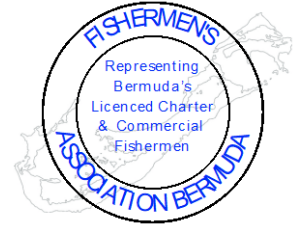


Fishermen's Association of Bermuda
April 20 2026



Press Release



Industrial fishing boats like this are the real target of global no fishing MPA's. In two sets of its net, one ship can catch as much marine biomass as all of Bermuda lands in an entire year.



This is the scale of commercial fishing in Bermuda. By the pound, this boat likely catches the most fish of any boat in Bermuda. Owner operated, small scale, artisanal, hand hauled nets and hook and line fishing, with extremely limited to no by catch.

Government will soon be considering legislation that sets the stage for the Marine Spatial Planning as recommended by the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme, which was initiated by a 2019 MOU with the Waitt Institute and ASU/BIOS.

Government's commitment to 20% Full protection (no fishing) of our EEZ waters, as set in that 2019 MOU, is not about keeping up with the international Jones's, or complying with any regulations, or qualifying for any funding. It was an ill-advised, if well intentioned, commitment made with no consultation of any local stakeholders, made under the influence of international NGO's with their own agendas.

Unnecessary

According to DENR, there are actually no international obligations or funding contingencies that require a particular percentage of Full protection.

The UN's Sustainability Goal 14, Life Under Water, calls countries to "sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems" and specifically to "Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets".

The global 30x30 initiative language is worth reading in its entirety, and does not specify Full protection: "Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories."

The wording of these international goals is very intentionally flexible to allow for appropriate levels of protection as determined by local governments and stakeholders.

Only a very small handful of countries currently have 20% or more of their EEZ's under Full protection (all pushed by NGO's such as Pew and Waitt Institute), and some, such as Palau, are already reconsidering their restrictions. The few countries that do have Full protection did so because they contend with foreign fishing vessels and damaging methods such as bottom trawling, dynamiting, and socially exploitive labour practices. Bermuda has none of that, utilizing small, purpose built lobster traps, hand hauled small bait nets, and hook and line by small, owner operated artisanal boats.

Ineffective

No-fishing MPA's do have their place, like our highly successful black grouper boxes and red hind grounds. The proposed MPA's do not target aggregate or spawning areas of commercially targeted species.

According to DENR, current impacts of fishing in Bermuda are at a sustainable level, and they have been relatively stable for decades. When fishing pressure is already sustainable, it can take decades for no-fishing MPA's to show any improvement, if they ever do.

In the context of Bermuda, “Full protection” is like wrapping your kid in bubble wrap. Is it actually effective? What are you protecting against? Are you promoting the development of responsible, meaningful interactions? Or are you just trying to make yourself feel better instead of doing the hard work of actual management?

Adversarial

During the course of negotiations, FAB has been told that the political will to implement recreational fishing licenses will likely disappear if we don't sign on to this version of marine spatial planning. FAB, DENR, the Marine Resource Board, the Commercial Fisheries Council, scientists, conservationists, and BOPP have all agreed on the necessity for recreational licenses for data collection, public education and the principle of ocean stewardship as an important fisheries management tool. The fact that Government has committed to licenses happening only as a package deal with the implementation of no fishing MPA's means they are not serious about meaningful, effective long term fisheries management, they are more interested in bragging rights in international conservation circles.

We regret that Government feels their signing of the (non-binding) 2019 MOU locked them into the 20% Full protection target. That set the parameters for the entire BOPP process and we have been told it is Government's hard line. Instead of 20% Full protection, FAB is advocating for 100% Effective Management of our marine area and resources. This includes bag and size limits, recreational licensing, and a respectful, cooperative working relationship between fishers and managers.

The Independent Panel that reviewed public comments to the BOPP plan noted, “The Panel observed a willingness by the FAB to collaborate and reach a plan agreeable to all parties.”

Unfortunately the 20% Full protection target has an outsized impact on our industry and perpetuates an adversarial relationship so we cannot support it. There are win-wins that we can pursue together, but insisting on Full protection means we cannot move forward. We respectfully urge the Minister of Public Works and The Environment, the Premier, the Cabinet and all Members of Parliament to take a step back and take a collaborative approach with stakeholders that starts with a shared goal we can all agree on.

Respectfully,

The Fishermen's Association of Bermuda