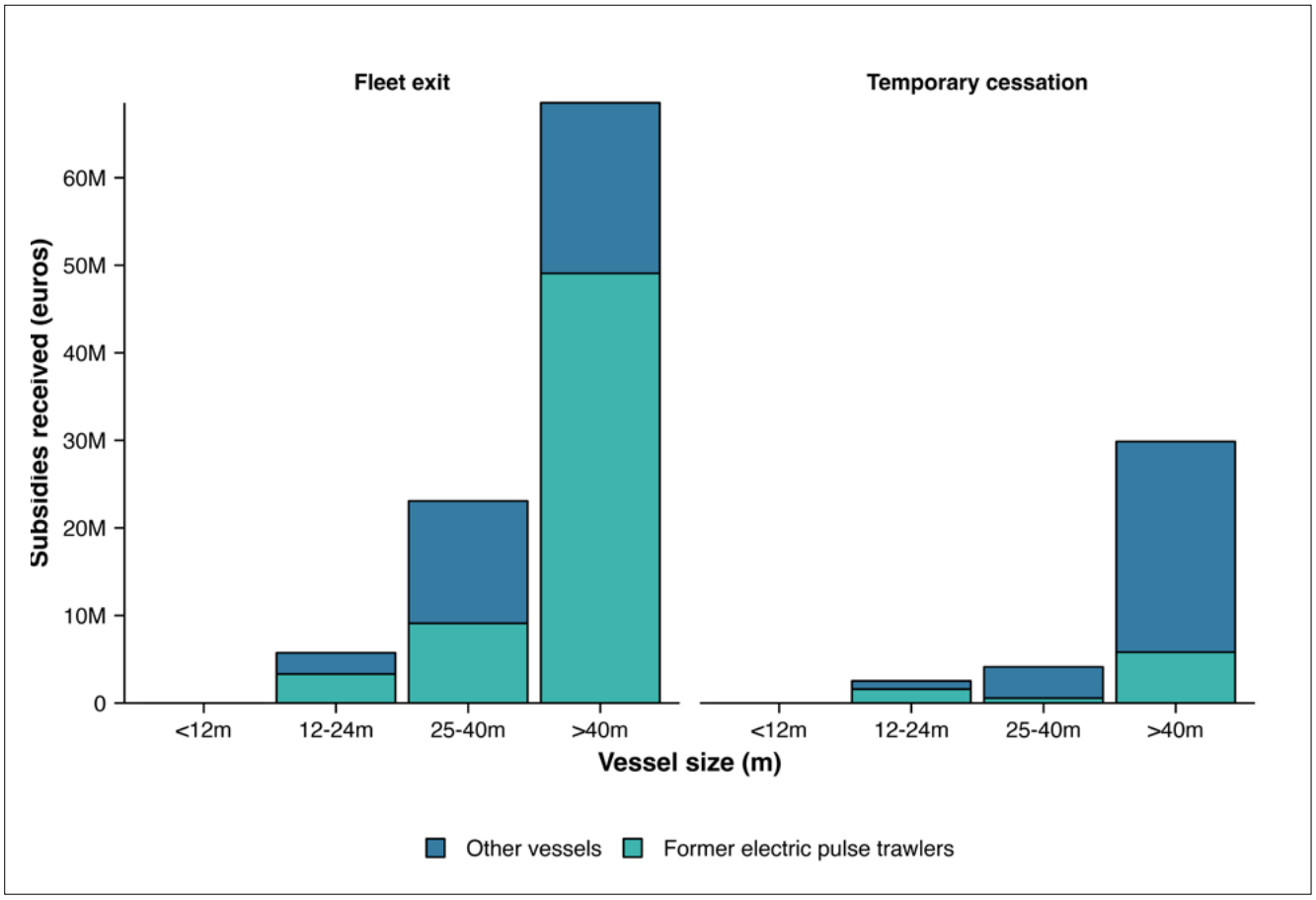


Figure 1 *Sum of subsidies received by length class under the fleet exit plan (left) and temporary cessations (right)*

