

LIFE ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Uniting European
Small- Scale Fishers
to Achieve Fair
Fisheries, Healthy
Seas and Vibrant
Communities



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 1. A NEW VISION FOR SSF: Making Fisheries Fair 5**
- 2. EUROPEAN POLICIES..... 9**
- 3. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES: LIFE AT THE WATERFACE..... 11**
 - MEDITERRANEAN..... 11
 - BALTIC AND NORTH SEAS..... 12
- 4. INTERNAL PROCESSES..... 17**
 - Changes in LIFE Staff and LIFE’s..... 17
 - Strategic Alliances..... 18
- 5. LOOKING FORWARD..... 20**
- LIFE PROVISIONAL ACCOUNTS 2023..... 23**

INTRODUCTION

2023 marks 10 years since the last reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and 11 years since LIFE was launched. The European Commission met its obligation to report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the functioning of the CFP by 31 December 2022 by publishing not one report, but 4! Together these 4 documents are described as a “Pact for Fisheries and Oceans”, and they lay out the Commission’s objectives, plans and proposals for the evolution of the European fisheries and aquaculture sectors over the coming period, up to 2050, in line with Green Deal objectives.

Rather than provide any new legal texts, the Commission has chosen to issue 3 “Communications” on: Energy Transition; An Action Plan to Protect and Restore Marine Ecosystems for Sustainable and Resilient Fisheries; and The Common Fisheries Policy Today and Tomorrow. The latter includes a “staff working paper” on the State of Play of the CFP, and there is also a report on the Common Market Organisation for Fishery and Aquaculture Products.

As Communications, the documents speak to Ministers and Member States Authorities, to the fisheries sector, and to all interested parties. They highlight international legislation already in place, which the EU has signed up to, and which Member States are obliged to implement. The Pact proposes actions to be implemented towards meeting these and other legally binding conservation and fisheries management targets. There are huge implications for the fisheries sector, and not surprisingly, there has been a big push back against the Commission’s Pact for Fisheries and Oceans, notably on the Action Plan.

Whilst LIFE has been active on many fronts, much of LIFE’s work over the 12 month period has been to study the implications of the proposals set out in the Pact, and to respond to the challenges they represent. To this end, much effort has been invested in joining platforms and building synergies with like minded organisations around the key themes of Fair Fisheries, Article 17, energy transition, digital transformation, blue economy, biodiversity and habitat restoration, marine protected areas, and food systems transformation.

The Pact and its content have created tensions in relationships between the EC and the fisheries sector on the one hand, and between the EC and the Parliament and Council on the other. The EC has received much criticism for allegedly putting too much emphasis on environmental objectives and too little emphasis on social and economic objectives.

Discussions on topics like **nature restoration**, **marine biodiversity conservation**, and the **establishment of marine protected areas** have become increasingly adversarial between those who want to maintain the status quo and those who seek change. In such a situation, the space available for SSF to make their voices heard gets squeezed, as the space is increasingly taken by larger scale fishing interests. This makes building synergies and establishing coalitions with like-minded associations essential to providing an alternative small-scale and low impact fisheries perspective, given the powerful and vociferous lobbying

from the larger scale fishing sector, aligned as it is with the powerful agro-industry lobby group Copa-Cogeca. These tensions are likely to increase going forward, and LIFE and its allies must be prepared to face up to these.

1. A NEW VISION FOR SSF: Making Fisheries Fair

European fisheries stand at an important crossroads facing a highly complex and uncertain future, with large question marks hanging over how Europeans will source their food from the sea in the future, and in what form they will consume it. The fisheries sector is entrenched in a 20th century model of fisheries extraction, heavily dependent on fossil fuels and high tech equipment, highly vulnerable to competition from, and at risk of being displaced by the rapidly emerging blue economy, as well as being undermined by climate change impacts.

The current model of fisheries extraction is not sustainable, either from a resource extraction point of view, or from a sustainable food systems point of view. The EU has a high dependency on imports for its fish supplies (over 70%), from sources that don't have to comply with EU social and environmental standards, and with consumers preferring their fish (around 40% of current consumption) to be highly processed and in the form of white fillet (Alaska pollack, cod, salmon), in canned form (mainly tuna) or luxury products like shrimp.

For decades small-scale low impact fishing has struggled to survive in the face of unfair competition for resources, fishing grounds and markets, and denied a dedicated voice at the decision making table. It is only by making fisheries fair that small-scale low impact fishing has a chance to survive. That means a fair and inclusive development of the Blue Economy, a fair transition to decarbonised fisheries, a fair redistribution of fishing opportunities and access to resources using Article 17, a fair access to support mechanisms, a fair price on the market for small-scale fisheries products, and fair access to decision making processes. All this can be achieved through a differentiated policy approach to small and large scale fishing.

