

## Declaration of support

# Scientists call for the prohibition of all destructive fishing methods and industrial activities in Marine Protected Areas

12 September 2022

Marine protected areas (MPAs) with high levels of protection have proven the most effective mechanism to restore marine life and all the benefits it provides to humanity, from food security to carbon sequestration, jobs and economic gains.<sup>1,2</sup> However, EU waters, especially around continental Europe, are in a dismal state of conservation, with only 31% of the stocks studied in the Northeast Atlantic considered in a good state in 2020, while most are not even assessed.<sup>3</sup> The EU currently has less than 1% of true MPAs,<sup>4</sup> meaning that over 99% of continental EU waters fail to be adequately protected from high-impact activities such as industrial extractions or bottom trawling. As a result, the abundance of marine life inside many EU MPAs is lower than in unprotected areas nearby,<sup>5</sup> which undermines any conservation goal. As they stand, EU MPAs fail to provide conservation benefits. If the EU aims at restoring marine life as part of its Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and intends to use MPAs as a tool to help replenish depleted fisheries, it must immediately prohibit bottom trawling and other industrial activities within its MPAs.

### The facts

#### The impacts of bottom trawling

- The strongest and most widespread disturbance of marine ecosystems is caused by bottom trawling, considered as the most destructive<sup>6</sup> and fuel-intensive fishing practice,<sup>7</sup> which has been compared to forest clear-cutting.<sup>8</sup> Bottom-trawling kills one million tons of organisms as bycatch every year, accounting for 93% of EU discards.
- Bottom-trawling disturbs the carbon stored on the seafloor and contributes to significant CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, exacerbating global warming.<sup>2</sup>
- As of today, bottom trawling is conducted in 59% of the EU's so-called 'MPAs', ironically depleting vulnerable species within their boundaries even faster than in nearby unprotected areas.<sup>5</sup> Allowing bottom trawling and other industrial extractive activities undermines conservation goals and depletes the natural capital that MPAs are supposed to grow.

#### The benefits of highly/fully protected MPAs

- MPAs that ban fishing restore marine life within their boundaries, with 6-fold increases in fish biomass and 20% increases in diversity.<sup>2,9</sup>
- Once predator abundance recovers sufficiently, no-take MPAs can trigger indirect effects that restore the structure and complexity of the ecosystem as it was before overexploitation.<sup>10,11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grorud-Colvert *et al.* (2021) [The MPA Guide: a framework to achieve global goals for the ocean.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Sala *et al.* (2021) [Protecting the global ocean for biodiversity, food and climate.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Gascuel (2022) [Bilan 2022 de l'état des stocks halieutiques en Europe : la surpêche recule, mais reste forte.](#)

<sup>4</sup> European Environment Agency (2020) [Marine Messages II — Navigating the course towards clean, healthy and productive seas through implementation of an ecosystem-based approach.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Dureuil *et al.* (2018) [Elevated trawling inside protected areas undermines conservation outcomes in a global fishing hot spot.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Chuenpagdee *et al.* (2003) [Shifting gears: assessing collateral impacts of fishing methods in US waters.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Sala *et al.* (2022) [Energy audit and carbon footprint in trawl fisheries.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Watling and Norse (1998) [Disturbance of the seabed by mobile fishing gear: a comparison to forest clearcutting.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Lester *et al.* (2009) [Biological effects within no-take marine reserves: a global synthesis.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Guidetti (2006) [Marine reserves reestablish lost predatory interactions and cause community changes in rocky reefs.](#)

<sup>11</sup> Shears and Babcock (2002) [Marine reserves demonstrate top-down control of community structure on temperate reefs.](#)

- No-take MPAs can increase adjacent fishery catches, ensure the sustainability and increase the long-term profitability of local fisheries.<sup>12,13,14,15</sup>
- Every Euro invested in a highly protected MPA generates at least 10 Euros in economic output,<sup>16</sup> in some cases exceeding the economic revenue of fishing 25-fold.<sup>17,18</sup> However, MPAs that allow commercial fishing typically do not provide more social or economic benefits than unprotected areas.<sup>19,20,21</sup>

