

Electric-pulse fishing continues in Europe despite ban, Bloom says

By Nicki Holmyard
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A new fight has emerged over the use of banned electric-pulse fishing systems, after a German beam trawler, the 21.6-meter Butendiek BRA 2, defied a European Union regulation and had a second-hand system fitted in the Dutch port of Den Helder. The vessel now fishes regularly in the North Sea out of that port.

Electric-pulse fishing was originally banned by the E.U. in 1998, but the Netherlands won an exemption in 2006 that allowed it to conduct experimentation and innovation to improve pulse beam trawl systems. As a result, Dutch pulse beam trawlers have been operating on a large scale since 2011.

However, in August 2019, [electric pulse fishing was permanently banned](#), with a transition period allowed until July 2021.

Under the terms of the new regulation, new licenses cannot be granted to any vessel during that transition, but the Butendiek BRA 2 was granted a derogation by German authorities for its new rig, and will continue to fish until the end of July 2021.

At the time of the ban last year, then-E.U. Fisheries Commissioner Karmenu Vella welcomed the deal, saying that “the new technical conservation measures present an important step forward in delivering on a concrete E.U. commitment to a sustainable fishing sector and the protection of the marine environment.”

The ban was particularly encouraged by France, following several years of intense campaigning from non-governmental organization Bloom.

Bloom has now accused Germany of disregarding the ban, and the European Commission of ignoring the “undeniably illegal number” of Dutch vessels engaged in electric fishing, despite acknowledging in February 2019 that the Dutch are in breach of the regulation.

Bloom has already filed two complaints with the European Commission against the Netherlands and cites a recent report by Corporate Europe Observatory, a fellow NGO, about collusion between different European countries’ industrial interests and political decision-makers. There has reportedly been a strategy of Dutch companies investing in German and U.K. registered vessels to exceed the regulatory limit on the number of electric-pulse trawlers.

The organization has also filed a formal complaint with the E.U. Commission against Germany, and managed to obtain an inquiry from the European Ombudsman into the failure of the commission to fulfill its role as Guardian of the Treaties, in light of the failure to act against the Dutch.

The ombudsman has asked the European Commission for answers, and Bloom said it hopes renewed pressure will prove effective. Bloom said Germany's actions are particularly troublesome, given that it took over presidency of the E.U. Council from Croatia on 1 July, 2020. The helm is handed over every six months and rotates between E.U. member states.

"It is more than problematic that this country is in such a clear breach of the regulation, when its behavior should be absolutely exemplary at this time," Bloom Scientific Director Frédéric Le Manach said.

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