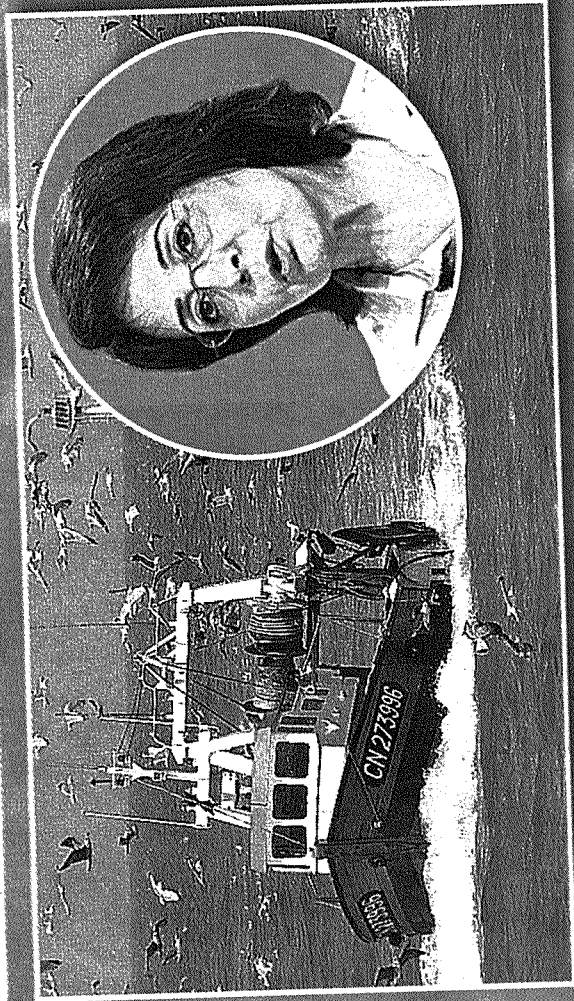


THOUVENIN/VES LOGGHE/ALAMY  
**Maria Damanaki, inset left, says deep-sea trawlers plunder fish stocks**



# EU fishing chief to ban deep-sea plunderers

Industrial-scale fishing is wrecking the sea bed off Britain and putting species at risk. Maria Damanaki tells **Bojan Pancevski** it has to stop

THE European Union's fisheries commissioner intends to ban industrial trawlers that devastate the sea bed in the deep-sea fisheries off Britain.

Conservation groups warn that bottom trawling in the northeast Atlantic threatens deep-sea fish species such as blue ling and orange roughy, and destroys coral reef and other ecosystems.

In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, Maria Damanaki said proposed new regulations would stop the fleet plundering the fish stocks. They would set out a timetable under which bottom trawling in the deep-sea fisheries would be phased out.

Damanaki admitted that

Damanaki wants to phase out deep-sea trawling in the northeast Atlantic. Most fish are caught in relatively shallow waters on the continental shelf, but the deep-sea trawlers operate at depths of more than 1,300ft.

Recent research has found the catches are up to eight times higher than the limits recommended by marine scientists. Conservationists say the bottom trawlers with chain nets weighing several tons wreck the deep-sea marine ecosystems.

The French, Spanish and Portuguese fleets account for about 90% of the deep-sea fisheries quota. UK fishing vessels account for only a small proportion of the catch.

Under the proposed rules, trawlers will have to acquire special licences for deep-water fishing in the region and will be allowed to land their catch only in designated ports that will have strict controls on the fish caught.

Damanaki's tough proposals

## THE SUNDAY TIMES



### Sea Rescue

misguided EU policies had contributed to the fish crisis. She said legislators and regulators had been too easily swayed by the fishing industry despite the mounting evidence of dwindling stocks.

In what will be seen as a broadside against the industry,

## She's not afraid to bite

Maria Damanaki, the commissioner confronting Europe's powerful fishing industry, signalled her agenda from the outset — by banning endangered bluefin tuna from the European commission's restaurants.

She was shocked that the threatened fish were being consumed by the bureaucrats while they

tried to devise policies to protect the marine environment. Damanaki, 59, a former engineer who was appointed fisheries commissioner in 2010, is steered for a radical reform of the European Union's fishing policy.

Despite a genteel demeanour, she will relish the battle. A former left-wing activist

EU ministers and the European parliament will both have to adopt the new legislation. Damanaki believes she would be able to secure a majority vote in both because of the increased public pressure on national governments to stop the destruction of sea life before it becomes irreversible.

Other changes being drafted by Damanaki's cabinet include

who was born in Crete, she endured imprisonment and torture at the hands of the military dictatorship in Greece during the 1970s before embarking on a career as a socialist MP.

She is an astute and determined operator and has already removed officials in her department felt to be too close to the fishing industry.

the compulsory labelling of fish by fishermen and a requirement on retailers to state the origin and date of catches, as well as whether the fish are fresh or defrosted.

Damanaki admitted that in past decades the fisheries policy of the EU has been "unreasonable" and devoid of "logic". She said the industry

influenced regulators too

easily. "We were not good managers, this was our problem," Damanaki said. "We were pushed by the interest [groups] as politicians and we could not resist."

She also conceded that the EU subsidies for fisheries, worth about €1 billion a year, offered no "value for money" to the European taxpayer and large, profitable corporations were able to extract more funds than working fishermen.

"We have two problems: one is that the taxpayers' money is spent in a way that doesn't give enough in return and the other is that it is spent in a way which is rather unfair since the biggest vessels can get more," she said.

Damanaki's department has drafted detailed proposals for reforming the fisheries policy that include banning the so-called discards or throwing fish overboard.

Other key changes in the proposals include the non-payment of subsidies to fishermen found guilty of illegal

fishing and setting fishing quotas according to scientific data, not political decisions.

Her proposals are being keenly fought. It has long been known that France and Spain, among others, have a vested interest in maintaining a status quo because of their vast fishing fleets, including factory vessels — 450ft ships that catch, package and freeze fish in massive quantities.

Damanaki refuses to identify those hampering her reform agenda, but spoke of a group of "Mediterranean countries". She is ready for the battle.

"We have to change the rules. We need a radical reform. Of course, it takes time," Damanaki said.

*Bobbing up in Lyme Bay: the way to save fish, Charles Clover, page 23*

SUNDAY TIMES DIGITAL

To read more about our campaign, go to **thesundaytimes.co.uk/searescue**

**ST**