Over the past year, LIFE has engaged in a number of new initiatives to focus attention on how small-scale low impact fishing could be part of the solution if given the opportunity and a supportive policy framework. LIFE has also engaged in more formal consultative processes on blue economy, decarbonisation, biodiversity conservation and restoration.

- **Rethinking Fisheries Initiative**

LIFE joined Seas at Risk and a wider group of stakeholders to launch the “Rethinking Fisheries” project. The project aims to promote an alternative vision for the future of fisheries, based on a just transition to low environmental impact, equitable, and economically viable fisheries. The inaugural meeting to launch this initiative took place at the University of Heriot-Watt in Edinburgh on June 12th, ahead of the “Beyond Growth: fishing for the future” symposium. A small group of 15 experts from fisher organisations, NGOs, retailers, experts and academics with a balanced representation of sea-basins and regions, met to share experiences, discuss and spell out how socio-economic and environmental imperatives can be reconciled in a positive manner. A drafting committee was appointed which took the main issues arising from the meeting and is preparing a draft document to be discussed further in the following meetings. A follow up meeting took place in November in l'Estartit (Spain) and two more will be held in 2024. A case study report on “alternative small scale and low impact business models that are good for people and planet” has been subcontracted and will be

released next year. It will provide concrete examples of what this vision of the future of fisheries should look like in practice, and how it should be promoted.



The launch of the “Rethinking fisheries” initiative in Edinburgh

- **European Blue Forum**

The European Blue Forum provides a platform for stakeholders from different Blue Economy sectors, sea basins, and organisational backgrounds to engage with the Commission to discuss, through structured workshops, the shared challenges and priorities over the medium term with the aim of finding consensus, synergies and solutions. LIFE was a key speaker at the launch of the Blue Forum in May 2023, which took place in Brest in the framework of the European Maritime Day, and attended the series of workshops after that, resulting in two stakeholder position papers having been published, [available online](#). More information on the Blue Forum can be found here:

<https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/european-blue-forum>

The European Blue Forum

[Join the European Blue Forum >](#)

Introduction

The seas are the foundation of all life on our planet and play a vital role in safeguarding some of our most basic needs. They provide us with essential resources and ecosystem services, such as oxygen, food, water, energy, connectivity, temperature regulation and biodiversity. However, marine ecosystems are complex and fragile. Caring for the health and productivity of our seas and oceans is a herculean task, demanding concerted efforts and consistent action at all levels.^{[1] [2]}

At the same time, our seas have a key role to play in contributing to the economic prosperity of nations. A healthy marine environment not only supports economic resilience, improved livelihoods, social inclusion and wellbeing, but it is also vital in tackling the global climate and biodiversity crises.



A snapshot of the European Blue Forum website

- **Fisheries for Communities, Canada**

LIFE was invited to provide a European perspective on fisheries at the Fisheries for Community event, organised in British Columbia (BC) by the Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters and the Eco Trust Canada. [Fisheries for Communities](#) is described as a grassroots movement made up of concerned Indigenous and non-Indigenous fish harvesters and their families, small businesses, community organisations, fishmongers, chefs, restaurateurs, coastal community members, academics and researchers that all share a commitment to ensure the many tangible and intangible benefits of BC's commercial fisheries benefit the people on the water, on the dock, and in adjacent communities.

The Canadian federal government privatised fishing access rights making fishing licences and quota available to the highest bidder on the open market. This policy change made it increasingly harder for the BC fish harvesters and First Nations to compete with the big corporate and foreign interests in the fishery. Now, BC's fisheries access is managed through an unregulated market for licences and quotas, and small-scale fish enterprises are struggling to participate viably in fisheries. As a result, fishing processing jobs and the supporting infrastructure have continuously declined, compromising coastal communities' long-standing connections to the sea.

Marta Cavallé, LIFE's Executive Secretary presented the European context, the challenges and opportunities that small-scale and low impact fishers are facing in this context and LIFE's story and work. Notable takeaways from the discussions are the importance of keeping fisheries resources as a public resource, to end privatisation, and the need to establish environmental, social and economic criteria when allocating fishing rights. These are basic

requirements for achieving fair fisheries, healthy seas and vibrant communities. Marta also visited [Skipper Otto](#) in Vancouver, a direct sales and community supported fisheries scheme, key member of [Local Catch Network](#), to learn about their model and strengthen synergies with both initiatives with LIFE.