### The opportunity for the European Union

Governing over the world's largest maritime zone, the EU is in a unique position to lead the way by banning bottom trawling from its network of supposedly 'protected' areas. The IUCN provides a clear definition of the activities, which should be prohibited within MPAs in order to qualify as 'MPAs': *"Any industrial activities and infrastructural developments (e.g. mining, industrial fishing, oil and gas extraction) are not compatible with MPAs and should be excluded from such areas if they are to be considered as MPAs."*<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note that, to achieve the greatest ecological and economic benefits, the bottom-trawling fishing effort currently occurring in MPAs should not be relocated elsewhere. This would reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from bottom trawling,<sup>2</sup> and net benefits from restored ecosystem services would start to occur as soon as four years after the bottom trawling ban.<sup>23</sup>

The transition to low-impact fisheries, and the protection of 30% of the EU's EEZ in MPAs by 2030 (including 10% in strictly protected (no-take) zones, which is a key mandate of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy), would help restore European marine biodiversity, replenish depleted European fisheries, resuscitate exhausted small-scale coastal fisheries and the livelihoods they support, and be easily financed by redirecting EU's harmful fisheries subsidies.

- 1 SALA, Enric (National Geographic Society, Explorer in Residence - USA)
- 2 HIRIART-BERTRAND, Luciano (Costa Humboldt, Ceo - Chile)
- 3 VERGES, Adriana (UNSW, Professor - Australia)
- 4 BURT, April (Seychelles Islands Foundation, Marine Management Consultant - Seychelles)
- 5 VERA - DUARTE, Javier (Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción, Researcher - Chile)
- 6 SUAREZ, Anna (Ports de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Environmental officer - Spain)
- 7 TEMPESTA, Milena (DeITa NGO, Independent consultant - Italy)
- 8 MENDRIK, Freija (University of Hull, PhD candidate - UK)  
OLIVA PÉREZ, Silvia (University of La Laguna, Postdoctoral researcher - Coastal and Marine Ecology - Spain)
- 9
- 10 SCHLEIMER, Anna (Odyssea, President - Luxembourg)

<sup>12</sup> Goñi et al. (2011) in [Marine Protected Areas: A multidisciplinary approach](#) (ed. J. Claudet).

<sup>13</sup> Goñi et al. (2010) [Net contribution of spillover from a marine reserve to fishery catches](#).

<sup>14</sup> Harrison et al. (2012) [Larval export from marine reserves and the recruitment benefit for fish and fisheries](#).

<sup>15</sup> Lynham et al. (2020) [Impact of two of the world's largest protected areas on longline fishery catch rates](#).

<sup>16</sup> Duarte et al. (2020) [Rebuilding marine life](#).

<sup>17</sup> Sala et al. (2016) [Fish banks: An economic model to scale marine conservation](#).

<sup>18</sup> Sala et al. (2013) [A general business model for marine reserves](#).

<sup>19</sup> Aburto-Oropeza et al. (2011) [Large recovery of fish biomass in a no-take marine reserve](#).

<sup>20</sup> Rife et al. (2013) [Long-term effectiveness of a multi-use marine protected area on reef fish assemblages and fisheries landings](#).

<sup>21</sup> Turnbull et al. (2021) [Evaluating the social and ecological effectiveness of partially protected marine areas](#).

<sup>22</sup> Day et al. (2012) [Guidelines for applying the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories to Marine Protected Areas](#).

<sup>23</sup> Davies et al. (2021) [Valuing the impact of a potential ban on bottom contact fishing in EU Marine Protected Areas](#).

