

Bring on the drones: Mediterranean sees severe overfishing

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In this August 23, 2006 file photo, tuna fishing vessels leave Marseille harbor, southern France. Experts say almost all fish species in the Mediterranean are still overfished despite decades of dwindling stocks. EU Fisheries chief Karmenu Vella said Tuesday Feb. 9, 2016 some stocks "are on the verge of depletion". (AP Photo/Boris Horvat, Pool, File)

Experts say almost all species in the Mediterranean are still overfished despite decades of seeing stocks dwindle—and the European Union is considering creative solutions like using drones or space technology to

catch fraudulent fishermen.

EU Fisheries chief Karmenu Vella said Tuesday some stocks "are on the verge of depletion. All in all, 93 percent of the [fish stocks](#) assessed are overexploited." On top of that, he said one in two fish caught in the Mediterranean are not even recorded with authorities—raising the specter of even worse depletion.

The 28-nation bloc has a new fishing policy that will begin in 2020 to eliminate [illegal fishing](#) but Vella said it might be too late at that time to counter the decline of some species.

"If we don't take action now there is a serious risk that stocks will decline beyond the point of no return," he said. "We cannot simply sit back and watch."

Fishermen have used helicopters, under-water radars and state-of-the-art technology to refine their hunt at sea, while controllers have often lagged behind.

Vella wants to change that. He said he was "very hopeful that new technologies may help us."

"I have heard of drones being trialed to control fisheries, telling us not only where a boat is located, but whether it has its nets in the water," he told a fisheries meeting in Catania, Italy.

"DNA analysis can verify whether the [fish](#) we buy are what they claim to be," Vella said, adding that [space technology](#) and "Big Data" could combine to pinpoint suspicious vessels that could be involved in illegal fishing. These examples show: we must think creatively."

The EU says that stocks like hake, red mullet, anglerfish and blue

whiting are specifically overfished. The Oceana environmental group said that European hake was fished up to 14 times higher than sustainable levels.

If no measures are taken by 2020 "closing all fishing activities in the Mediterranean will be the only option left," said Oceana Europe executive director Lasse Gustavsson.

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