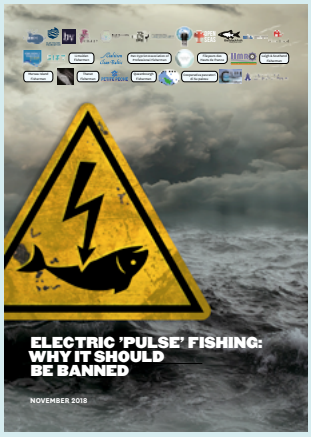
Electric fishing: a recap

Remember: far from the seductive image of an "innovative" and "climate-friendly" technique[20] promoted by the Dutch lobbies, electric fishing is a brutal fishing practice consisting of sending electric shocks into the seabed to dislodge flatfish, such as sole, that live buried in the sediment. In the space of just a few years, small-scale fishers who found themselves competing against this ultra-efficient and destructive method went bankrupt or had to retrain. Electric fishing led to the closure of the Dunkirk fish auction in 2020[21] and caused a social haemorrhage in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Today, some of the most fervent former defenders of electric fishing, such as Belgian researcher Hans Polet, now strongly denounce the ecological and social damage it causes:[22] *"It was an example of what you shouldn't do", explains Hans Polet, Scientific Director at the Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO).* ***"They handed out nearly a hundred licences, and everyone started electric trawling for sole, which led to overfishing. We are still reeling from the consequences today: sole numbers in the southern North Sea are low. If you fish very intensively for twelve or thirteen years for a single species using an experimental and ultra-efficient method, it can't go well. Today, we're seeing exactly the same thing again with the demersal seine."***

Banned in Europe in 1998, as in most countries around the world, electric fishing was initially authorised by the European Commission, which gave in to pressure from the Dutch fishing industry. In 2007, the Commission decided to create a system of derogations against the advice of its own scientists. Once the breach had been opened, collusion between the Dutch government, Dutch lobbies and the European Commission ensued, allowing electric fishing to expand. Although the initial framework only authorised a maximum of 15 derogations for this Member State, in the end, 84 vessels were equipped with this technology.

This change of scale led to the widespread use of electric fishing in the Dutch trawler sector, and vessels equipped with electric fishing trawls soon accounted for almost all catches in this segment.



« Electric 'pulse' fishing: why it should be banned »
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Thanks to unprecedented mobilisation and a blitz campaign conducted hand-in-hand with small-scale fishers, which culminated in a crushing vote by the European Parliament in January 2018 calling for a ban, BLOOM succeeded in putting a stop to electric fishing. A year of negotiations later, in February 2019, the European Parliament and the EU Member States finally agreed on a gradual ban on electric fishing, culminating in a total and definitive ban from July 2021.

20 https://new.express.adobe.com/page/LTf3vpqJpgwfz/
21 https://bloomassociation.org/fermeture-criee-dunkerque/
22 https://apache.be/2025/04/17/duurzaam-noordzee-leegvissen-flyshoot

Vessels doomed by massive fuel consumption and dwindling fish stocks... not by Brexit

The main reason given by Dutch fishing industry to justify electric fishing was its lower fuel consumption compared to their conventional trawlers, whose massive diesel costs were threatening them with bankruptcy in the very short term. By halving fuel consumption and catching fish much more efficiently, electric fishing was an economic miracle for its users, who saw their turnover rise by 9,746% in 2016 compared with the period 2008-2015.[23] The structural problems linked to the extravagant consumption of fuel by trawlers still exist. Consequently, it is logical that the ban on this fishing technique has led to a collapse in the economic model of its users, who have reverted to a less efficient method that consumes more fuel.

The Dutch fishing industry may well claim loud and clear that Brexit has crushed their business by preventing them from accessing British waters, but this is not the case. In fact, Dutch researchers have clearly demonstrated that **the vessels benefiting from the fleet exit plan – those targeting mainly sole and plaice – were very energy-intensive and therefore doomed from an economic point of view.**[24]

Moreover, all except two of the scrapped vessels had obtained a licence issued by the British authorities to fish in English waters:

- The trawler DE VROUW JANNETJE (ARM-15), which fished part of the time in British waters until December 2019;
- The trawler IDA (YE-88), which was not fishing in English waters, but rather in French, Belgian and Dutch waters.

