

Full ban on electric fishing: one cataclysm averted, but more on their way

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The full ban on electric fishing in Europe came into effect on 01 July, writes the Parisian based non-governmental organisation, BLOOM

It will help avoid the environmental and social cataclysm that the expansion of this method would have caused, but the industry is already working on imposing two equally destructive methods: Danish seine (flyshooter) and high-pressure water jet fishing.

Following the fierce fight by BLOOM and its coalition of NGOs and European artisanal fishers, along with the support of a handful of elected officials, the European Parliament voted on January 16th 2018 for a ban on electric fishing. After a two-year transition, during which a few of the equipped vessels were allowed to continue using electric fishing, the full ban on this method comes into force on July 1st 2021 for all European Union vessels, including those fishing outside EU waters.

Thanks to this ban, an environmental and social cataclysm was narrowly avoided: in 10 years and with around one hundred electric fishing licenses, industrial fishers have managed to transform the North Sea into a desert, the fishing auction in Dunkirk has closed, a number of artisanal fishers have gone out of business, and others are now on the verge of bankruptcy all over Europe. Without this ban, industrial fishers would have aimed for hundreds of licenses at the European level.

"We must understand the hegemonic goal of industrial companies. If electric fishing had not been banned, all ecosystems would have been devastated within a decade. And European small-scale fishing would have disappeared," explains Laetitia Bisiaux, researcher at BLOOM.

But the same Dutch industrials who have worked at national and European levels to impose electric fishing are now deploying their effort on two alternative fishing methods: Danish seine (also called flyshooting) and high-pressure water jet fishing.

"The industrial fishing model, carried by the Dutch, is based on sequential overexploitation: after having transformed the North Sea into a desert by using electric fishing, they are now pillaging the Channel with flyshooters" explains Frédéric Le Manach, Scientific Director at BLOOM. Last April, the French artisanal fishers had succeeded in thwarting an agreement that the Dutch industry had tried to impose to legitimize the presence of Dutch flyshooters in the Channel. "We are seeing the same strategies as for electric fishing" warns Laetitia Bisiaux. "For example, Dutch industrial fishing lobbies have obtained public subsidies for three high-pressure water jet fishing vessels under the guise of 'innovation'. This is exactly the same argument that was used to fund the development of electric fishing with public monies".

As we did for electric fishing at the time, BLOOM warns of the existential threat that flyshooters and high-pressure water jet fishing pose to ocean conservation and small-scale fishing. "IPCC reports are a constant reminder of the climate emergency. Regional, national and European politicians must fully understand what is happening when it comes to ocean conservation and take their responsibilities" insists Frédéric Le Manach. "Under no circumstances can they continue to allow the development of destructive fishing methods, especially by financing them with public funds. The Precautionary Principle, enshrined in the Common Fisheries Policy, must be applied"