Marta Cavallé , LIFE Executive Secretary, meeting members of the Local Catch Network

- **ICSF/LIFE/Mulleres Salgadas workshop in Galicia (IYAFA)**

LIFE joined hands with **ICSF and Mulleres Salgadas (MS)** to organise an international workshop on the theme “Getting the story straight and envisioning a fair future for small-scale fisheries in Europe”. The event took place in Vilanova de Arousa, Galicia, Spain from 13 to 16 November, and was attended by LIFE members from 8 countries from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. The event was hosted by MS, a highlight of which was an organised visit to meet with their members – women shellfish gatherers (mariscadoras) from the Ria de Arousa – and to learn about their profession. The event, divided into three thematic areas, provided the opportunity to reflect on and develop an alternative narrative for small-scale fisheries based on inclusive and sustainable socio-economic and environmental development (led by the Equal Sea Lab); to discuss governance in EU fisheries, and how to apply a differentiated approach for governing small and large scale fisheries (led by LIFE); and on the role of women in fisheries (led by ICSF and Aktea).

The 45 participants from 16 countries gathered for the meeting included men and women fishers and their representatives, support organisations, scientists, academics and other interested parties, and they collectively produced and agreed on a [final statement with a call to action](#). This was the fourth and final in a series of events organised by ICSF to celebrate the 2022 International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA). For more

information

see:

<https://lifeplatform.eu/getting-the-story-straight-and-envisioning-a-fair-future-for-small-scale-fisheries-in-europe/>



LIFE members from 8 countries, from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, in Galicia

- **Towards an International Panel for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS)**

The "Bridging Shades of Blue" workshop held in Barcelona from 22-23 March, brought together experts and stakeholders to evaluate challenges in bringing ocean knowledge to decision-making interfaces and strategize the development of the International/Intergovernmental Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS). It embraces the vision for the UN Decade of Ocean Science and will contribute to creating a shared vision for developing a sustainable approach to ocean management and protection. The "Towards IPOS" initiative aims to be the gateway that reconnects knowledge with policy action to support a just transition to ocean sustainability. The initiative recognises small-scale fishing and coastal communities as important actors to be engaged in the governance of such a structure, and as sources of knowledge and information on the status of the ocean and marine resources - contributing their traditional ecological and experiential knowledge alongside scientific data.

With this in mind, LIFE was invited to participate in the other key events after that such as

“The Scientific Keystone Supporting Sustainable Ocean Policies” that took place in the European Parliament (November 15) and to become key partners in the co-construction process of this initiative, which seeks to be officially launched in 2025. More information about the events:

<https://www.uab.cat/web/sala-de-premsa-icta-uab/detall-activitat/workshop-bridging-shades-of-blue-1345819915078.html?detid=1345884141228> and <https://ebcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Event-Report-Presentation-of-the-International-Panel-for-Ocean-Sustainability-IPOS.pdf>

2. EUROPEAN POLICIES

All policy work engaged in was overshadowed by the EC’s “Pact for Fisheries and Oceans”, and LIFE’s perspective on the Pact can be found here: <https://lifeplatform.eu/lifes-response-to-the-european-commissions-pact-for-fisheries-and-oceans/>

Similarly, the legislative and policy making agenda of the European Parliament was dominated by the publication of the Pact, and LIFE staff engaged in various parliamentary processes, attended key meetings, proposed amendments and presented positions and statements, met with different MEPs, and provided comments and suggestions for proposed amendments to reports.

Highlights included:

- Participating in a Public Hearing on the status of the Multiannual Plan (MAP) for the Baltic Sea. [Read the article here](#)
- Sending a letter to the European Commission, European Parliament and Member States with a general call to urgently implement Article 17. You can [read the article here](#)
- After 6 years, agreement on amendments to the EC’s proposal on the **Fisheries Control Regulation** was finally reached by the trilogue negotiations between the Parliament, Council and the Commission. The amended regulation came into force on January 9th 2024. There are important implications for small-scale fisheries, notably on digital transformation of fisheries control, and for which many new rules will apply from 2028.
- The Parliament approved a **Multiannual Plan for Bluefin Tuna**, which includes several mentions of the importance of small-scale fisheries. However, its intention to allocate a specific quota to this sector falls short due to a very imprecise methodology to define small-scale fisheries.
- The EPP (right wing/ Conservative parties) adopted their **own initiative reports (INI) on the Marine Action Plan and the Implementation of the CFP**, which adopt positions close to those of the large-scale industry. These reports are highly critical of the EC and its proposals within the framework of the Green Deal (biodiversity conservation).
- LIFE joined forces with more than 35 companies on a [collective statement](#) for an ambitious and legally binding EU Nature Restoration Law, to regenerate nature in

Europe through conservation and good practice. On November 29th, the members of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of the **Nature Restoration Law** as agreed in the trilogue negotiations, approving the final text with 53 to 28 votes. This is of course encouraging news, and a step closer to seeing this law becoming a reality. However, the draft law has been considerably weakened by several amendments. The next step in the process will be the adoption in plenary which is scheduled for early 2024.