The official catch data show very clearly that the argument of the loss of quota caused by Brexit is fallacious: catches of sole and plaice were already well below the quotas allowed, even when electric fishing was still permitted (→ figure 2). **Brexit has not significantly reduced the quotas for these two species:** plaice has not seen a significant reduction in its quota, and although sole has (-13.3%), this has had no impact on catches, as these were already well below the quotas authorised for years. Between 2017 and 2023, catches of sole and plaice fell to a third, and the quota usage rate dropped continuously. The fall in catches is not therefore due to a reduction in quotas. In particular, since Brexit, less than half of the quotas for these two species were used between 2021 and 2023. These trawlers are themselves victims of the overfishing for which they are responsible.

23 Pg.446 of the 2018 STECF report: http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC112940

24 https://research.wur.nl/en/publications/decommissioning-of-the-dutch-cutter-sector-impact-analysis-of-man. These two species of flatfish alone accounted for almost 75% of the volume landed and 70% of the turnover of these vessels.

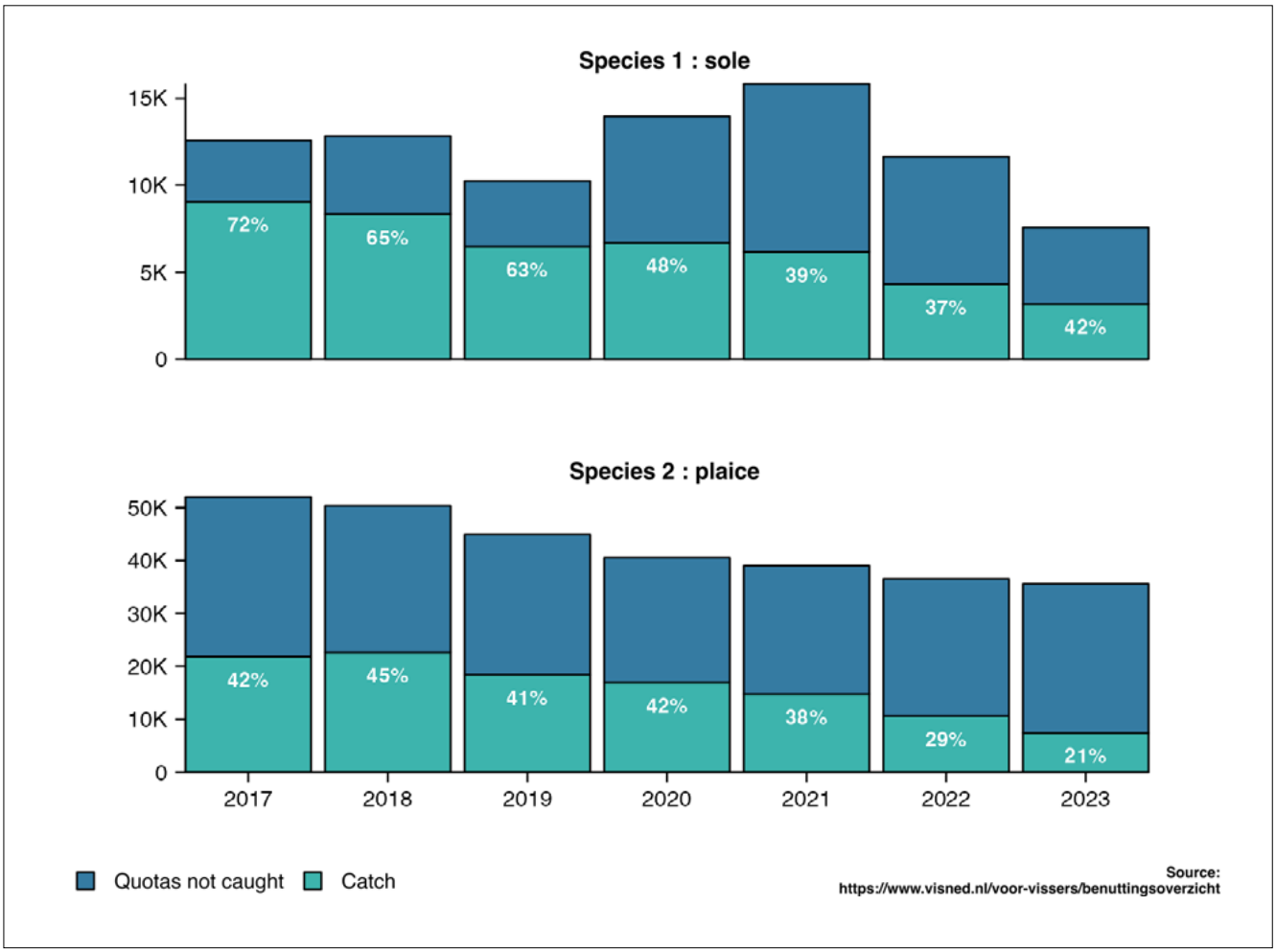


Figure 2 *Sole and plaice catches and quotas (tonnes) between 2017 and 2023 in the Netherlands*

In short, neither a reduction in quotas nor the loss of access to British waters can justify public funding for the scrapping of these vessels. These bottom trawlers consume huge amounts of fuel and have extremely high operating costs. They are by far the most vulnerable to increases in fuel prices, as happened in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These vessels' real problem remains their loss of productivity. It is a direct result of the ban on electric fishing, which allowed them to artificially maximise their catches, even without being able to "fill their quotas" at the time.

So, far from compensating for any real damage caused by Brexit, these subsidies have been used to offer a golden exit to an industrial fleet destined to disappear as a result of its own destructiveness. In other words, Brexit has been used by the Dutch government as a means of compensating electric trawlers for the economic damage caused by the ban on this fishing method – damage further exacerbated by the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the hike in fuel costs.

Small-scale fishers in the Hauts-de-France region, brought to their knees by this unfair competition, have received no compensation.

Recurrent subsidy fraud