- 11 DAVIES, Bede Ffinian Rowe (University of Nantes, Postdoc - France)
- 12 CONKLIN, Kristen (Department of education , Biology educator - USA)
- 13 NOTARBARTOLO DI SCIARA, Giuseppe (Tethys Research Institute, Founder - Italy)
- 14 TSIKLIRAS, Athanassios (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Professor - Greece)
- 15 BEARZI, Giovanni (Dolphin Biology and Conservation, President - Italy)
- 16 FOURT, Maïa (Independant consultant, PhD-Consultant - France)
- 17 PERRY, Allison (Oceana, Director, Science & Strategy (Europe) - Spain)
- 18 ROSALES, Alfredo (Fundación Museo del Mar Ceuta, Scientific manager - Spain)
- 19 EVANS, Julian (University of Malta, Senior Lecturer - Malta)
- 20 LOPEZ, Oswaldo (INNOVA oceanografia litoral SL, CEO - Spain)
- 21 COVADONGA, Orejas Saco del Valle (Instituto Español de Oceanografía-Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Senior researcher - Spain)
- 22 DANOVARO, Roberto (Polytechnic University of Marche, Professor - Italy)
- 23 HALL-SPENCER, Jason (University of Tsukuba, Professor - Japan)
- 24 CUSCÓ-MARÍN, Ricardo (Gobierno de Canarias, Teacher - Spain)
- 25 CABANELLAS REBOREDO, Miguel (IEO-CSIC, PostDoctoral Researcher - Spain)
- 26 ROS , Joandomènec (Univeristy of Barcelona, Emeritus Professor of Ecology - Spain)
- 27 PIPITONE, Carlo (CNR - IAS, Senior researcher - Italy)
- 28 SALOMIDI, Maria (Institute of Oceanography, Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, Researcher - Greece)
- 29 DAVID, Léa (EcoOcéan Institut, Scientist manager - France)
- 30 GOVERS, Laura (University of Groningen / NIOZ, Assistant Professor - Netherlands)
- 31 MURRAY, Ivan (Universitat de les Illes Balears, Lecturer - Spain)
- 32 MAGNEVILLE, Camille (University of Montpellier, PhD student - France)
- 33 DROUAL, Gabin (Ifremer, Engineer - France)
- 34 ARNAUD-HAOND, Sophie (Marbec, Researcher - France)
- 35 GUILLOTREAU, Patrice (IRD, Researcher - France)
- 36 SALAS CASANOVA, Carmen (Universidad de Málaga, Profesor Titular de Zoología - Spain)
- 37 FROESE, Rainer (GEOMAR, Senior Scientist - Germany)
- 38 CERRANO, Carlo (Polytechnic University of Marche, Professor - Italy)
- 39 DUPAIX, Amaël (MARBEC, PhD student - France)
- 40 KAYAL, Mohsen (IRD, researcher - France)
- 41 HOPKINS, Stephanie (Ifremer, PhD student in marine ecology - France)
- 42 RODRÍGUEZ, Laura (ULPGC, Postdoc - Spain)
- 43 ISBERT, Wolf (Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), PostDoc - Germany)
- 44 GASCUEL, Didier (Institut Agro, Professor - France)
- 45 MARBÀ, Nuria (CSIC, Research Scientist - Spain)
- 46 CLAUDET, Joachim (CNRS, Researcher - France)
- 47 TUNESI, Leonardo (ISPRA, Head of the Unit "Marine biodiversity, habitat and species Protection"; - Italy)
- 48 HART, Paul (University of Leicester, Emeritus Professor - UK)
- 49 CURY, Philippe (IRD, Senior Scientist marine ecology - France)
- 50 PUIG, Pere (Institut de Ciències del Mar (ICM-CSIC), Scientific Researcher - Spain)

- 51 CALCINAÏ, Barbara (Università Politecnica delle Marche, professor - Italy)
- 52 ALMANSA BERRO, Eduardo (IEO-CSIC, Senior researcher - Spain)
- 53 MASSERET, Estelle (University of Montpellier, Associate Professor Marine Ecology - France)
- 54 RICCARDI, Agnese (Università Politecnica delle Marche, PhD Student - Italy)
- 55 LEYS, Sally (University of Alberta, Professor - Canada)
- 56 NOBRE MONTENEGRO VENTURA, Patricia Alexandra (Università Degli Studi di Palermo, Post-doc - Italy)
- 57 BATISTA, Marisa (MARE, Universidade de Lisboa, Junior researcher (PhD) - Portugal)
- 58 CAMPOS, Luiza (ESCI, Project Manager - Germany)
- 59 LABRIÈRE, Arc'hantael (IMBRSea, Marine biologist and Master student - Belgium)
- 60 COTTIER PÉREZ, Alexandre (IMBRSea Consortium, Graduate student - Belgium)
- 61 ASAR, Daniela Anahi (IMBRSea, Higher education student - Belgium)
- 62 VAN VLASSELAER, Jasper (Flemish research institute for agriculture, fisheries and food, Researcher - Belgium)
- 63 CATALÁ, Myriam (Rey Juan Carlos University, Associate Professor - Spain)
- 64 DE BENITO ABELLÓ, Carmela (CCMAR, Research Assistant - Portugal)
- 65 WILKINSON, Emily (Operation wallacea, Researcher - UK)
- 66 LEEB, Katharina (Okeanos-UAc, University of the Azores, PhD Candidate - Portugal)
- 67 CATALÁ, Rafael (CSIC, Tenured Scientist - Spain)
- 68 HAMMOND, Emily (Marine Biology, Divemaster - UK)
- 69 CHRISTOFOROU, Eleni (Cyprus University of Technology, Post doctoral researcher - Cyprus)
- 70 GEORGIEVA, Simona (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Postdoc - Bulgaria)
- 71 GONZÁLEZ, José M. (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Assistant professor - Spain)
- 72 RUOCCO, Miriam (Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, Postdoc - Italy)
- 73 CHEFAOUI, Rosa M. (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Postdoctoral Researcher - Spain)
- 74 STOLTENBERG, Ina (University of Southern Denmark, PhD Student - Denmark)
- 75 KINDS, Arne (University of Santiago de Compostela, Postdoctoral researcher - Spain)
- 76 FORTUNA, Vera (MARE, Science Communication - Portugal)
- 77 FERREIRA, Verónica (University of Coimbra, Assistant researcher - Portugal)
- 78 VILLASANTE, Sebastian (University of Santiago de Compostela, Professor - Director of the EqualSea Lab - Spain)
- 79 RODENAS, Airan (Universidad de La Laguna, Professor Researcher - Spain)
- 80 MEDINA SÁNCHEZ, Juan Manuel (Universidad de Granada, Associate Professor - Spain)
- 81 PEIFFER, Friederike (MARE-ISPA, PhD student - Portugal)
- 82 RODRIGUES, Diana (MARE-NOVA, PhD student - Portugal)
- 83 RITTER, Fabian (M.E.E.R. e.V., President - Germany)
- 84 YILMAZ, Rümeyza (Helmholtz-Zentrum Hereon, Student - Germany)
- 85 WATLING, Les (University of Hawaii, Professor Emeritus - USA)
- 86 PALOMARES, Deng (Quantitative Aquatics, Science Director - Philippines)
- 87 CASATI, Roberto (CNRS, EHESS, Senior Researcher, CNRS - France)
- 88 TENBRINK, Thora (Bangor University, Professor of Linguistics and Director of the Places of Climate Change Research Centre - UK)
- 89 BOWLER, Chris (Ecole normale supérieure, Director of Research CNRS - France)
- 90 SCHMIDT DI FRIEDBERG, Marcella (University of milano-Bicocca, Professor - Italy)

