

Protection of deep-water coral reefs from the effects of fishing in certain areas of the Atlantic Ocean

2004/0020(CNS) - 03/02/2004 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: To protect deep-water coral reefs from the effects of trawling in certain areas of the Atlantic Ocean **PROPOSED ACT:** Council Regulation **CONTENT:** This proposal seeks to amend Regulation 850/98 on the conservation of fishery resources through technical measures for the protection of juveniles of marine organisms. In recent years the "International Council for the Exploration of the Sea" (ICES) has found and mapped highly sensitive deep-water corals (*Lopelia pertusa*), thermal vents and carbonate mounds off the Canary Islands and in several sites at depths mostly greater than 1000m around the Atlantic islands of Madeira and the Azores. Since being mapped they have been defined as habitats of Community interest in the EU Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. And yet, in spite of their highly diverse biological nature they are under threat from fishing using mechanical deep-sea trawlers. Currently, certain fishing zones around the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands containing known or potential deep water habitats have been preserved from trawling due to special access regimes defined in EU Regulation establishing a system for the management of fishing effort relating to certain Community fishing areas and resources. This regime, however, is due to end in 2004 and makes the case for protective Community legislation all the more urgent. In view of the above, the Commission is now seeking a prohibition of the use of trawlers in the areas of recently mapped deep-water corals. The most appropriate means to protect these sensitive sites is by amending Regulation 850/98. The amendment lists those areas, which are to be protected. A map, attached to the Commission memorandum on the proposed amendment, outlines those maritime areas affected by the amendment. The Commission does not expect the fishing industry in the area to suffer major consequences since the prohibition to trawl already exists. In addition, fleets can continue to fish within the protected areas using towed gear not in contact with the bottom of the ocean, such a pelagic trawls and long lines, purse seines and other fixed gear.