



PRESS RELEASE

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A meeting of minds in Warsaw

The 2016 Congress for the low impact fisheries organized by the European platform LIFE

Saturday 29th October, Warsaw - Member organisations and invited guests met in Warsaw, Poland to celebrate LIFE's work in support of the small scale, low impact fishers of Europe.

The event was officially opened by Mr Marek Gróbarczyk, Minister for Maritime Economy and Inland Waterways, who welcomed attendees to the event on behalf of the Polish Government. In his speech, the Minister recognised and applauded the work of LIFE, the need for specific support mechanisms for the sector and the importance and value of small scale fishers in the Baltic to coastal communities.

Speaker after speaker representing LIFE member organisations from the Canaries to northern Finland and the length of the Mediterranean Sea then provided fascinating insights into their way of life, the fishing gears and methods they use that have such a low impact on the marine environment and the challenges and opportunities they face on a daily basis.

It was clear from the range of issues covered that small scale fishers in Europe have a continuing uphill struggle to achieve the sort of recognition and support they deserve after years of being the forgotten fleet of Europe. It was however equally transparent that the creation of the LIFE Platform, as the only dedicated pan European organisation in support of the 80% of the European fleet that is deemed to be small scale is increasingly seen as the only way forward to make the voices of this sector heard at European and member state level.

A ground breaking initiative between AKTEA, the network of women in fisheries, and LIFE was confirmed at the Congress with members supporting the creation of a distinct women's section within LIFE. This section will provide a partner platform and specific support for women who are the often-invisible element in small scale fisheries, from being fishers and gatherers in their own right, through to providing hidden but invaluable support to their partners in so many ways. Speaking for LIFE, Jerry Percy, Executive Director said that this partnership would provide as valuable a service to women in fisheries as LIFE does for small scale fishers generally and he was particularly grateful for the work done by Marja Bekendam in building the bond between AKTEA and LIFE.

The event also witnessed the launch of LIFE's Umbrella Strategy for the period from 2017 to 2027.

Focussing on the need for continuing and practical support and how to achieve it in light of such a rapidly increasing membership of small scale fisher organisations in LIFE, the overarching strategy identifies LIFE's route map for the next decade. Members overwhelmingly endorsed the continued direction of travel for LIFE and the ever growing and positive influence of the platform at European level.

LIFE is a platform aiming to provide a clear and coherent voice at EU level for the previously mainly silent majority of European fishers, who are smaller scale and who use low impact fishing gears and methods, but have historically lacked dedicated and effective representation in Brussels and at Member State level. More information can be found at www.lifeplatform.eu.