

Transforming trawling

The NGO coalition that delivered a petition to Defra last week explains why its mission is to *transform* – as opposed to stop – bottom trawling worldwide

On page 3 of last week's issue (FN, 28 November, 'NGOs launch united attack on bottom trawling'), we mistakenly referred to the Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition as the 'Stop Bottom Trawling Coalition' – quite an important difference. Whilst the press release we received was titled 'Call on government to ban destructive bottom trawling in UK Marine Protected Areas', it was an error that should not have crept in. The coalition has asked for space in this week's issue to explain why it believes that 'transforming' trawling, rather than 'stopping' it, is in everyone's best interests – Ed.

By **TOM COLLINSON**
Blue Ventures advocacy manager, on behalf of the Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition

associations, seafood businesses and researchers. Each has different perspectives, but they are united in addressing the harm that can be caused by bottom trawling – with a shared mission to revive marine ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them.

The coalition follows a long tradition of campaigns to address bottom trawling's impacts, the vast majority of which have been spearheaded by concerned working fishermen. Dragging gear along the seabed to catch fish has happened for at least 800 years of human history, and it has been

controversial since the start.

The earliest known references to bottom trawling come from the UK in the 13th century, when fishers filed petitions decrying the high rates of juvenile bycatch, seabed damage and unfair competition caused by the new 'wondyrchoun' or 'marvellous fishing trawl'. These petitions led to the passing of two acts of parliament – in 1350 and 1371 – to banish the use of trawls and insist that the 'ancient' statutes for preserving juvenile fish should be strictly observed.

Over the proceeding centuries, fishers from as far afield as Nova Scotia and Indonesia would raise almost identical concerns as bottom trawling expanded into new territories, particularly with the advent of steam engines. Readers will be familiar with the Our Seas coalition's 'Inshore Limit' campaign, which seeks to re-establish trawl exclusion zones in Scotland, first introduced following fishers' complaints about the arrival of steam-powered trawls in the 1800s. Today, broader coalitions are forming as environmental concerns coincide with fishers'

commitments to stewardship and sustainable livelihoods.

So the hoo-ha around bottom trawling isn't new. On the contrary, the petitions delivered to parliament in the 1200s wouldn't seem too out of place in today's debate. Bottom trawling has been dogged by controversy and criticism throughout its history, and while age-old issues with bycatch, seabed disturbance and overfishing persist, that isn't likely to change.

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The Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition is the latest effort in this lineage, but its approach is a bit different. The label 'bottom trawling' encompasses a vast diversity of fishing gears that operate across scales of industrialisation globally, from small 'baby' trawlers in parts of South East Asia to vast pollack trawlers in the Bering Sea. Addressing the complex issues associated with this mix of practices requires a sensitive and nuanced approach that fits local contexts.

It's for this reason that, while it might sound more punchy, we're not called the 'Stop Bottom Trawling Coalition'. Instead, we're calling for a transformation of current practice that addresses bottom trawling's problems, documented over the centuries, with locally appropriate solutions, rebuilds thriving low-impact fisheries and ensures sensitive marine environments are protected, all while minimising the short-term impacts on livelihoods,

food provision and the economy.

While they share the same ultimate goal – healthy oceans full of fish that support thriving fisheries – participants in the heated debate around bottom trawling do not tend to emphasise common ground. On the contrary, polarisation between camps appears to be increasing. We must open up dialogue, forge alliances and make painful but necessary compromises to meet the climate and nature crises and secure a bright future for our coastal communities.

Half a million in fines and forfeitures in Irish prosecutions

Six fisheries cases heard at Cork Circuit Court at end of November

By **PAUL SCOTT**

FINES AND FORFEITURES totalling €562,500 have been imposed by a court in Ireland for six separate fisheries cases involving a range of offences and vessels.

The prosecutions, brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA), were heard at Cork Circuit Court late last month.

The single largest penalty was imposed following the detention in Irish waters of the UK-registered pelagic freezer trawler Wiron 6 H 2220. The vessel, operated through a subsidiary of the North Atlantic Fishing Company, was found to have a non-compliant set-up of grading equipment onboard which did not allow for automatic freezing of catches. Additionally, the equipment did not prevent the possibility of discarding catches at sea.

The court heard there was approximately 450t of catch onboard – although it was not the prosecution case that discarding had occurred. A fine and forfeiture totalling €290,000 was imposed.

The skipper of a Drogheda-registered prawn trawler received a heavy penalty after pleading guilty to the under-recording of catches. David Minihane of Filane, Castletownbere was ordered to pay a total of €48,000 in forfeiture and a fine after an inspection of his vessel Blue Horizon DA 77 by officers of the SFPA at Castletownbere on 23 October, 2022 discovered the under-recording of *Nephrops* by 5,958kg.

The *Irish Examiner* reported that fisheries officer John Flaherty testified: "The amount

of *Nephrops* on the vessel was substantially more than the amount entered into the logbook. There had been an under-declaration of just under 6t."

Mr Minihane was described by defence barrister Alan O'Dwyer as being 'apologetic' and otherwise 'a man of impeccable character'.

Another case involving logbook offences involved the French-registered Astrid GV 938270, whose skipper, Roland Krasinski, pleaded guilty to two counts of under-recording. The offences were detected by SFPA officers during an inspection when the vessel landed at Castletownbere on 16 August, which detected an under-recording of *Nephrops* by approximately 1,300kg and monkfish by 660kg. A fine and forfeiture totalling €50,000 were imposed.

The remaining three prosecutions involved two German-registered vessels, Pesorsa Dos HF 564 and Ortegale Tres HF 570, and the Spanish-registered Punta Candieira

3FE-4-17-05.

In the case of the Pesorsa Dos, a fine and forfeiture totalling €115,000 were imposed for failure to facilitate an officer's safe boarding of the vessel and non-compliant gear use in offences in January 2023 (FN, 9 February, 2023, 'Pesorsa Dos detained in Irish waters').

The skipper of the Ortegale Tres pleaded guilty to charges of failing to remove nets from the water and failing to accurately record data relating to the gear – offences detected during an inspection in January 2023. The court imposed a fine and forfeiture totalling €37,500.

The case involving the Punta Candieira resulted in a fine and forfeiture totalling €22,000 (FN, 28 November, 'Spanish skipper fined €7k').

Commenting on the prosecutions, Paschal Hayes, executive chairperson of the SFPA, said: "Guilty pleas were entered in all six cases. The court's significant decisions reflect the robust inspection activities and appropriate enforcement steps undertaken by officers.

"I commend the dedicated work of our officers, support services, the Naval Service and the European Fisheries Control Agency for their commitment to protecting the sustainability of sea-fisheries."

SFPA PROSECUTION

Obstructing fisheries officers costs €1,200

The skipper of a Drogheda-registered vessel has been ordered to pay a charitable donation and costs after being found guilty of obstructing fisheries officers.

Richard Branagan of Skerries, Co Dublin entered a guilty plea to a charge of obstruction during a food safety inspection onboard the vessel Nausicaa DA 63, contrary to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 1998. His actions resulted in the forced abandonment of the inspection by officers of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA).

At a court hearing, held on 4 November, Mr Branagan was directed to make a charitable donation and a contribution towards the costs of the SFPA totalling €1,200.