



## **Blue Hole:**

**A key ecosystem of the Argentine Sea under siege by international fishing fleets**





Image of the seabed in Blue Hole damaged by the international fleets.  
The image was taken with a Tow Cam. March 2022  
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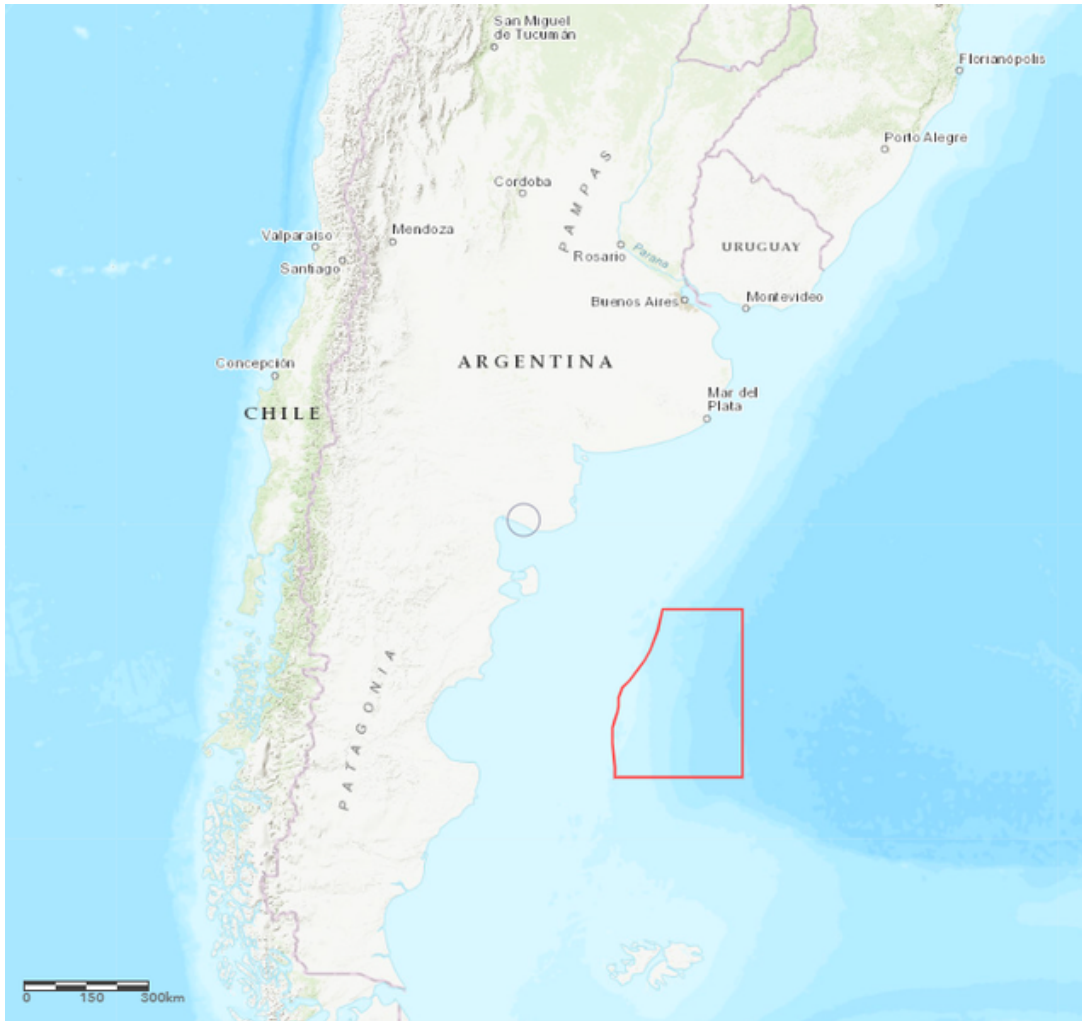
# INTRODUCTION

