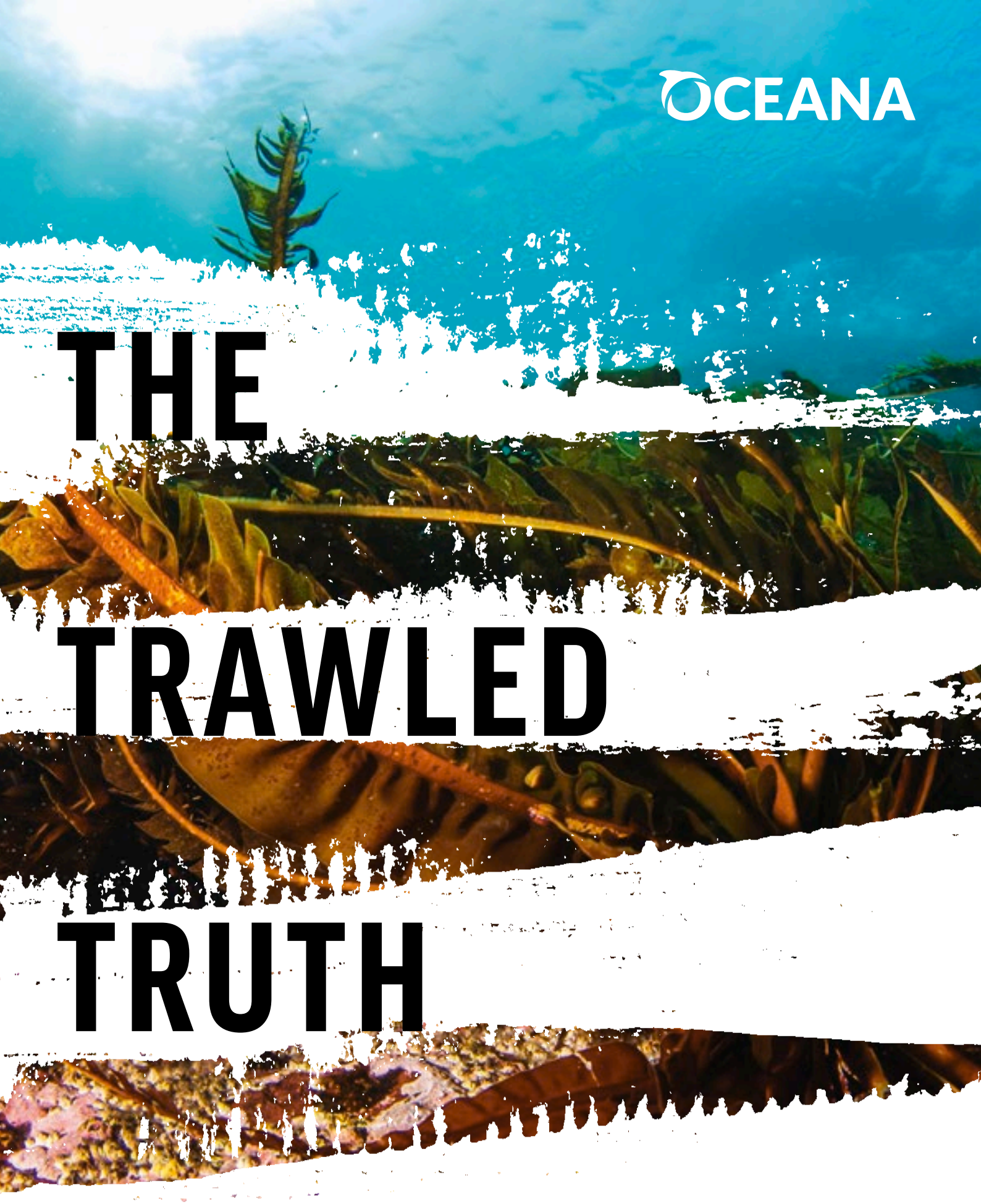

OCEANA

THE TRAWLED TRUTH

THE CASE FOR BANNING BOTTOM TRAWLING IN UK MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

7

CONCLUSIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

All UK governments should follow Belize, the Philippines, Canada, Peru, Sweden and many others in banning bottom trawling from their MPA networks and other wildlife hotspots.

There is no single, globally used, definition for an MPA. Generally, it describes **areas of the ocean set aside for long-term conservation** where human activities are legally restricted or prohibited in order to protect a vulnerable species or habitat. Whatever the definition and designation, the world's leading conservation agency, the IUCN, states that industrial bottom trawling is not compatible with well-managed MPAs.

Despite this, we estimate that 90% of UK MPAs are currently subjected to bottom trawling activity, with effective whole-site bottom-trawl bans in just 38 of the UK's 377 MPAs, and over 31,000 hours of suspected bottom trawling in our offshore MPAs alone in 2024. **We have arguably the worst of all worlds: an illusion of protection masking ongoing destruction.** This means nearly all UK MPAs currently remain largely unprotected from bottom trawling activity. This veil of protection might be doing more harm than good, delivering worse outcomes for nature, while taking more time and cost to enforce.

Banning bottom trawling in UK MPAs is a policy for the many, not the few. The UK can ban bottom trawling within MPAs using the management powers we have, not by designating a set of new sites. The UK's philosophy of treating these areas as static sites open to trawling unless proven otherwise, instead of starting from a whole-site approach, needs thorough re-examination. It is high time we use MPAs to prioritise the long-term recovery and resilience of nature over the short-term profits of industrial fisheries who never have to pay the cost of their damage.

Finally, conviction from the UK public is clear: 8 in 10 UK adults think bottom trawling should be banned in UK MPAs and 64% believe it is *already* banned. As countries around the world step up to ban destructive fishing from their MPAs and deliver against their '30x30' commitments, the UK risks being overtaken by other countries taking steps to properly protect their MPA networks from this industrial threat. This is an ocean credibility issue for all UK governments: there is no time to waste.

