



HOW TO INFLUENCE THE EU DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



TUTORIAL 1

Learn more on the functioning of
EU institutions and how LIFE can
help you shape your future !

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Too often citizens perceive EU Institutions as remote from them, and they feel powerless in the face of complicated decision-making processes that impact their everyday lives without taking too much account of local situations.

However, **Brussels is closer than you think** and, by understanding some basics of how procedural mechanisms work, and with the help of dedicated specialists, it is actually possible to positively **influence** European rules to your own benefit.

The EU is a political and economic union of Member States which delegate a part of their sovereignty. In the case of fisheries management, Member States transfer their decision making powers (“competence”) to the EU when they join it. Three EU institutions which have a direct role in fisheries decision-making are **The European Commission, The European Parliament and The Council of the European Union (also referred to as the “Council of Ministers” or the “Council”)**.

The **European Commission** is the “executive” body of the EU system and is responsible for proposing new laws that will then be discussed and decided upon through a negotiation process called the “ordinary legislative procedure” by the Parliament and Council.

While developing the proposals, the Commission generally consults citizens and specific interest groups (like fishers, fish traders etc.) in what are called “Open Consultations”. These are **opportunities to express your points of view**.

For example, in 2011 the European Commission presented its proposals for the reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy - but the process started in 2009 with a public consultation. In this framework, a document called “Green Paper” was published. It presented the challenges faced by the sector, and all EU citizens (including the small-scale fishers who founded LIFE), were called to provide their inputs in order to set the new rules to manage European fishing fleets and conserve fish stocks.

The **European Parliament** is a democratically-elected body, composed of 751 Members, elected directly by the citizens of the EU. The Members of the EP meet in **working groups** called Committees. Every six weeks, Parliamentarians responsible for fisheries in their political groupings meet in the so-called **PECH Committee** where they review legislative proposals and appoint teams to negotiate with the Council on EU regulations, directives and other laws etc. It is therefore vital to be in touch with MEPs, either directly or with the help of LIFE, as they play a key role in decision making processes. They are accountable to you.

The **Council** is composed of National Ministers. They meet several times throughout the year depending upon the topics on the agenda. For example, the December Council meeting decides on the levels of fishing quotas to be allocated to Member States (the Total Allowable Catches or TACs). In this case, it is the **National Ministers responsible for Fisheries** who gather in the Council, each minister representing his or her government and defending their national interests. The Ministers are key deciders, and it is therefore important that they are well informed about the importance of small scale fisheries to take the sector’s interests into account in their decisions.

These three EU Institutions are complemented by other bodies, such as the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the EU Court of Justice etc... but normally first the

Commission makes a proposal, then the Parliament makes amendments and reaches a common position. Finally, the Council and Parliament negotiate an agreement. In case they don't reach it, the next step is a complex process assisted by the Commission called the "**trialogue**", which leads to the creation of new EU rules to be implemented by our Member States.

These institutions are also in direct and constant contact with **national authorities and international bodies**. "Brussels" needs to keep in touch with the National Ministries in order to reflect their priorities in their respective policy processes. At international level, the EU represents its Member States in **global fora**, such as at the UN General Assembly, the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations etc. where binding and non-binding international agreements are discussed that govern the activities of fleets in international waters, set catch limits on migratory species like tuna, agree on conservation measures for endangered species, and such like.

In these complex national, European and international settings...

What is the role of LIFE and what can LIFE do for you?

The role of the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) is to ensure that **your interests as small scale low impact fishers are defended, represented and influence** the formulation of policies and laws that affect you and your businesses. **While you are out fishing, LIFE is actively working for you in Brussels and with your national authorities**, so that you can continue to earn your living now whilst we fight for your future.

LIFE is an organisation of organisations, run by fishermen for fishermen, with a dedicated team of multi-lingual staff based in Brussels and regionally, we ensure that the voice of the low impact small-scale fishers from all around Europe is heard loud and clear where the decisions are taken.

To do this, we engage with EU officials, MEPs, national decision-makers, industry representatives, scientists and civil-society organisations. We defend your rights at the Council, the Parliament, the Commission, the National Ministries and in International fora.

In addition, if you require direct contact with decision-makers, LIFE can support you, both practically and **financially**, to organize meetings with decision-makers and to develop an effective strategy to reach your goals.

LIFE brings "Brussels" closer to you, and gives you a voice in the heart of Europe.