- **Article 17.** There was some tangible progress on **Article 17** with the publication of a report by the **STECF** on [Social Data in Fisheries \(STECF 23-17\)](#). Published at the end of 2023, the STECF report analyses the responses of 22 Member States (i.e. all coastal EU states) to a questionnaire on Article 17.

The EC Communication on the Implementation of the CFP (The common fisheries policy today and tomorrow: a Fisheries and Oceans Pact towards sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management COM(2023) 103 final) addressed Article 17 as follows: *“the Commission will work together with scientific bodies and with Member States to further assess and ensure the transparency of those criteria (of an environmental, social and economic nature) and their conformity with the CFP provisions and to encourage the use of criteria that can foster sustainable fishing practices and support small-scale and coastal fishers, which represent nearly 75% of all fishing vessels registered in the EU and nearly half of all employment in the fishing sector.”* The DG Mare Staff Working Paper on the implementation of the CFP comments that: *“Small-scale coastal fishing operators experience difficulties in accessing fishing opportunities and in having their concerns taken up in fisheries management and maritime spatial planning decisions. Part of the solution lies in small-scale fishers improving their collective organisation to have their voice heard by the Member States, which are the main decision makers on allocating fishing opportunities and on maritime spatial planning”*. Whilst this is a vindication of LIFE and its work, any progress will require setting aside dedicated funding to enable SSF to establish such collective organisation. Going forward, the STECF analysis of social data will be an invaluable tool in developing our campaigning EC for social justice and environmental sustainability, and building alliances to support our cause.

- **Decarbonisation and energy transition.** The evolving situation on fuel prices and the war in Ukraine has thrown up complex problems and created many uncertainties. After the publication of the “Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU fisheries and Aquaculture Sector”, the European Commission has started a process and series of initiatives to advance in this Energy transition and Decarbonisation. Particularly the Energy Transition Partnership (ETP) was created as a platform to advance on the key issues, and to which LIFE signed up and systematically contributed to. In addition, LIFE will publish its own perspective on energy transition in early 2024.

Fishers of the Future

A major concern for the fisheries sector in Europe is generational renewal. Where will the next generation of fishers come from, and what role will they play in society? Towards the end of 2023, DG Mare launched the “[Fishers of the Future Project](#)”. This is to “delve into the hopes, fears, expectations, and needs of fishers to understand how the profession is likely to evolve by 2050”. ‘Fishers of the Future’ will also explore the expansion of fishers’ role in society beyond providing high-quality seafood.

For LIFE, the issue of **intergenerational renewal** remains a key issue, in a context of an ever-ageing fishing fleet and an ever-ageing fishing population. Without a more certain future, a more positive image, and better prospects, it is no wonder that the future of fishing is in question. We hope this project will provide some clarity about the role of fishing in the future of food from the sea, and the conditions under which fishers will work in the years to come. LIFE is committed to engaging in it.

3. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES: LIFE AT THE WATERFACE

MEDITERRANEAN

Closing of the project: “Stewards of the Sea: Promoting Sustainable Fisheries in the Balearics Using Small-scale Fisheries as a Driving Force”

Early 2023 saw the end of a three-year long project in the Balearic Islands funded by the [Marilles Foundation](#). The main outcome of the project was the creation by Decree of a Management Plan for Artisanal Professional Fishing in the Internal Waters of the Pitiusas Islands, published by the Balearic Government in May 2022. Among the most important technical measures of the plan is the reduction of 40% of the number of fishing days; the possibility of combining the use of trammel nets and pots for lobster with other types of trammel nets; reducing the setting period at sea to 24 hours and authorising the use of traditional gears in the Pitiusas Islands. These measures enable an important diversification of the permitted gears. Also LIFE made major contributions to the work towards the creation of a new Plan for Lobster in the Balearic islands. This will reduce the permitted soak time for trammel nets to 24 hours instead of two or three days, with major effects in lowering the impact of this fishery.

Activities under this project to be reported for 2023 included:

- o Publication of the Peix Nostrum Case Study titled “[Collective commercialisation and brand Peix Nostrum](#)”. (In Spanish only)
- o Publication of the report “[Socioeconomic study of SSF in the Pitiusas Islands](#).” (In Spanish only)

Co-Management comitté in Catalonia and Pitiusas

LIFE continues to be involved in two of the Co-Management Committees in Catalonia and in the recently established co-management committee in the Pitiusas Islands in the Balearics, both in Spain.

LIFE Rejoins MEDAC end of 2023

LIFE joined the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MedAC) in its early years, but was unable to continue its engagement. Following a request from our Board of Directors, LIFE has rejoined the MedAC end of 2023 and will be participating in the upcoming General Assembly and Working Group meetings, due to take place early 2024.

