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Greenpeace calls on supermarkets to stop deep sea fish sales

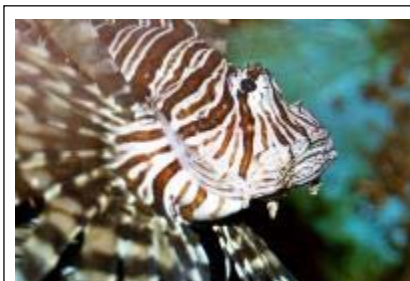
[Michael Cosgrove](#)

06 October, 2009 06:02:00

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Broadbarred firefish from the Scorpaenidae family. Wikimedia. BS
Turner Hof

Several deep sea fish species are facing extinction from overfishing according to Greenpeace, who have called upon European supermarket chains to stop selling them.

“Eating a tuna roll at a sushi restaurant should be considered no more environmentally benign than driving a Hummer or harpooning a manatee.”

Those words were written by Daniel Pauly, a Vancouver University professor and one of the world’s leading experts on overfishing, in a *New Republic* article titled “[Aquacalypse now.](#)”

Pauly was talking about tuna, but he could just as well have been talking about those species who live in the deeper areas of the world’s seas and oceans.

If he didn’t mention them, it’s probably because the names of deep sea species like the emperor bream, the Greenland halibut, the grenadier (or rattail), the blue grenadier, the common ling (or molva), the blackscabbard fish, various scorpaeniformes and some species of shark are virtually unknown to the general public.

Most of the fish traditionally consumed by humans come from relatively shallow sea depths, but many years of overfishing have led the fishing industry to trawl deeper and deeper in order to find other species of fish to commercialize. That is why more and more deep sea fish are to be found in supermarkets, where they are often cut up and sold in the form of fillets because of their relatively unappetizing appearance. They are even renamed sometimes, using non-existent and innocuous names in order to make them more attractive to consumers.



Above: Black scabbardfish at Funchal market at Madeira in Portugal (Wikimedia)

[Greenpeace](#) claims that the species mentioned above are now in danger of extinction due to aggressive overfishing, according to French daily [Le Figaro](#).

Many deep sea species have low metabolism rates, which means that their life expectancy (almost 140 years for some emperor breams according to recent studies) and reproduction rates (not before 40 years old in some cases) make them highly vulnerable.

The situation is made even worse by the fact that deep sea ecosystems, which have remained untouched for thousands of years and which do not evolve as quickly as land-based systems, are being devastated by sea-bottom trawling activities because of their relative lack of resilience faced with sudden change.

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“We must no longer catch deep sea fish,” states Claire Nouvian, founder of the [Bloom Association](#), an NGO dedicated to ocean protection and an associate of the Greenpeace campaign.

Statistics issued recently by the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\)](#) indicate that 285 industrial-sized trawlers are mobilized for deep sea fishing around the world. They are mainly operated by only 10 countries: Spain, which alone operates 60 trawlers, and South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, Australia, Japan, France, Portugal, Belize and Estonia.

Efforts to organize a moratorium on deep sea fishing, supported by a large number of marine scientists, have not yet borne fruit. The issue is scheduled to be discussed shortly at the UN, but many of the countries involved in deep sea fishing do not support a moratorium, including France and Spain.

This situation has led Greenpeace to launch a European campaign which aims to stop the commercialization by large supermarket chains of threatened species. “Supermarkets are major actors who are in a position to change things because the vast majority of fish and other sea products are sold in them,” explained a senior French Greenpeace representative in a recent press statement.

All French supermarket chains sell deep sea fish. The two most popular species are the Greenland halibut and scorpaeniformes, followed by the black scabbard fish and the grenadier.

One of the largest of the chains, [Intermarché](#), owns the largest deep sea fishing fleet in France, La Scapêche. A Scapêche director, Fabien Dulon, has declared that he is open to the Greenpeace initiative, but he also insists that Scapêche exploits a very small area of the seas compared to the Spanish fleets.

The last word here goes to Daniel Pauly and his *New Republic* article, in which he compares the current dynamic consisting of fishing ever-further and ever-deeper whilst at the same time being subsidized by taxpayer-driven fishery support to the [Ponzi scheme](#) set up by Bernard Madoff.

Food for thought indeed.

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