- 91 MIRAMBEAU, Gilles (Sorbonne Université , MCU - France)  
92 PAULY, Daniel (Sea Around Us; Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries & Department of  
Zoology, Professor - Canada)
- 93 PENCO, Carlo (University of Genoa, Full Professor - Italy)  
94 FERRIERE, Regis (University of Arizona, Professor and Director, iGLOBES International Research  
Laboratory - USA)
- 95 GIARDINO, Valeria (CNRS, Researcher - France)
- 96 HANZ, Ulrike (Alfred Wegener Institute, Post-Doc - Germany)
- 97 VOLTOLINI, Alberto (University of Turin, Full Professor - Italy)
- 98 SCHWENKE, Theresa (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research, PhD candidate - Germany)
- 99 KLINKE, Annabell (Leibniz-Zentrum für Marine Tropenforschung (ZMT), Research assistant - USA)
- 100 TAPPOLET, Christine (Université de Montréal, Full Professor - Canada)
- 101 WIDDER, Edith (Ocean Research & Conservation Association, CEO and Senior Scientist - USA)
- 102 BONATTI, Luca Lorenzo (Icrea and Universitat Pompeu Fara, ICREA Professor - Spain)
- 103 DERRICK, Brittany (UBC, Research Assistant - Canada)
- 104 MATSUMOTO, George (blank, scientist and concerned citizen - USA)
- 105 STEITZ, Matthias (Federal Ministry for the Environment , Senior Advisor - Germany)
- 106 BAXTER, Sydney (University of British Columbia, Research Assistant - Canada)
- 107 SENT, Giulia (MARE-ULisboa, PhD student - Portugal)
- 108 SHEA, Lauren (University of British Columbia, Graduate Student in Oceans and Fisheries - Canada)
- 109 DRAZEN, Jeffrey (University of Hawaii at Manoa, Professor - USA)
- 110 BROTZ, Lucas (University of British Columbia , Honorary Research Associate - Canada)  
111 EFFORD, Meaghan (Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, University of British Columbia, PhD  
Candidate - Canada)
- 112 DAHMOUNI, Ilyass (The university of British Columbia, Faculty member - Canada)
- 113 SADOVY, Yvonne (University of Hong Kong, Professor (retired) - Hong Kong)  
114 NEWELL, Dianne (University of British Columbia, Interim Director, Centre For Indigenous Fisheries  
- Canada)
- 115 ROGERS, Alex (REV Ocean, Science Director - Norway)
- 116 SQUARCINA, Enrico (Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca, Professor - Italy)
- 117 PITA, Pablo (University of Santiago de Compostela, Scientific researcher - Spain)
- 118 TUBIO, Ana (University of Santiago de Compostela , Project manager - Spain)
- 119 BARAÑANO, Carlota (University of Vigo, Project manager - Spain)
- 120 GÓMEZ, Sílvia (Autonomous University of Barcelona, Associate Professor and Researcher - Spain)
- 121 AINSWORTH, Gillian (University of Santiago de Compostela, PI - Research Associate - Spain)
- 122 OLIVE, Irene (Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, Researcher - Italy)
- 123 LAZZARI, Natali (University of Barcelona, Margarita Salas Postdoctoral Fellow - Spain)
- 124 ROBERTS, Callum (University of Exeter, Professor of Marine Conservation - UK)
- 125 SANABRIA-FERNANDEZ, Jose A. (University of Barcelona, Postdoctoral Researcher - Spain)
- 126 MAUD, Jacqueline (University of British Columbia, Postdoctoral Research Fellow - Canada)
- 127 HELMKAMPF, Martin (Leibniz Centre for Tropical Marine Research, Senior Scientist - Germany)
- 128 BEILFUSS, Svenja (BUND Schleswig-Holstein , Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin - Germany)
- 129 CORREIA, Miguel (University of British Columbia, Research Associate - Canada)
- 130 PONS BUADES, Guillem (University of the Balearic Islands, University professor - Spain)