Friends of SSF and GFCM

LIFE also continues to keep an eye on developments in the Mediterranean as a member of the "Friends of SSF" group in the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (the GFCM, the regional RFMO for the Mediterranean) and as member of the "Together for the Med" coalition. Also, LIFE attended the MedFish4ever event organised by the EU and GFCM in Malta in October 2023, where we joined the coalition MedSeaAlliance on a side-event to call to end illegal bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean. This call resulted satisfactorily in the approval by the GFCM of key specific requests from the coalition.

BALTIC AND NORTH SEAS

Throughout 2023 LIFE has proved its legitimacy and increased its influence in the Baltic Region. A key aim of LIFE is to strengthen the voice of small-scale fishers through representation at advisory, scientific and decision-making fora.

Key aspects towards improving fisheries management in this sea basin are the need to promote biomass increases as well as individual growth, and to improve the conditions for spawning and recruitment through, for example, habitat restoration and protection. Healthier stocks provide the foundation for improved fish stock access for the small-scale coastal fleet as well as contributing most effectively to improving the socio-economic situation. SSF are dependent on productive waters and healthy and abundant fish stocks. The small-scale low impact sector could be a legitimate alternative to the trawl segment, if given favourable policies. Trawling is blighted by overcapacity and poor selectivity in the Baltic, where not only has it contributed to the collapse of large parts of the resource, but also is also preventing stock recovery.

In this regard, LIFE has continued to be an active member of the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC), participating in all Executive Committee, working group and focus group meetings. This includes providing input on the production of advice to the European institutions, agendas, meeting notes and amending the annual work plan.

LIFE also continued to build alliances and synergies with “non-sector” organisations (Environmental NGOs) in the BSAC, with a particular focus on fisheries management and the use/ misuse of “Maximum Sustainable Yield” as a fishery management tool. It has become clear that the way that scientific advice is being provided by ICES and acted on by the Commission in line with MSY criteria, is a hindrance to rebuilding stocks. The ICES advice is limited by the fact that it only considers single-species aspects and does not account for how, where and with what gear the fish are caught. This has led to a lack of precaution, which combined with “quota inflation” (i.e. inflating TAC recommendations) at the Council level has contributed to the dire state of Baltic stocks. The proposals for the entire Baltic Sea Advisory Council can be found [here](#).

In the “Rules of Procedure” working group of BSAC, the larger scale sector are pushing for their organisations to be recognised as representing all fleet segments, both large scale and small scale. This runs contrary to the Delegated Regulation ((EU) 2015/242) that requires that the number of representatives of small-scale fleets should reflect the share of small-scale fleets within the fishing sector of the Member States concerned. A key issue is that no official definition of, or guidelines for small-scale fleets has been issued for ACs. For LIFE, this is a vitally important issue, as without a dedicated small-scale representation, the agenda of the ACs is always determined by the agenda of the larger scale fleets, and we will continue this work in the coming year.

LIFE BANS coordinator was elected as vice-chair of the General Assembly of BSAC, giving us further influence over the planning process ahead of meetings and internal discussions with the secretariat.

In addition, LIFE staff participated as observers in regional and EU level advisory and management bodies: BALTFISH, ICES, STECF and HELCOM. Staff have coordinated with our members to provide a concerted voice for small-scale fisheries through input at meetings and in reports.

Other key actions in 2023 included, coordinating a joint position by LIFE Members on the annual quota decision taken by the European Council for Baltic quotas, with recommendations for Baltic Sea quota allocations for 2024. LIFE contributed to a [Baltic Sea Advisory Council paper](#) on the same subject.

LIFE also responded to the DG Mare consultation on Baltic trawl gear modifications, which we see as a massive waste of time and money to legislate for what is yesterday's problem. Such a proposal is of no use either for Baltic sea fisheries conservation [or for cod recovery](#).

We initiated and contributed to the [BSAC recommendation](#) on the effectiveness of cod spawning area protection measures that was published in July 2023. We have requested to allow the depth exemption for passive gears fishing for flatfish to be extended from 20 to 30 metres. While this proposal was not implemented due to a lack of research on the potential implications for cod mortality, the paper did contribute to the exemption applied to pelagic trawling during the closed season to be removed at the October Council. In addition, we will continue to lobby for the depth exemption to be extended and have requested BALTFISH to initiate a pilot project so that more scientific data can be collected. The [BSAC wrote a follow](#)

up letter to the Commission calling on them to allow for scientific test fishing.