**THE BLUE HOLE, A KEY AREA FOR THE BIODIVERSITY OF THE ARGENTINE SEA, IS LOCATED 200 MILES FROM THE COAST, RIGHT OUTSIDE THE ARGENTINE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS). ARGENTINA HAS JURISDICTION OVER THE SEABED, DUE TO THE EXTENSION OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF THAT WAS GRANTED TO THE COUNTRY BY THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION IN 2016. (1)**

This is an area of high importance for biodiversity. During the summer and fall it is part of the migratory route of species of high commercial interest such as squid and hake, among others. It is also one of the favorite feeding grounds for iconic species of the region, such as whales, sea lions and elephant seals. It also provides sustenance to seabirds such as petrels and albatrosses.

Year after year, the Blue Hole is plundered by global fishing fleets, enabled by poor governance and the lack of protection of vulnerable areas of the high seas. The Blue Hole is threatened by overfishing, destructive fishing practices and the failure of States to collaborate to ensure that marine ecosystems are effectively protected and fisheries are sustainably managed in international waters.

Governments around the world have joined the scientific community and civil society in calling for at least 30% of the world's oceans to be protected by 2030. Greenpeace's report, *30x30: A blueprint for Ocean Protection*, produced in collaboration with leading academic institutions, including the Universities of York, Oxford, Edinburgh and Salford, sought to model what the level of protection would be if it covered 30% of representative ecosystems in international waters, and areas of the Blue Hole with its impressive biodiversity were clearly identified as areas in need of protection.(2)



## Location of the Blue Hole



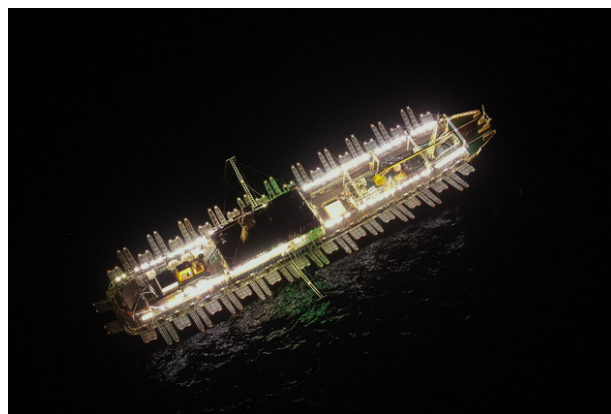
This area of the Southwest Atlantic is in a legal vacuum. There are currently no effective mechanisms for the protection of areas outside coastal states jurisdictions. The UN is in the final stages of the negotiations for a Global Oceans Treaty that could amend this situation and place conservation at the heart of ocean governance. In addition, in Argentina, a project to create a benthic marine protected area is currently being discussed in the national congress.

The only regional fisheries management organization operating in this area is the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT); however, ICCAT only manages fisheries targeting tuna and tuna-like species, as well as sharks caught by tuna fleets, so other important fishing activities in the area targeting species such as squid, hake or Patagonian toothfish are not governed by an international multilateral body.

Greenpeace calls for the immediate adoption of regulations to ensure that human activities in the region does not harm vital ecosystems, as well as the adoption of a Global Ocean Treaty, to be discussed at the UN in August, that will pave the way for the creation of a network of ocean sanctuaries free of human

industrial activity, encompassing areas such as the Blue Hole that are vital to the global oceans' health.

A robust Global Oceans Treaty that creates mechanisms for the governance of international waters through marine sanctuaries will curb the advance of international fisheries in the area, which are over-exploiting fish populations, leading to the devastation of a critical ecosystem.



**Squid Jigger documented by Greenpeace Andino, in Blue Hole. The organization detected more than 500 vessel plundering this area of the Southwest Atlantic. March 2022.**  
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# FISHING EFFORT IN BLUE HOLE

Evolution of the international fishing fleet in the last 5 years.