Since 2017, BLOOM has relentlessly denounced serious infringements committed in the context of the development of electric fishing, as well as the illegal financial support provided by the Dutch authorities to promote and legitimise this destructive fishing method. Despite numerous complaints and legal actions brought by BLOOM, the European Commission had remained passive and had never investigated these controversial public subsidies. However, after years of struggle, **the Court of Justice of the European Union** delivered a landmark ruling on 13 November 2024 in favour of BLOOM, **condemning the Commission's inaction in relation to the illegal subsidies granted by the Netherlands for the development of electric fishing.**[25] This decision represents a crucial step in the fight against destructive fishing practices and underlines the need for transparency and accountability in European governance. The Court's judgment explicitly recognises that the Commission failed to fulfil its obligations to assess the legality of this national public aid. This decision now obliges the European Commission to examine the financial aid in question and to take the necessary corrective measures.

BLOOM also submitted an alert to the European Public Prosecutor's Office in 2022 about fraud involving COVID aid by a number of Dutch vessels, including former electric trawlers.[26]

While the procedures to obtain reimbursement of these earlier subsidies received in a totally unjustified manner are still underway, the granting of new European aid, under the pretext of compensating for Brexit, constitutes a real scandal that we are denouncing today.

This is all the more serious given that the current ban on electric fishing remains under constant threat from Dutch interests, whose representatives are constantly calling for it to be re-authorised at European level, and given that whistleblowers have informed us that the trawlers' electric fishing equipment has, in all likelihood, not been destroyed but rather carefully stored until the law is unravelled.

The battle against electric fishing is far from over

The Dutch fishing industry has not come to terms with the ban on electric fishing. Determined to make Brussels bend, they are stepping up the pressure and activating all the levers at their disposal to try and force a reversal. Their offensive quickly translated into explicit political statements at the highest levels of government.

In September 2024, the Dutch government described the ban on electric fishing as *"obstructive European regulations"*.[27] In its coalition government agreement 2024-2028, it wrote that ***"At European level, the Netherlands will do everything in its power to overturn the ban on electric fishing".***[28] The situation is made all the more serious by the fact that the European Commissioner for Fisheries, Costas Kadis, said on 7 April 2025, during his visit to the Netherlands, on the subject of electric fishing: *"We discussed this issue at the stakeholder consultation this morning and I can say that we have some ideas for putting this issue on the agenda"*.[29] This statement shows the extent to which Dutch lobbying is succeeding in undermining measures adopted at European level.