- 131 RODRÍGUEZ, Jose (Instituto Español de Oceanografía, Researcher - Spain)
- 132 GIAKOUMI, Sylvaine (Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn, Senior Researcher - Italy)
- 133 HODGINS, Nicola (Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Researcher - UK)  
MORENO CASTILLO, Isabel (University of Balearic Islands and Friend of the Earth , Former Marine  
134 Biology professor and Board Member of Amics de la Terra Mallorca - Spain)
- 135 LABROUSSE, Sara (CNRS, Researcher - France)
- 136 TRATHAN, Philip (University of Southampton, Visiting Professor - UK)
- 137 D'OVIDIO, Francesco (LOCEAN-IPSL, CNRS senior researcher - France)
- 138 ROPERT-COUDERT, Yan (CNRS, Director of research - France)
- 139 SCHILLER, Laurene (Carleton University, Postdoctoral researcher - Canada)
- 140 FAVREAU, Aurélien (IFREMER, phd student - France)  
CAILLIET, Gregor (Moss Landing Marine Laboratories of the California State University System,  
141 Professor Emeritus - USA)
- 142 DAYTON, Paul (Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Distinguished Professor Emeritus - USA)  
LINDSAY, Dhugal (Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, Senior Staff Scientist -  
143 Japan)
- 144 RICHER DE FORGES, Bertrand (Ex-IRD, Retired marine biologist - France)
- 145 HOYT, Erich (IUCN SSC-WCPA Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force, Co-chair - Switzerland)
- 146 GRAS, Michael (JRC, Scientist - France)
- 147 BARNES, James (Antarctic & Southern Ocean Coalition, Board Chair - USA)
- 148 ANDREWS, Samantha (Ocean Oculus, Researcher - France)
- 149 KÜHN, Ingolf (Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Professor for Macroecology - Germany)
- 150 AULIYA, Mark (The Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change, postdoc - Germany)
- 151 MONK, Hazel (Springlands School, Teacher - New Zealand)
- 152 OBAIDULLAH , Farah (Women4Oceans , Ocean Advocate - Netherlands)
- 153 JOHNSON, Rory (University College Dublin, Associate Professor - Ireland)
- 154 COUSTEAU, Alexandra (Oceans 2050, President, Oceans 2050 - Germany)
- 155 OOMEN, Rebekah (University of Oslo, Researcher - Norway)
- 156 DZIADEK, Ricarda (Former AWI and MARUM, Postdoctoral Researcher - Germany)  
EMAM, Wasseem (Ethical Seafood Research | University of Stirling , Director & Lead  
157 Researcher - UK)
- 158 EVANS, Alice (The Royal Parks, Volunteer Officer - UK)
- 159 STEINER, Zvi (GEOMAR Helmholtz Center for Ocean Research Kiel, Scientist - Germany)
- 160 JAKOBI, Tobias (Georg-August University Goettingen, Senior Researcher - Germany)
- 161 HALVORSEN, Kim (Institute of marine research, Marine scientist - Norway)  
EISEN, Olaf (Alfred Wegener Institute Helmholtz-Centre for Polar and Marine Research, Professor  
162 - Germany)
- 163 HORTA E COSTA, Barbara (CCMAR; University of the Algarve, Researcher - Portugal)  
THIELE, Torsten (Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam, Affiliate Scholar -  
164 Germany)
- 165 MACPHERSON, Enrique (Spanish Research Council (CSIC), Research Professor - Spain)
- 166 GALBRAITH, Eric (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Research Professor - Spain)
- 167 HADDOCK, Steven (Self, Senior Scientist - USA)
- 168 SCHMIDT, Susanne (UFZ , Senior Researcher - Germany)
- 169 MICHELI, Fiorenza (Stanford University, Professor - USA)