The work on the Advisory Council to reform its Rules of Procedure so that small-scale fishers can be better represented in Advisory Councils across Europe continues. The revised Delegated Act (Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/204) requires that the “number of representatives of small-scale fleets should reflect the share of small-scale fleets within the fishing sector of the Member States concerned”. LIFE contributed to a paper asking for clarification on how this is to be interpreted in the structure and functioning of the ACs.

Decarbonisation and the energy transition of the fishing fleet has also been a key policy theme for the BSAC that began during 2023 and will continue for the coming years. As outlined elsewhere in the report we have worked on the energy transition in a wide range of fora, and in the Baltic contributed significantly in the focus group to produce the final paper from the BSAC which was presented to Ministers at the Our Baltic Conference in October.

With regards to eel management, we contributed to a position paper that outlines the potential for the High Seas Treaty, which the EU signed up to, to improve the migration and spawning potential of eel from Europe to the Sargasso Sea.

We have in addition contributed to work on recommendations for the development of offshore windfarms, reviewed the EU Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) annual report on the economic performance of the EU fishing fleet, implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation, and EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries.



A small-scale fishing boat on the beach of Ahlbeck, in Germany (Baltic Sea)

4. NEW MEMBERS

LIFE welcomed the following new members in 2023:

- Kustnära Bottenhavets Producent Organisation (Bothnian Sea Coastal Producer Organisation) is a Producer Organisation of herring fishers from the North of Sweden. In addition, we organised a meeting for potential new members in Sweden who also fish primarily for herring. We hope that in the coming period, LIFE's membership in the Baltic will increase.
- We also welcomed Udruga malih priobalnih ribara Jadrana , or the Association of Small Coastal Fishermen of the Adriatic from Croatia

4. INTERNAL PROCESSES

Changes in LIFE Staff and LIFE's Board of Directors

Personnel-wise, Marta Cavallé was appointed as Executive Secretary through the unanimous decision of LIFE's Board of Directors, a post she took up on January 1 2023. Good progress has been made in the transfer of responsibilities and clarification of the respective roles for outgoing Executive Secretary (ES), Brian O'Riordan (now Policy Adviser) and Marta Cavallé, as the new ES.

It is planned that a new part-time post will be created (**Administrative Officer/Bookkeeper**) in the coming period to take on the administrative and coordination functions of the Brussels Office currently assigned to the Policy Advisor.

Sadly, our Marketing and Communications Officer, Barbara della Rovere, resigned from her post due to personal issues. In the interim, Annya Crane, who has been engaged by LIFE's Mediterranean Programme, has stepped in on a temporary and part time basis. Yet demands of new projects and the need for more frequent communications using different media (articles, statements, social media postings, videos, pod-casts etc) require a full-time post which will be addressed in 2024.

LIFE organised four Board Meetings during the year and a General Assembly in December where main positions, documents, accounts and budgets were approved. In the latest, a new Member of the Board for the Atlantic Region was elected as a vacancy in the area opened up. Bally Philp, from the Scottish Creel Federation was elected and will join the work of the rest of the Board until 2025, when a new elective Assembly is planned to take place.

Communications and Fundraising

New corporate funding

LIFE's ambition is to diversify its sources of funding, so as to become less dependent on philanthropic grant funding and be able, slowly and progressively, to generate its own resources. As decided at the 2021 General Assembly, LIFE introduced and began collecting an annual membership fee in 2022 and launched its first "individual donor campaign" at the end of the year to enlist the support of individuals under the name #JoinTheWaveOfChange.

In 2023 LIFE was very happy to initiate a new partnership with the outdoor clothing company Patagonia, becoming the first corporate funding received by LIFE. Framed in Patagonia's "**Protect Our Ocean**" campaign, LIFE has received a small grant of 15.000 Euros towards the "Rethinking Fisheries" initiative. The association with Patagonia will

continue into 2024 and beyond.

As part of developing a new communications strategy, monthly newsletters were published with interviews, news and articles around SSF in Europe, the members of LIFE and the issues facing them.

LIFE's Newsletters can be accessed here: <https://us20.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=789b8e46ebd06a01da495f4f7&id=70f6a358c8>

Various articles were published on LIFE's website: <https://lifeplatform.eu/news-articles/>

Strategic Alliances

Partnerships with NGOs and other Coalitions

LIFE joined or otherwise engaged in the following partnerships, projects and initiatives:

- **International networks:** LIFE staff have engaged in international networks of small-scale fisheries to promote a common small-scale/ coastal communities agenda for international processes on fisheries management (FAO, UN General Assembly) and ocean governance (UNOC, Our Ocean Conference). In particular, building on LIFE's participation in the 2022 UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, LIFE is engaged with partners in discussions with the Rise Up for the Ocean initiative to shape their work on small-scale fisheries: <https://riseupfortheocean.org/#empower-and-support-coastal-people>.
- Several initiatives (with scientists, businesses, civil society) have been launched to show support for nature restoration in the face of serious opposition from the industrial farming and fishing lobbies. LIFE joined a **Coalition of Businesses and Business Associations for Nature Restoration** (led by WWF) and signed up to a Business Statement. This initiative was aimed particularly at the Environment Committee of the European Parliament, whose vote of November 29th resulted in an overwhelming majority in favour of the Nature Restoration Law, approving the final text (although considerably weakened by several amendments) with 53 to 28 votes. <https://lifeplatform.eu/life-together-with-the-restorenature-coalition-calls-on-all-members-of-the-european-parliament-and-eu-member-states-to-support-the-final-adoption-of-the-nature-restoration-law/>
- LIFE's engagement with the **Fish-X** project (under the Horizon Programme) has progressed from interest to partnership. Fish-X is a project designed to **advance the digitisation of small-scale fishing**, using the CLS VMS Nemo device, and exploring options for using smart Apps for electronic catch reporting, within the framework of the new control regulation. LIFE has participated in a series of on-line and in person events, emphasising the need to involve fishers at an early stage and to build their

capacity as the owners and users of their own data. As the year drew to a close, LIFE and member organisation IIMRO became Fish-X partners (as explained below in section 5 of this report).

- **Exposing Fisheries Fraud** – a case was brought by Client Earth and LIFE at the Hague Administrative Court against the Dutch Authorities for failure to stop fisheries fraud:
<https://lifeplatform.eu/netherlands-admits-fraud-likely-across-whole-fisheries-sector-as-f-lagship-court-case-concludes/>. Whilst the case was thrown out on technical grounds, it highlighted that widespread fraud across the entire Dutch fisheries sector is prevalent due to the inadequate capacity of the authorities to control the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of fish landed annually. This failure is also a failure of the Dutch authorities to implement their designated legally binding responsibilities under the CFP.
- The initiative “**Rethinking Fisheries**” which was started in the first half of the year with “Seas at Risk” has progressed steadily. There have been a number of virtual meetings of the drafting committee in charge of drafting a “vision document” for an alternative model of fisheries along with a “case study report on alternative businesses models”. These two drafts were discussed and updated in a two-day field visit in November to the Costa Brava fishing community in Estartit (Spain), where the wider group of experts discussed relevant points of the vision, while strengthening relationships and partnership. Much inspiration was drawn from meeting and discussing with the local small-scale fishers, members of LIFE, and learning about the innovative solutions they are applying to their difficult situation.
- LIFE joined a Brussels based coalition of NGOs working to promote a **just transition towards decarbonisation of the fisheries sector** (led by Client Earth and Oceana). Monthly meetings with these two organisations have enabled us to align efforts and to develop a joint advocacy strategy for promoting low impact fishing. Activities included an online Workshop entitled: “Decarbonising the EU Fishing Sector – the path ahead” ahead of the Energy Transition Partnership and to announce the launch of the website Decarbonise Now!
<https://decarbonisepresent.eu/how-to-decarbonise/transition-to-low-impact-fisheries/>
- LIFE co-organised the 4 day-workshop “**Getting the Story Straight and Envisioning a Fair Future for Small Scale Fisheries in Europe**”, as mentioned in Section 2 above.
- LIFE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with **Abalobi**, a social enterprise that aims to elevate small-scale fisheries through technology and data. The partnership will seek ways to launch field level projects to apply ICT solutions to problems faced by small-scale low impact fishers.

5. LOOKING FORWARD

The start of 2024 finds LIFE significantly strengthened compared to the previous year. 2022 and 2023 saw the finalisation of some key projects in the Mediterranean, and the end of a 4-year (2018-2022) programme of work in partnership with the MAVA Foundation. The partnership with the Velux Foundation has shifted the focus of LIFE's work away from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, a highly strategic sea basin for small-scale low impact fishing, and one where LIFE has considerable previous experience.

We are succeeding in diversifying and securing alternative sources of finance, building partnerships and exploring new avenues. At the same time we are building our capacity to engage in complex projects that both channel benefits to our members and provide solutions to on-going and urgent problems. At the end of 2023, LIFE has secured its participation in 4 new projects, 3 of them being EU funded grants (Horizon and Interreg). Our strategy is to engage as responsible partners in these projects, whilst freeing up time and resources to improve our policy advocacy work at EU level and supporting our members at national level.

On a wider EU political level, 2024 will be a year of change, with elections to renew the European Parliament for a new legislature taking place in June. It is likely that these elections will lead to considerable changes in the balance of political power, which are likely to be reflected in some substantial changes to the mandate and structure of the incoming Commission. The new balance of power in the Parliament and the new mandate of the Commission will define the context for our work at European level.