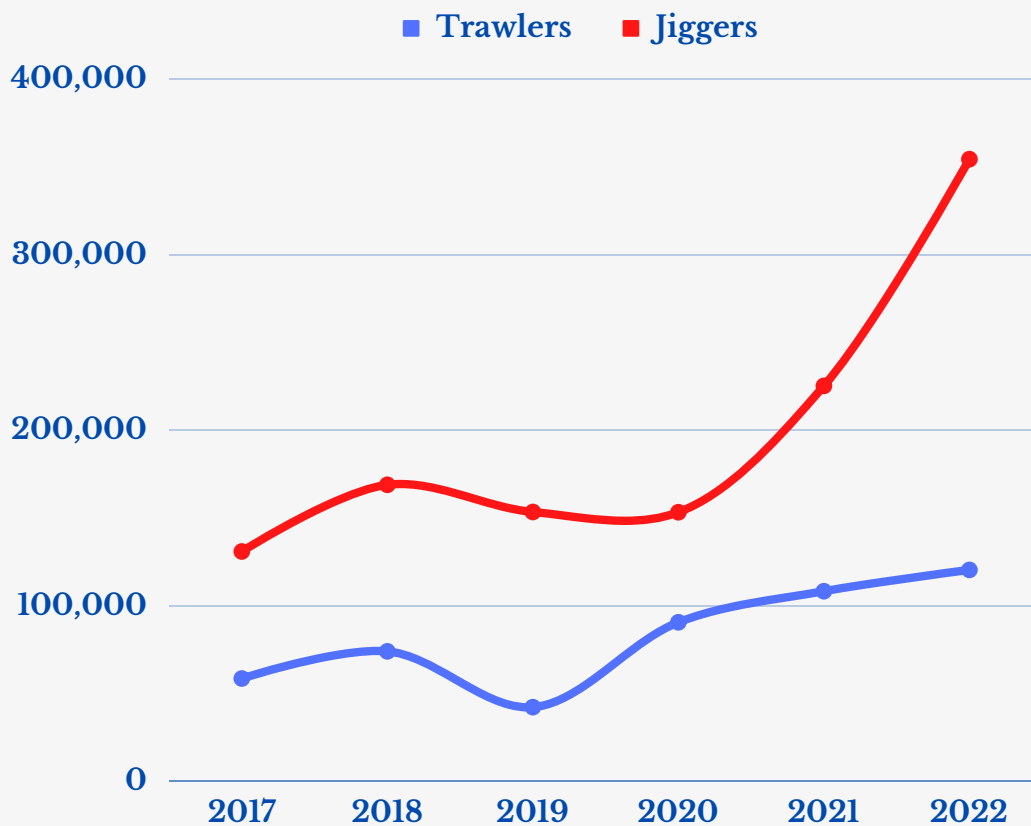
Using tools provided by Global Fishing Watch, an organization which promotes advances in ocean governance through greater transparency of human activity at sea, we've analyzed the evolution of the international fleet operating in the Blue Hole area over the last five years.

A significant increase in the hours of apparent fishing effort - i.e. the number of hours that the fleets have been operating in the area- can be observed, which gives an indication of the magnitude of the problem and the impact on the ecosystem. This means greater pressure on fish populations given a substantial increase in the number of fishing vessels operating in the area.

Looking exclusively at the high fishing season from December to July of each year, we can observe an upward trend, that over the years there has been a substantial increase in fishing effort in the area.



**Hundreds of squid jiggers documented by Greenpeace Andino, in Blue Hole. March 2022.  
© Martin Katz / Greenpeace**



Fishing effort hours in the Blue Hole

## What about the squid fishery?

Looking exclusively at the squid season, when the population of the *illex argentinus* migrates over the continental slope leaving the Argentine exclusive economic zone and passing through the area where the international fleet operates, **for the year 2017 the apparent fishing effort hours of squid jiggers was 130,789 hrs. while for bottom trawlers, it was 58,408 hrs.**

The following year, a slight increase was observed in the squid jigger fleet with 168,789 hrs. and for bottom trawler fleet, 73,882 hrs. In the 2019 season, there was a slight decrease, 153,303 hrs. for squid jiggers and 42,081 hrs. for bottom trawling. **But the upward trend is noted again in 2020 doubling the bottom trawling hours (90,442 hrs).**

**In 2021, the increase in the number of hours is also observed with 108,158 hrs. reported for bottom trawling and 225,168 hrs. for squid jiggers,** always focusing exclusively on the high squid season that occurs from the beginning of January or last days of December until mid-July or early August.

