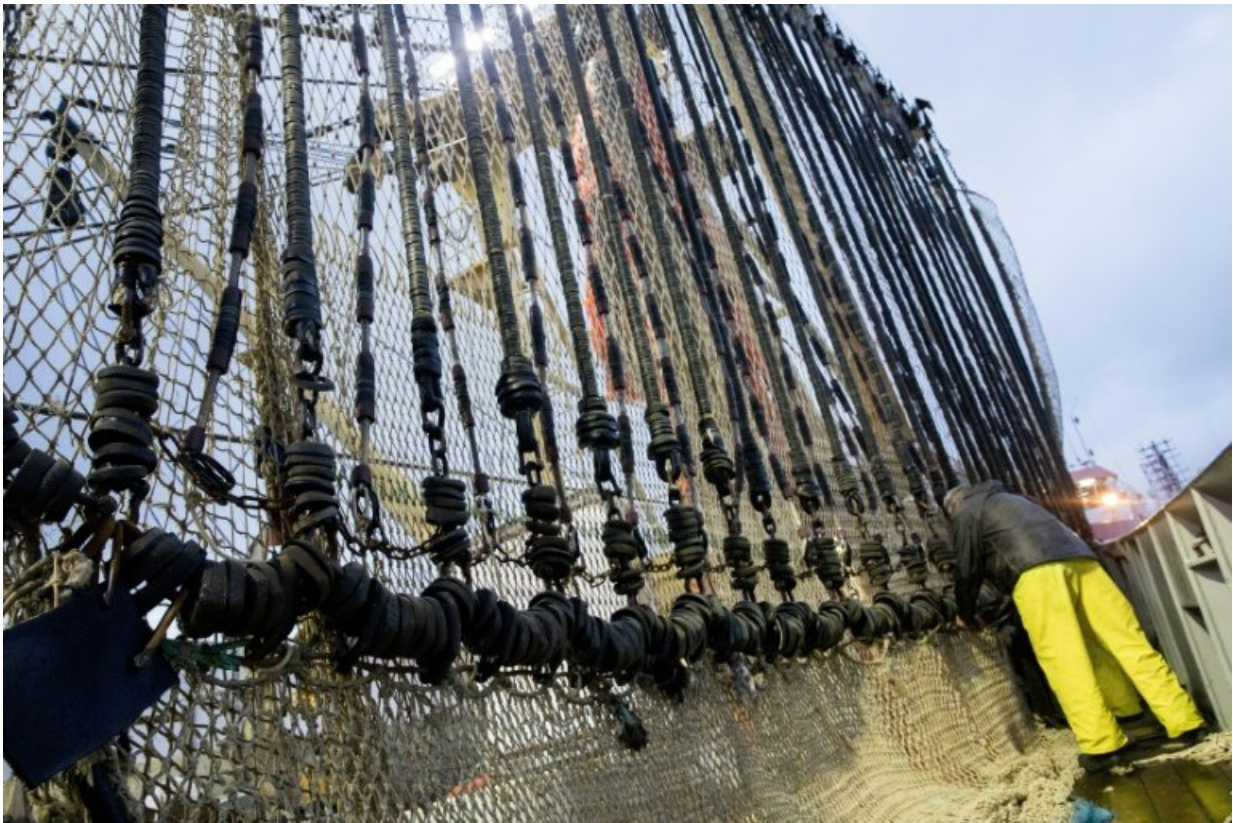


Dutch shocked by call to ban EU electric pulse fishing

January 20 2018, by Charlotte Van Ouwerkerk, Sophie Mignon



The European Parliament is demanding a ban on electric pulse fishing, a technique often used in the Netherlands

The black clouds hanging over the boats in Dutch ports Friday were not the remnants of wild winter gales, but harbingers of another devastating

storm brewing for Dutch fishermen.

On Tuesday, the European Parliament struck what may prove to be the death knell for some of the Dutch fishing fleet by demanding a ban on electric pulse fishing.

For the Dutch, who invented this experimental method of trawling the North Sea for [fish](#), the decision came as a bombshell, spelling likely catastrophe.

In the northern village of Urk, Andries de Boer, a third generation fisherman, said he like many others now faced an uncertain future after investing heavily to equip their boats with the technology.

On the western coast, in the bustling port of Scheveningen near The Hague, his colleague Anton Dekker said he was "bewildered and extremely disappointed" by "this injustice".

Standing among the nets on his boat, his gaze was lost on the horizon as his crew prepared to head out into the cold North Sea for four days.

'It's electrifying'

Pulse fishing involves dragging electrically charged lines just above the seafloor to shock marine life up from low-lying positions into trawling nets.

EU rules allow member states to equip up to five percent of their fleets with electrodes, and the method has been adopted in particular by Dutch vessels fishing for sole.

Some 84 Dutch boats use the practice, alongside just three Belgian vessels, representing 0.1 percent of the total European fishing fleet.

"Sole is a fish which hides under 10 centimetres of sand during the day. By sending out these little electric pulses, they come out of the sand and bingo, they're in the net," said Dekker.

"When you've been working for years to improve the environment and CO2 emissions, to catch fewer unwanted or small fish, and you've reached your goal—which is what we believe—to then see it reduced to nothing, is terrible," said de Boer bitterly.

In Urk, a 10th century village which used to be an island in Flevoland, fishermen have spent hundreds of thousands of euros after having won the go-ahead from the EU on an experimental basis.

But MEPs voted on Tuesday by 402 members to 232 in favour of the ban, while 40 abstained.



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"It is a wonderful victory against a terribly harmful kind of fishing," said Yannick Jadot, a French member of the Greens party, who took part in the campaign against the practice.

But Pim Visser, the head of the Dutch fisherman's organisation VisNed, said the campaign had been based on "half-truths, non-facts, insinuations and allegations".

"It's a scandal, and a blow," he said, denying Jadot's accusations by insisting there was no terrible environmental harm.

On the contrary, the Dutch fishermen said: "The seabed is less disturbed" than by more traditional methods of fishing for sole..

There is "no scientific basis for saying that electric fishing is not good," he added.

'Bruised fish'

Researcher Adriaan Rijnsdorp, from the University of Wageningen, agreed. He is due to complete a study of the environmental effects next year.

"It's a very promising technique, which is important for limiting the damage which fishing inflicts on the ecosystem," he told the NOS public broadcaster.

But the row has increasingly pitted the Netherlands against France—particularly after 200 top European chefs pledged to stop sourcing seafood obtained through electric pulse fishing.

"We refuse to work with seafood coming from a fishing method that condemns our future and that of the ocean," the chefs said in a text written by two-star Michelin chef Christopher Coutanceau.

They alleged that electric trawlers "produce catches of poor quality, fish which underwent stress and are often marked by post-electrocution bruises."

"It is impossible to work with such low-quality products."

"Nonsense," shot back Visser, insisting the Dutch were selling high-quality fish, and pointing to the beloved French delicacy of foie-gras, most often produced by force-feeding poultry to fatten their livers.

Tuesday's vote was just one step in a long battle, with the EU parliament now trying to strike a compromise with the European Commission, the bloc's executive, and the European Council, which groups the 28 member states.

Dutch fishermen say if a total ban is adopted, then they will need to use 40 million litres of diesel more a year to drag heavier nets, which will cut their revenues by some 20 percent.

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