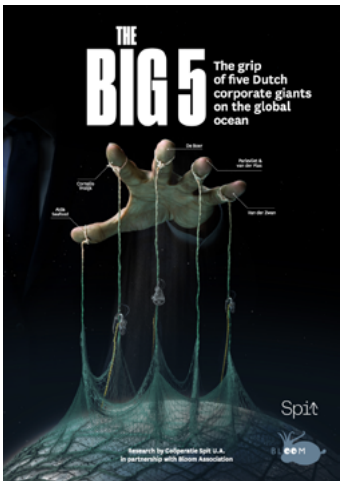
At the same time, a parliamentary offensive has been mounted in Brussels: three Dutch Members of the European Parliament (Bert-Jan Ruissen (European Conservatives and Reformistes), Sander Smit (European People's Party) et Ton Diepeveen (Patriots for Europe)).[30] Thanks to spurious scientific research funded by the fishing industry, they are once again trying to prove the sustainability of electric fishing, which is presented as an innovation. The same ploy is being recycled: the scientific research argument is once again being misused eighteen years after the first derogations were issued by the European Union.

25 https://www.bloomassociation.org/en/european-justice-condemns-commissions-inaction-on-illegal-subsidies-for-electric-fishing/
26 https://www.bloomassociation.org/en/european-prosecutors-covid/
27 https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/dutch-government-wants-to-reverse-eu-ban-on-electric-pulse-fishing/
28 https://www.kabinetsformatie2023.nl/documenten/publicaties/2024/05/16/framework-coalition-agreement-2024
29 https://www.visserijnieuws.nl/nieuws/algemeen/40414/herkansing-voor-pulsvisserij
30 https://brusselsenieuwe.nl/drie-europarlementariers-op-de-bres-voor-pulsvisserij-nieuwe-ronde-nieuwe-kansen/

MASSIVE SUBSIDY TAKE-UP BY THE BIG FIVE FACTORY VESSELS

The Dutch Big Five alone received over €53 million

As well as running a veritable empire in Europe and worldwide, the five largest Dutch industrialists in the sector – *Parlevliet & Van der Plas* (P&P), *Cornelis Vrolijk*, *Van der Zwan*, *Alda Seafood* and the *De Boer* family – have benefited greatly from this windfall, even though the impact of Brexit for them has been, at most, very marginal.



« Big Five »
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The Big Five alone received a total of €53.2 million, or 39.4% of all funds allocated:

1. €27.8 million for the scrapping of 11 vessels (i.e. 28.6% of the budget dedicated to the fleet exit plan);
2. €25.4 million euros for temporary cessation of fishing (i.e. 69.7% of the fund), almost all of which – €22.6 million – was allocated to just six factory vessels measuring between 94 and 142 metres.

Some subsidiaries of the Big Five have benefited in particular from this financial windfall. Two of them received nearly €20 million to scrap their bottom trawlers: Dutch Flatfish B.V., a subsidiary of P&P, and Klameibo B.V., which belongs to the De Boer family.

BLOOM strongly opposes the massive receipt of public aid by a handful of industrialists who are preventing any ecological and social transition, with the complicity of the European authorities, to the detriment of the public interest.

Temporary cessations: a jackpot for factory vessels

To qualify for the temporary cessation of the fishing activities aid scheme, Dutch vessels had to prove that they had ceased their activities by remaining in port for seven consecutive days on at least five occasions over the period 2021-2022. This criterion is particularly flexible and has, unsurprisingly, led to abuses.

As explained above, the scheme has mainly benefited three Big Five companies: *Parlevliet & van der Plas, Van der Zwan* and *Cornelis Vrolijk*. Through their numerous subsidiaries, these companies have received almost €25 million, or more than two-thirds of the budget for temporary cessations, including **€22.6 million for just six of their factory vessels measuring between 94 and 142 metres in length.**

Using the Global Fishing Watch platform, which provides access to data on vessel trajectories, we were able to compare the number of consecutive seven-day port stoppages for these six factory vessels between the reference period for calculating Brexit aid (2021 and 2022) and the period preceding it (2014-2020 and 2023). **The result is irrevocable: the number of such stoppages did not increase significantly over the reference period for calculating Brexit aid.** In other words, **these subsidies have not been used to compensate for a loss of business, but have been misappropriated to pump money into predatory companies whose business model is sustained solely by taxpayers' money.**

Moreover, these tax breaks did not prevent the three companies concerned from lodging a complaint against the Dutch government for a lack of support for their open-ocean fleets in 2024 – a move which fortunately came to nothing.[31] This manoeuvre perfectly illustrates a classic industrial lobbying strategy to obtain ever more public aid and tailor-made legislation favouring their interests.

