

Hong Kong bans trawling to save fish stocks

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Hong Kong has banned trawl fishing in its waters, a decision welcomed by conservationists Friday as a crucial move to save fish stocks and revive the city's depleted marine environment.

The measure, which is expected to come into effect in late 2012, comes after a long campaign by environmental groups who say the method is extremely damaging to the seabed and fish stocks.

The territory's law-making body approved the ban on Wednesday, and proposed a HK\$1.7 billion (\$219 million) scheme to provide payments to some 400 affected trawler owners and deckhands.

"(The ban) can strengthen the sustainable development of the [fishing industry](#), and to maintain a good oceanic environment," Hong Kong's health chief York Chow told the Legislative Council, according to a statement.

A spokeswoman from the Food and Health Bureau, which oversees trawl fishing activities, told AFP Friday that the proposed payments to the trawler owners and deckhands will need to be approved by the law-making body.

[Conservation group](#) WWF, which has been lobbying for a trawling ban since 2005, hailed the decision as a success for [ocean conservation](#) efforts, after a dramatic decline in catch volume since the 1970s.

"We welcome and support this ban very much, as trawling is a very

destructive practice," WWF Hong Kong spokeswoman Samantha Lee told AFP, adding that trawling accounts for over 40 percent of local fisheries capture.

"This would help valuable fish stocks to recover. This is an important first step, but I hope the government can tackle illegal trawling," she said.

Lee said the local [fish population](#) could increase by 20-30 percent five years after the implementation of the ban.

Trawling is a fishing method which involves nets being pulled through the water behind one or more boats, gathering up fish but also damaging the ocean floor and capturing other unwanted species.

Apart from saving [fish stocks](#), [conservationists](#) have also said a trawling ban will give soft corals, sponges and other bottom-dwelling creatures an opportunity to recover.

WWF said that countries such as Australia, Brazil, Canada and Malaysia have established no-trawl zones in inshore waters to protect marine resources while Indonesia has banned trawling across the entire country.

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