# Suspected bottom trawling breaches surge in UK marine protected areas despite conservation promises



A recent report has revealed a troubling trend in the management of the United Kingdom’s marine protected areas (MPAs), as over 20,000 hours of suspected bottom trawling were recorded within these zones last year. This statistic emerges against the backdrop of government promises aimed at bolstering conservation efforts. The findings underscore a gap between political pledges and actual protective measures being implemented, casting doubt on the effectiveness of the UK's current approach to marine conservation.

Further analysis reveals an even starker picture. In 2023, the total hours of suspected bottom trawling in UK offshore MPAs surged to over 33,000, with just ten non-UK flagged fishing vessels responsible for more than a quarter of these activities. This alarming concentration of destructive fishing practices calls into question not only the sustainability of fishing within these areas but also the regulatory frameworks governing them. Oceana UK, an influential marine conservation NGO, has voiced strong support for a comprehensive ban on bottom trawling in all MPAs, arguing that such measures are crucial to protect vulnerable marine habitats from further degradation.

The Marine Conservation Society has echoed these concerns by highlighting a long-standing trend. Reports indicate that between 2015 and 2018, almost every offshore MPA in the UK experienced bottom trawling and dredging, except for one. Shockingly, legal frameworks currently ban bottom-towed fishing gear in only 5% of these areas. This stark statistic points to an urgent need for enhanced legal protections to ensure that the seabed and its diverse ecosystems receive the care they require.

Media investigations have previously reported the extensive presence of bottom trawling within these protected zones. A 2019 investigation found that 97% of the UK's offshore MPAs had been subjected to destructive fishing practices, while subsequent data revealed that this figure remained alarmingly high, with 90% of these areas impacted in 2021. Such statistics reveal a persistent pattern where the very essence of MPAs—safeguarding vital marine ecosystems—is undermined by ongoing fishing activities.

Despite the evident damage to marine habitats, there appears to be slow progress on the political front. Advocates are urging immediate legislative action, as the existing measures have proven largely ineffective. The call for a total ban on bottom trawling in these critical areas is increasingly seen as a necessary step to halt further ecological decline and to align the UK's marine practices with its environmental commitments.

As marine biodiversity faces unprecedented threats from various human-induced pressures, the situation in the UK serves as a critical reminder of the need for robust, enforceable conservation policies that genuinely protect marine environments. Without decisive action, the future of these protected areas—and the health of the marine ecosystems they encompass—remains perilous.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: Source 1
2. Paragraph 2: Sources 2, 4
3. Paragraph 3: Sources 3, 6
4. Paragraph 4: Sources 5, 7
5. Paragraph 5: Source 4
6. Paragraph 6: Source 2

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://carbon-pulse.com/400042/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://uk.oceana.org/press-releases/10-fishing-vessels-cause-a-quarter-of-suspected-bottom-trawling-in-uk-offshore-mpas/> - In 2023, over 33,000 hours of suspected bottom trawling occurred in the UK's offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Notably, just 10 fishing vessels, all non-UK flagged, were responsible for over 25% of this activity. Oceana UK advocates for a comprehensive ban on bottom trawling across all MPAs to protect vulnerable marine habitats from further degradation.
3. <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/ban-bottom-trawling-in-uk-protected-waters/> - A report by the Marine Conservation Society revealed that between 2015 and 2018, bottom trawling and dredging occurred in all but one of the UK's offshore MPAs. Despite these findings, only 5% of these areas have legal bans on bottom-towed fishing gear, highlighting the need for stricter conservation measures to protect the seabed and its biodiversity.
4. <https://uk.oceana.org/reports/briefing-for-parliamentarians-banning-bottom-trawling-in-uk-marine-protected-areas/> - Oceana UK's briefing for parliamentarians highlights that in 2023, over 33,000 hours of suspected bottom trawling took place within the UK's MPAs. This destructive fishing method continues despite government pledges to strengthen conservation efforts. The report calls for urgent political action to implement a complete ban on bottom trawling across all MPAs to safeguard marine ecosystems.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/oct/09/revealed-97-of-uk-offshore-marine-parks-subject-to-destructive-fishing> - An investigation by The Guardian revealed that in 2019, bottom trawling and dredging occurred in 97% of the UK's offshore Marine Protected Areas. This extensive fishing activity undermines the purpose of these protected zones, which are intended to safeguard vital marine ecosystems and species from such destructive practices.
6. <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/report-finds-more-reasons-to-ban-bottom-trawling/> - The Marine Conservation Society's report indicates that between 2015 and 2018, bottom trawling and dredging occurred in all but one of the UK's offshore MPAs. Despite this, only 5% of these areas have legal bans on bottom-towed fishing gear, emphasizing the need for more effective conservation measures to protect marine habitats.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/31/fishing-industry-still-bulldozing-seabed-in-90-of-uk-marine-protected-areas> - Data shared with The Guardian shows that in 2021, bottom trawling and dredging occurred in 90% of the UK's offshore Marine Protected Areas. This ongoing destructive fishing activity continues despite previous reports and government commitments to protect these vital marine habitats from such practices.