31 https://thefishingdaily.com/european-fishing-industry-news/dutch-trawler-owners-sue-government-over-brexit-funds/

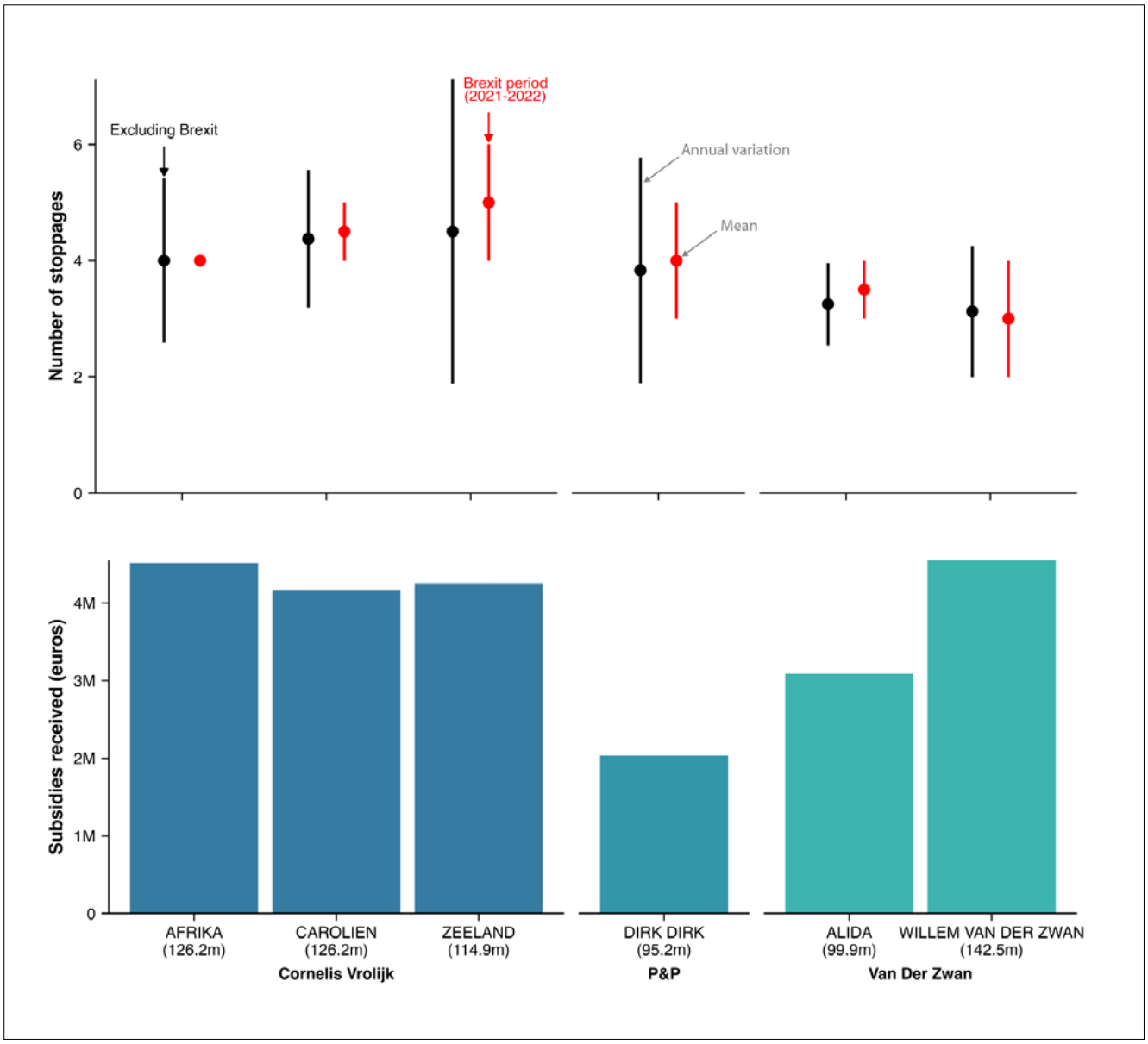

Figure 3 *Main beneficiaries of the temporary cessation of fishing activities subsidies and number of weeks in port during the Brexit period as compared with the 2014-2020 period (and 2023).*

