

Open Letter

President Emmanuel Macron

Subject: Will France walk the talk and embrace true protection?

February 5th, 2025

Dear President Macron,

As France prepares to host the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) in Nice this June, the eyes of the world turn to you, not just as the national leader of the world's second largest maritime power but as a global champion for the ocean that you could be.

At UNOC 2022, you announced France's position against deep-sea mining. Since then, France also became the first EU Member State to ratify the High Seas Treaty. However, this commitment to protect the high seas and the deep sea has so far been marred by the state of France's own seas and marine protected areas. You must now go beyond words, and take action, for the ocean, for the future of fisheries, for the climate, and for our future.

As members of the "[Protect Our Catch](#)" campaign, made up of **BLOOM**, **Blue Marine Foundation**, **Empesca't**, **Environmental Justice Foundation**, **Oceana**, **Only One**, **Seas At Risk** and **Tara Ocean Foundation**, together with small-scale fisher representatives across Europe, we call on you to make at least 10% of French waters comply with IUCN standards¹ of strict protection and eliminate destructive activities such as bottom trawling from all French MPAs. Such measures are essential if France is to maintain a healthy and flourishing sustainable fishing fleet that creates jobs and supports local communities, contributing to the fight against climate change and promoting local consumption and food security.

Collectively, our organisations and representatives bring decades of experience working towards a healthy and prosperous ocean, uniting scientific expertise, grassroots advocacy, sustainable fishing and policy leadership to safeguard marine biodiversity, combat climate change, and support sustainable food security.

Destructive fishing methods continue to take place in French marine protected areas (MPAs), undermining the integrity of these sanctuaries, negatively impacting local fishing communities and making a mockery of France's image as a steward of the ocean.

Despite the EU Action Plan that calls for Member States to develop national roadmaps to phase out bottom trawling in MPAs by the end of 2024, France has yet to make any meaningful progress.

¹[Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, IUCN](#)



Destructive fishing methods wreak havoc on marine ecosystems, devastating biodiversity, overexploiting fish stocks and destroying vital seabed habitats. Bottom trawling contributes to greenhouse gas emissions by disturbing carbon-rich marine sediments and relies on taxpayers to subsidise fuel-intensive methods.

Beyond environmental harm, bottom trawling and other destructive fishing practices undermine small-scale French fishers and coastal communities, exacerbating inequality and economic instability.

Favouring large-scale fishing suggests France's priority lies with the industrial players that fish to excess for profit and export, rather than with small-scale French fishers who fish for local distribution, national consumption and community.

The urgent reality of the ocean crisis demands decisive action and calls for France to walk the talk. As the host nation for UNOC, France has a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between rhetoric and action, positioning itself as a pioneer in marine policy and reinforcing its leadership, at home and on the world stage. The decisions made in the next five months will define your legacy for generations.

We urge you to seize this moment by announcing the following:

1. Strict protection that follows the IUCN standard for at least 10% of French waters.

This action would align with global 30x30 goals and demonstrate that France is taking meaningful steps to safeguard biodiversity in its vast Exclusive Economic Zone.

2. Ban destructive fishing methods such as bottom trawling in French MPAs

Destructive fishing methods like bottom trawling taking place within French MPAs is incompatible with the existing EU laws and undermines the effectiveness of French MPAs. Prohibiting these destructive practices would set a strong precedent for the rest of Europe to follow, ensuring MPAs fulfill their intended purpose.

By leveraging these mechanisms, France will ensure true protection in its national MPAs and protection for 10% of its waters. This would not only align France with its international commitments but also deliver tangible national benefits by safeguarding biodiversity, enhancing the resilience of marine ecosystems, and driving sustainable economic opportunities. Protecting these waters would support the livelihoods of small-scale fishers, strengthen coastal economies, and ensure long-term French-based food security, while reducing inequality and over-dependence on industrial fishing practices.

President Macron, we appeal to your vision, your leadership and your appreciation of long term investments in France over short term gain, to ensure that UNOC 2025 becomes a defining moment for Europe's ocean and for France's environmental legacy.

Respectfully,