**Finally, for the first semester of the year, the hours of apparent fishing effort for squid jiggers was 354,367 hrs., a number that almost triples what was seen 5 years ago, and for bottom trawlers 120,302 hrs., which is also much more than double what was observed in 2017.(3)**

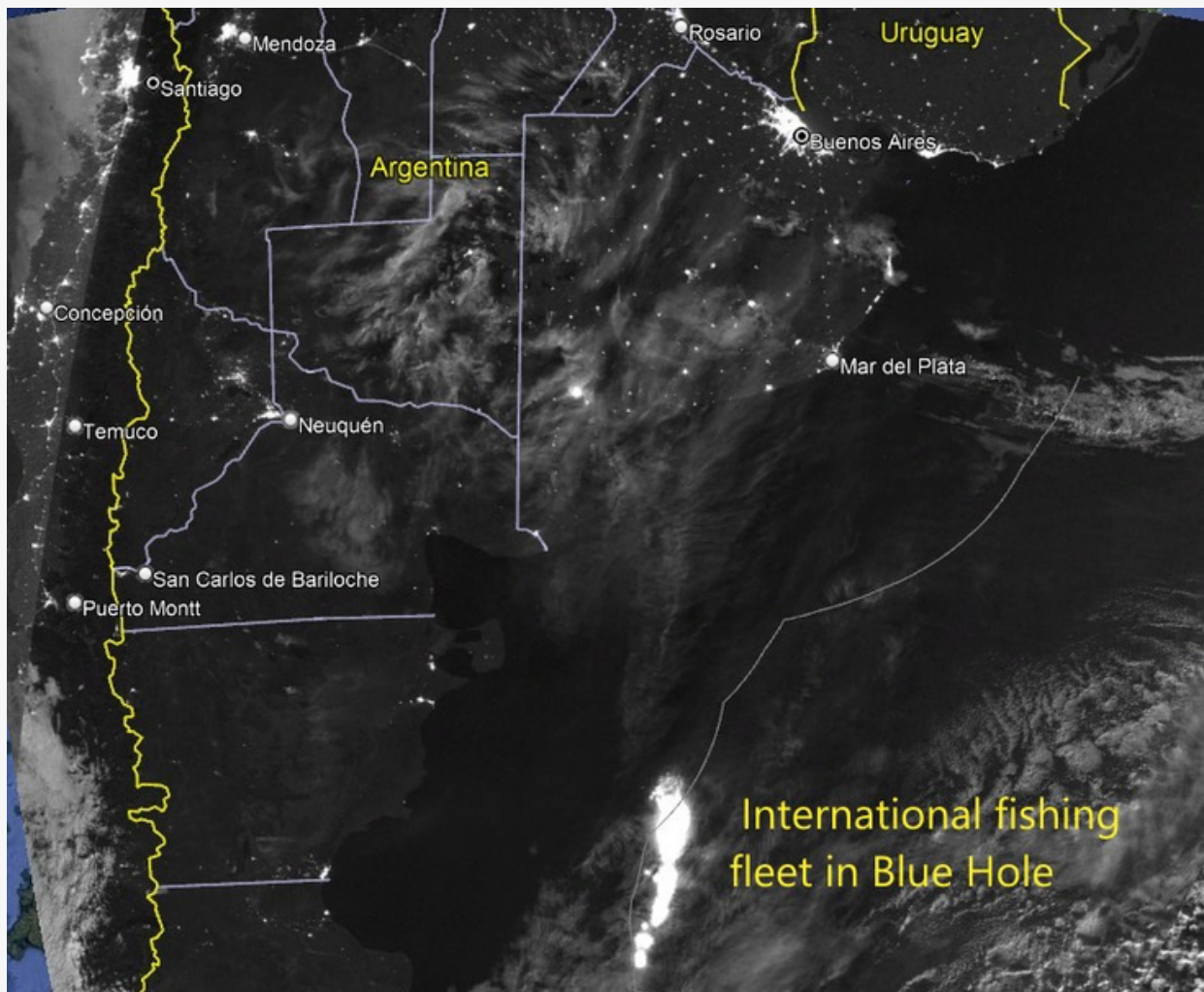
This data shows that from 2017 to date, the fishing effort has more than doubled, which implies a terrible pressure not only to target species but also to the entire ecosystem, specially on benthic (seabed) species which are highly vulnerable and fundamental for the sustainability of marine food chains.