How to interpret this graph:

The lower part of the graph shows the subsidies received by the main vessels benefiting from temporary cessation of fishing activities, grouped by Big five member. The upper part shows, in black, the days of cessation corresponding to the period 2014-2020 and to the year 2023. The period of compensation for temporary cessation related to Brexit (2021-2022) is shown in red. The dots represent the average number of weeks the vessels remained docked, and the segments represent the range between the maximum and minimum number of weeks of cessation during the period.

OUR DEMANDS: PUBLIC SUBSIDIES SOLELY FOR ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSITION

Public funds should only be used to bring about a real ecological and social transition in the European fishing industry. Once again, this new study shows that the reality is quite different: only a handful of industrialists, connected and therefore politically powerful, have a stranglehold on financial resources, destroying in the process not only marine ecosystems and what remains of inshore fishing and coastal economies in Europe, but also what little confidence our fellow citizens might still have in our institutions.

Brexit has clearly been used as an alibi to bolster the coffers of a few industrialists who own the most destructive and fuel-hungry vessels. Far from being a one-off occurrence, this receipt of public funds in fact lies at the heart of the fishing industry's economic strategy.

Despite having been banned since 2021, electric fishing has once again cost European taxpayers €69.4 million in the context of Brexit, even though this destructive fishing method had already illegally received more than €20 million in subsidies in the past. Despite the destruction of many of their vessels, industrialists have never given up on the idea of reintroducing it. We need to be more vigilant than ever, lest we see it re-emerge over the next few years in a Europe that is veering to the right. Many governments and MEPs are now aiming to unravel the meagre environmental and social gains achieved through relentless citizen campaigning in recent years. **No victory is final.**

It is our collective future that we finance through public money. Today, these funds are all too often misused and, instead of financing actions in the public interest, they pump money into a model that is destructive, unequal and contrary to the European Union's climate and social commitments.
The post-Brexit aid plan could have been a historic turning point: a massive contribution to the ecological transition of the fishing industry, protection of marine ecosystems and support for small-scale fishing. This was not the case. On the contrary, this plan has reopened the debate by preventing the bankruptcy of a handful of industrialists who are destroying the public interest day after day.

The conclusions of our report are crystal clear: the subsidies allocated to the Dutch fishing industry as part of the Brexit package is, at best, undue and, at worst, completely illegal. We urge the European Commission to fulfil its role as guardian of the Treaty on European Union.[32] To do this, we ask to:

1 : Use the financial correction tools provided to recover all subsidies that has been unduly or illegally received;

2 : Develop stricter and better-targeted eligibility and conditionality criteria for the future to ensure that European funding actually helps to attain the objectives set;

3 : Increase checks by the European Commission's auditors on the use of European funding by the Member States;

4 : Ensure that European funding is distributed fairly and that the most powerful economic players are not the priority beneficiaries of European funding;

5 : Maintain the ban on electric fishing without compromise, in order to protect the integrity of marine ecosystems, small-scale fishing, environmental justice and the existing regulatory framework, while respecting democratic choices.

We can choose to finance a future that is fair, sustainable and respectful of the ocean. It is merely a matter of political will to make every euro invested an act to protect marine life and, consequently, to preserve the habitability of the whole of planet Earth.

32 Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union: "*The Commission shall promote the general interest of the Union and take appropriate initiatives to that end. It shall ensure the application of the Treaties, and of measures adopted by the institutions pursuant to them. It shall oversee the application of Union law under the control of the Court of Justice of the European Union. It shall execute the budget and manage programmes. It shall exercise coordinating, executive and management functions, as laid down in the Treaties. With the exception of the common foreign and security policy, and other cases provided for in the Treaties, it shall ensure the Union's external representation. It shall initiate the Union's annual and multiannual programming with a view to achieving interinstitutional agreements.*"



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