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- [WWF](#)
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## **Edie weekly summaries 16/03/2001**

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### **Three West African nations take action to halt declining fish stocks**

The impoverished nations of Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal have announced conservation efforts which will jeopardise lucrative EU fishing contracts, but are designed to boost stocks



Traditional Mauritanian fishermen (M. Edwards)

The three nations announced drastic measures designed to save one of the world's richest marine environments from over-fishing at the Ministry of the Environment in Senegal's capital Dakar

on 10 March. Mauritania is banning all fishing except traditional non-motorised fishing by local communities, in the Banc d'Arguin National Park, a 4,700 square mile (12,000 sq km) coastal wetland, home to the world's most endangered marine mammal, the monk seal. The EU pays 266 million euros (US\$ 247 million) for access to Mauritanian waters alone annually, a huge source of income for one of the world's poorest nations.

Guinea Bissau's action comes in the form of the creation of only its second national park, João Viera /Poilão, a 200 square mile (500 sq km) marine protected area which includes the largest green turtle nesting site on the Atlantic coast of Africa, whilst Senegal is to develop marine protected areas within its territorial waters. The announcements came soon after the European Commission proposed large cuts in fishing quotas to save stocks of certain fish, but which would only restrict catches in EU waters (see [related story](#)), and after 150 of the world's leading marine scientists called for specially-protected marine parks to cover 20% of the Earth's seas, also to preserve dwindling stocks.

News reports say that West Africa has suffered massive over-fishing by EU fishing fleets, with local small fishing boats being forced to seek fish ever further away or to concentrate their activity in sensitive coastal areas. The environmental NGO, WWF says that the EU has a chance to assist West African nations to conserve the natural resources off their coast with fishing agreements due for renewal with the three nations this year. It urges respect to be shown for the interests of communities dependent on fishing for food supply and a limit on fish that can be caught based on a scientific assessment of stocks.

“These actions to save fish stocks and marine life are necessary because of years of over-fishing by industrial fishing fleets from Europe and elsewhere,” said Souleymane Zeba, Director of WWF's West Africa Programme. “Fish stocks have been devastated and damaging fishing techniques have caused a decline in species like dolphins, sharks and turtles.”

“If developing countries in West Africa can invest precious resources in safeguarding fish stocks why can't the European Union stop overfishing in West African waters?” wonders Julie Cator, WWF's European Fisheries expert. “European Fishing Ministers should hang their heads in shame. The EU is subsidising European fleets to over-fish off West Africa,” she added.

In a separate development, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has announced the adoption of a new Plan of Action against illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing by more than 110 countries. The plan calls upon states to ensure that their nationals do not support or engage in IUU fishing, with no vessel being allowed to fish unless so authorised. States should also cooperate to identify those who are the operators or owners of vessels involved in IUU fishing, with measures being taken against vessels without nationality involved in IUU fishing. In some important fisheries, IUU fishing accounts for up to 30% of total catches, FAO says.