- 170 TEIXIDOR, Patricia (University of Bern, scientific officer - Switzerland)
- 171 BARÓ, Francesc (Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Asst. Professor - Belgium)  
AUSTER, Peter (Mystic Aquarium & University of Connecticut, Senior Research Scientist  
172 & Research Professor Emeritus - USA)  
EKELAND, Ivar (Université Paris-Dauphine, Former President, Université Paris-Dauphine PSL -  
173 France)
- 174 FRIEDLANDER, Alan (National Geographic Society, Chief Scientist - USA)  
GILL, Josep-Maria (CSIC (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas), Research Professor -  
175 Spain)
- 176 GUIET, Jerome (UCLA, Assistant Researcher - USA)
- 177 SUMAILA, Rashid (University of British Columbia, Professor - Canada)
- 178 FERRETTI, Francesco (Virginia Tech, Assistant Professor - USA)  
JACKSON, Jeremy (Scripps Institution of Oceanography, Professor of Oceanography, Emeritus -  
179 USA)
- 180 POERTNER, Hans (Alfred-Wegener-Institute, Professor - Germany)
- 181 PEDACCINI, Marie (CCMAR, MSc student - Portugal)
- 182 BROWN, Eric (National Park of American Samoa, Marine Ecologist - USA)
- 183 ATWOOD, Trisha (Utah State University , Associate Professor - USA)
- 184 GUAL DE TORRELLA , Cristina (Sanidad, Fisioterapeuta - Spain)
- 185 CORRAL GARCÍA , Lara Silvia (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid , University lecture - Spain)
- 186 ROUSSET, Clement (CNRS, Ingénieur de Recherche - France)
- 187 ALMÓN, Bruno (GEMM, PhD Student - Spain)
- 188 SCHWEMMER, Henriette (Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten e.V. , Diplom Biologist - Germany)
- 189 ROESSGER, Julia (CCMAR, Research assistant - Portugal)
- 190 CHEN, Emily (Institute of Oceanography, Polish Academy of Sciences, PhD candidate - Poland)
- 191 MELO, Ricardo (MARE - Marine and Environmental Research Centre, Researcher - Portugal)
- 192 SANTOS , Romana (Science Faculty University of Lisbon, Professor - Portugal)
- 193 CORREIA, Otilia (University of Lisbon, Professor - Portugal)
- 194 KNOWLTON, Nancy (Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries, Board Member - USA)
- 195 MONTOTO, Pablo (Fundación Blue Life, Marine biologist technician - Spain)
- 196 COSTA, Maria José (MARE.Faculty of sciences Lisboa, Full professor Retired - Portugal)  
MASIANO , Graciela (Plataforma Pitiüsa en Defensa d'unes Pensions Públiques Dignes ,  
197 Movimiento pensionista - Spain)
- 198 BORSA, Philippe (Institut de recherche pour le développement , researcher - France)
- 199 MARTINEZ, Pablo (None, Teacher - Spain)
- 200 COSTA, Mélanie (University of Evora, Technician - Portugal)  
RIBES BEAUDEMOULIN, Sonia (Muséum d'Histoire naturelle de La Réunion, Biologiste marin (à la  
201 retraite) - France)
- DOMINGOS, Isabel (Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon /MARE - Ulisboa, Assistant Professor -  
202 Portugal)
- 203 BERNAT, Hereu (University of Barcelona, Tenired-track - Spain)
- 204 FORTES, Ana Margarida (FCUL, Assistant Professor - Portugal)
- 205 MOUILLOT, David (University of Montpellier, Professor - France)
- 206 COLL, Marta (Institut of Marine Science (ICM-CSIC), Senior Researcher - Spain)
- 207 MOLAND, Even (University of Agder, Associate Professor - Norway)