Given the lack of transparency that prevails in these operations, there is no accurate information available to calculate the catch of target species by the international fleet, but there is data on what happens within the Argentine continental exclusive economic zone for comparison.

To get an idea of the size and magnitude of the fishing pressure, the surface area of the proposed benthic protected area is about 144,000 km<sup>2</sup>, while the Argentine flagged squid jiggers fleet operates in an area of about 1.000.000 km<sup>2</sup>.

**For the current year, in a season that ended on June 17th 2022, inside the EEZ, the total hours of fishing effort was 67,328 hrs by the Argentine flagged fleet and 146,600 tons of Argentine squid have been caught (4).**



**Satellite image of February 15th. @NASA Worldwide**

# The Path to Blue Hole Protection

In Argentina, there is a draft law for the creation of a Benthic Marine Protected Area in the Blue Hole, which aims to protect the seabed and subsoil beyond 200 miles.

This bill, which has already been approved by the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress and is now pending the Senate's voting, seeks to protect this fundamental ecosystem, the main biological corridor of the Argentinean Sea and perhaps of the whole south Atlantic Ocean.

The law would not only put a stop to trawling fishing fleets that devastate the seabed, but would also contribute to the

conservation of the oceanic ecological structure and to the mitigation of climate change, since the Blue Hole is located on the Continental Slope of the Argentine Sea, one of the main oceanic fronts in the world.

A Global Oceans Treaty is also needed, negotiations should be completed in August this year.

We need a strong Global Ocean Treaty that enables us to create a network of ocean sanctuaries to protect the Blue Hole and its biodiversity, putting the ocean off-limits to destructive industries.

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**THIS TREATY WOULD PROTECT THESE WATERS AND ECOSYSTEMS, AS IT WOULD PLACE CONSERVATION IN THE HEART OF OCEANS GOVERNANCE.**

**THIS IS URGENT AFTER DECADES OF MISMANAGEMENT AND EXPLOITATION BY HUMANS, WHICH HAS BROUGHT THE OCEANS TO THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE.**



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# References

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**1.- Extension of the continental shelf that was granted to Argentina by the United Nations organization in 2016.**

<https://undocs.org/en/clcs/93>

[https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/commission\\_submissions.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/commission_submissions.htm)

**2.- Greenpeace's report, 30x30: A blueprint for Ocean Protection, produced in collaboration with leading academic institutions, including the Universities of York, Oxford, Edinburgh and Salford.**

<https://www.greenpeace.org/international/publication/21604/30x30-a-blueprint-for-ocean-protection/>

**3.- Apparent fishing effort AIS southwest Atlantic - international waters FAO 41 3.1.** <https://globalfishingwatch.org/map>

**4.- Total squid capture in tons by the Argentine squid jigger fleet**

[https://www.magyp.gob.ar/sitio/areas/pesca\\_maritima/desembarques/lectura.php?imp=1&tabla=especie\\_flota\\_2022](https://www.magyp.gob.ar/sitio/areas/pesca_maritima/desembarques/lectura.php?imp=1&tabla=especie_flota_2022)





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