

Thailand Commits to Reducing Destructive Bottom Trawling at UN Ocean Conference

- Royal Thai Government announces moratorium on new commercial fishing licences for bottom trawlers

July 1, 2022, Lisbon

Blue Ventures and the Environmental Justice Foundation welcome the Royal Thai Government's announcement today to stop issuing new commercial fishing licences to bottom trawlers.

"I am pleased to announce today that there will be no more new licences for bottom trawlers in Thailand. This builds on our fisheries reforms implemented over recent years, as we work to protect our coastal waters and artisanal fishing sector," said Dr. Chalermachi Suwannarak, Director General of Thailand's Department of Fisheries.

He announced the news at Blue Ventures' [Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition](#) event at the [UN Ocean Conference](#) (UNOC) in Lisbon.

"There will be no more vessel registration and licensing for new trawlers. This year, our government is preparing a budget of \$40 million USD for a decommissioning programme," he told the audience at the [UNOC event](#).

"The vessel owners will have to scrap their vessels, overseen by a government official. When the vessel is completely scrapped, the owner can apply for compensation from the government," he said.

"To reduce fishing capacity of the fishing fleet, Thailand has also implemented a fishing vessel buyback scheme to remove fishing vessels from the system. There are now 1,838 fishing vessels preferring to exit the system, including 541 trawlers which cost \$30 million USD for the government to buy back, and these trawlers are our first priority for this buy back scheme," he added.

This latest move follows other recent and substantial improvements to Thailand's monitoring and surveillance and enforcement capabilities, and the Royal Thai Government continues to take a firm stance on driving the reforms forward to support artisanal fishers.

A 2015 fisheries act sets aside an area of three nautical miles for artisanal fishing vessels to access coastal seas. Thailand also introduced robust financial sanctions for illegal fishing and restrictions on destructive gear types.

Thailand froze new licences for industrial fishing vessels in 2016 to bring down the size of the fleet, coupled with a programme of vessel decommissioning. The move announced today makes this ban on new licences permanent for bottom trawlers.

The Transform Bottom Coalition welcomes the announcement, encourages the Royal Thai Government to develop equitable solutions to reduce the size of the country's existing bottom trawl fleet, and calls on other states to follow Thailand's lead.

Blue Ventures started [The Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition](#) (TBT Coalition) in September 2021 to call on all coastal states to urgently address and reduce the damaging impacts of bottom trawling, with evidence of a globally reduced footprint by 2030. The TBT Coalition is now a global movement of 54 organisations from 21 coastal states to establish, expand and strengthen national inshore exclusion zones (IEZs) to create a more equitable and sustainable future for small-scale fishers and our oceans.

“We applaud the steps that the Royal Thai Government is taking to address the impacts of one of the most pervasive and destructive forms of industrial fishing that is threatening people’s lives and livelihoods,” said Annie Tourette, the Head of Advocacy at [Blue Ventures](#).

The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) has worked in Thailand since 2013 to document the environmental and human rights impacts of destructive fishing practices. They have used these findings to inform the Royal Thai Government’s programme of reforms to tackle bad practices in the sector and drive increased transparency and enforcement.

“Thailand’s decision to permanently stop new licences for bottom trawlers will benefit not only marine ecosystems but also artisanal fishing communities. They are setting a bold example that should be applauded and followed throughout the region and internationally,” said EJF’s CEO Steve Trent.

“This new announcement from Thailand is the latest of a series of progressive steps being taken by coastal states to restrict a destructive fishing practice that is ultimately incompatible with sustainable coastal fisheries,” said Dr Alasdair Harris, Blue Ventures’ Executive Director.

“This is a positive step for biodiversity, small-scale fishers, and blue carbon. Incremental change is no longer an option. We can no longer defend the indefensible. Governments must act with courage, prioritise access for coastal communities and phase out the most destructive of our industrial fishing practices,” he said.

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Visit the Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition site for more [news](#) and [stories](#) about the impacts of bottom trawling and to add your voice to the growing global movement.

Blue Ventures is a marine conservation organisation that puts people first. We support coastal fishers in remote and rural communities to rebuild fisheries and restore ocean life. Read more about our advocacy work [here](#).

The Transform Bottom Trawling (TBT) Coalition is a global movement of 54 organisations from 25 countries working to find constructive and equitable solutions to the impacts of bottom trawling on coastal fisheries and ecosystems. Learn more about the coalition’s campaign and add your voice to the global movement [here](#).

The Environmental Justice Foundation is an international non-governmental organisation working to protect the environment and defend human rights. EJF is a charity registered in England and Wales (1088128). www.ejfoundation.org

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