We have arguably the worst of all worlds: an illusion of protection masking ongoing destruction

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ANNEX 1

LIST OF MPAS WITH EFFECTIVE WHOLE-SITE PROTECTIONS TO BOTTOM TRAWLING

We consider a site to be effectively protected when all forms of bottom trawling and dredging are legally prohibited from the whole of the site. We estimate this to be the case for the following sites. We exclude three HPMAs that do not yet have management measures in place. A number of further MPAs offer partial protections to some or all forms of bottom-towed fishing gear, in some cases up to 90% of the site, but are not included in these calculations.

Area Name	Size (KM²)	Designation
Runswick Bay	68.0	MCZ
Holderness Inshore	309.0	MCZ
Lizard Point	141.0	SAC
Dogger Bank	12331.0	SAC
Wight-Barfleur Reef	1373.4	SAC
East of Haig Fras	400.0	MCZ
Selsey Bill and the Hounds	16.0	MCZ
South Dorset	193.0	MCZ
Lundy	3.0	MCZ
Skomer	13.0	MCZ
Hatton Bank	15694.0	SAC
North West Rockall Bank	4365.0	SAC
East Rockall Bank	3695.0	SAC
Lyme Bay	206.0	MPA
Darwin Mounds	1380.0	SAC
East Mingulay	26.0	SAC
Loch Creran	12.0	SAC
Loch Laxford	12.0	SAC
Loch Sunart and Sound of Jura	741.0	NC MPA
Noss Head and Sinclair Bay	8.0	MPA
Sanday	110.0	SAC
St Kilda	3995.0	SPA/SAC
Treshnish Isles	25.0	SPA/SAC
Wyre and Rousay Sounds	16.0	NC MPA
Loch Carron	23.0	NC MPA
Lochs Duich, Long and Alsh	37.0	NC MPA
Lochs Duich, Long and Alsh Reefs	12.0	SAC
Red Rocks and Longay	12.0	NC MPA
Red Bay	9.7	SAC
Carlingford Lough	3.2	MCZ
Outer Belfast Lough	2.5	MCZ
Strangford Lough	164.8	MCZ
Murlough	119.0	SAC
The Maidens	74.7	SAC
Rathlin	90.6	SAC/SPA/MCZ
Waterfoot	0.8	MCZ
Skerries and Causeway	108.7	SAC
Strangford Lough	150.0	MCZ
Total MPA area closed to trawling	45,940 km²	
Total UK MPA area	338,729 km²	
% of UK MPA area closed to trawling	13.56%	

ANNEX 2

METHODOLOGY: USING GLOBAL FISHING WATCH DATA TO IDENTIFY POTENTIAL BOTTOM TRAWLING ACTIVITY

The analysis used to calculate the number of hours of suspected bottom trawling in UK MPAs focused on the UK's 63 offshore benthic MPAs. These sites are located beyond 12 nautical miles from our coast, and are designated specifically for the importance of their seabed features. This analysis utilises Global Fishing Watch (GFW) data on fishing vessels that appeared to have fishing activity between January 1 and December 31 2024 within at least one of the UK offshore benthic MPAs.

For this analysis, Oceana's Illegal Fishing and Transparency team used data from GFW, an independent non-profit founded by Oceana in partnership with Google and SkyTruth. Oceana identified satellite tracks within MPAs that indicated industrial fishing (based on GFW algorithms, machine learning, and a random manual inspection of the data by the Oceana analyst team) and then narrowed the dataset down to vessels that were registered as carrying bottom-trawl or dredging gear as at least one of their gear types. This matching process is external to GFW, since the information from GFW does not currently distinguish between 'bottom' and 'midwater' trawlers. This process used the unique Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) and the matching Common Fleet Register (CFR) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) identifiers from the apparent fishing activity data and vessel information data pulled from GFW, and then used these CFR and IMO numbers to externally match these vessels to the appropriate registries (the European Fleet Registry and the UK Registry). Please note that the Norwegian Registry does not provide adequately specific gear codes to identify bottom-towed gear. Therefore, no Norwegian vessels are included in these total calculations.

GFW uses data about a vessel's identity, type, location, speed, direction and more that is broadcast using the Automatic Identification System (AIS) and collected via satellites and terrestrial receivers. GFW analyses AIS data collected from vessels that research has identified as known or possible commercial fishing vessels, and applies a fishing presence algorithm to determine "apparent fishing activity" based on changes in vessel speed and direction. The algorithm classifies each AIS broadcast point for these vessels as either apparently fishing or not fishing, and shows the former on the GFW fishing activity heat map. AIS data, as broadcast, may vary in completeness, accuracy and quality. Also, data collection by satellite or terrestrial receivers may introduce errors through missing or inaccurate data.

GFW's fishing presence algorithm is a best effort to mathematically identify "apparent fishing activity". As a result, it is possible that some fishing activity is not identified as such by GFW; conversely, GFW may show apparent fishing activity where fishing is not actually taking place. For these reasons, GFW qualifies designations of vessel fishing activity, including synonyms of the term "fishing activity", such as "fishing" or "fishing effort" as "apparent" rather than "certain". Any/all GFW information about "apparent fishing activity" should be considered an estimate and must be relied upon solely at your own risk. GFW is taking steps to make sure fishing activity designations are as accurate as possible. GFW fishing presence algorithms are developed and tested using actual fishing event data collected by observers, combined with expert analysis of vessel movement data resulting in the manual classification of thousands of known fishing events. GFW also collaborates extensively with academic researchers to share fishing activity classification data and automated classification techniques.

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