Meanwhile, the main threads of our work will continue to be focussed on getting a fair deal for small-scale low impact fishers, securing improved access to resources and markets for them, trying to make the CFP works in favour of small-scale fishing interest, ensuring a secure future for them, being served by policies designed for them as an integral part of the sector.

At a Regional level, LIFE has been invited to participate in the bilateral consultative meetings between ICES and the EU's Advisory Councils (MIAC & MIACO) in January 2024. This fits with our objective to engage more closely with scientists and scientific institutions. ICES is the most important of these institutions and we will continue to engage closely in consultations with them. Two NGOs that we work with, Coalition Clean Baltic and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, have launched court cases at the European and national government level respectively. This was after the Council set quotas for Baltic herring last year in spite of the European Commission proposal to close the fisheries. These court cases are relevant and we are supporting their work because it is a good example of bad practice: how scientific advice is being misused to justify management decisions that harm the interests of SSF by preventing fish stock growth and recovery.

New projects for the next period.

At the time of writing this report, of the following new projects in which LIFE is a partner have been approved:

- **Round goby project**, phase II (2024-2026). LIFE is engaged in this Interreg Baltic Sea Region project as a consortium partner to develop a fishery for the invasive round goby species in the Baltic. The main partners in the consortium are scientific research institutes from across the region, together with local government agencies, fish processors and fishing organisations such as the Latvian Fishermen's Federation, FSK, SYEF and Darlowska Group. The project was approved in July 2023 and work will begin at the start of 2024. LIFE's responsibilities mainly concern the assessment of existing fishing techniques to inform on the development of new innovative gear commercial fishing for round goby, organising test fishing across the Baltic and giving policy recommendations.
- **SeaGlow Project**. LIFE is engaged in another consortium to implement this EU Horizon project to test solutions for the decarbonisation of the Baltic and North Sea small-scale fishing fleets. The project SEAGLOW (Sustainable Energy Applications for Green and Low-impact Operation of small-scale fishing boats in the Baltic and North Sea basins) will demonstrate the impact and potential of 5 different technological applications to reduce fossil fuel consumption and GHG emissions on small fishing boats in the North and Baltic Sea basins. LIFE will lead the communications work package and organise a final conference to summarise the project findings. Work will begin in May 2024.
- **Rethinking fisheries** (2024), initiated by Seas at Risk at the start of 2023 with backing from the Oceans 5, LIFE's further participation is now supported by a small grant from Patagonia - as described above.
- **Fish-X** (2024-2025), is a project under the EU Horizon Programme, which aims to drive digital innovation to enable the sustainable exploitation of common natural resources; develop accessible technologies to empower small-scale fishers and grow their credibility towards the customer. LIFE's inputs include engagement in webinars/workshops, and co-designing an industry roadmap for digitisation.
- **CiBBRiNA**: LIFE is engaged on the Stakeholder Advisory Board on this project, described as "a European flagship initiative on by-catch reduction". CiBBRiNA will gather together fishers, scientists, fisheries and environment ministries and NGOs from 13 European countries, across 3 sea basins (North East Atlantic, Baltic and Mediterranean), working jointly to minimise (and where possible eliminate) incidental bycatch in fisheries which have a high risk of bycatch of priority marine mammals, birds, turtles, sharks and rays (endangered, threatened and protected species).

We are very grateful to **LIFE's staff and Board of Directors** for the essential role they play in sustaining LIFE and keeping Europe's small-scale fishers at the decision-making tables and in the public eye. A special thanks is due to **LIFE's 35 Member Organizations, in 15 countries** and to the thousands of **small-scale fishers** for their work at the waterfront, for their courage against difficult odds, and for putting delicious, wholesome and healthy food on our tables. We are also extremely grateful to the support we receive from our partners, notably the **Marilles Foundation, Velux Foundation and Waterloo Foundation**, without whom we would not be able to reach such an impact.

LIFE PROVISIONAL ACCOUNTS 2023

Details	Income	Expenses
Balance Carried forward from 2022	76.784,58	
MAVA Foodnected	16.955,00	
MAVA Comanagement NTZ	27.462,00	
Velux Fonden	170.000,39	
Waterloo Foundation	27.766,49	
Membership Fees	3.472.12	
Subtotal income	322.440,58	
Salaries/ Honoraires		
Staff Salaries		182.245,73
Consultants honoraires		6.982,99
Activities		
Field work and studies		12.172,34
Meetings, Interpretation, Translations		15.280,44
Travel and activities		19.649,85
Running Costs		
LIFE Office Costs		19.786,45
Communications (internet, website, software etc)		6.781.38
Miscellaneous		
Subtotal expenditure:		262.899,18
Balance carried forward to 2024:	59.269,42	