

Fair Policies for Fair Fisheries

***Manifesto for the 10th
Legislature 2024 – 2029***

***Fair for the Fishers
Fair for Future Generations
and Fair for Nature***

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The LIFE Platform

The [Low Impact Fishers of Europe](#) (LIFE) is the only European level organisation providing a dedicated representation for small-scale fishers committed to minimising their environmental impacts whilst maximising their socio-economic benefits. Our aim is to unite such fishers to achieve fair fisheries, healthy seas and vibrant communities. Launched on the eve of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 2012, LIFE currently incorporates 37 member organisations from 15 Member States across the EU and all sea basins, from the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, representing around 10,000 fishers.

The Importance of Small-Scale Low Impact Fisheries

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) support a way of life which plays a key socio-economic role in coastal and island communities by providing livelihoods and economic activities in areas, especially where there are few alternatives. There are also important linkages between tourism and SSF, with SSF providing an important intangible cultural heritage and bio-cultural diversity. **SSF is distinct from but complementary to larger scale more industrialised fishery activities**, and should be treated as such.

Using the yardstick provided by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and used by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), SSF (vessels under 12 metres using non-towed gears) constitute over 70% of the vessel fleet and provide at least half of the sea going jobs in fishing. SSF are mainly micro- and nano-sized family enterprises, which support (through administration, business management, fish handling, etc) ancillary fishery activities and distribute socio-economic benefits widely.

Low-impact, small-scale fisheries comprise 70 to 80% of the fleet by vessel numbers, **generate most of the jobs in fishing and a greater share of the added value** (15% of the value of landed catches), whilst amounting to only 6% by volume and causing the least environmental damage, in contrast to large-scale, high-impact fishing. Despite this, the sector has been marginalised, and starved of fishing opportunities and sectoral support over decades, impacting the overall resilience of European fishing communities.

Small-Scale Fisheries are Part of the Solution

Given policy space and appropriate support, **small-scale fisheries (SSF) could be part of the solution and a gamechanger to Europe's ailing seas**. SSF could make a vital contribution to implementing the Green Deal agenda for 2030 and 2050 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the **partial implementation of successive Common Fisheries Policies (CFPs) has led to a distorted sea, with most of our stocks being overexploited and fishing capital, access to fishing opportunities, and influence concentrated in ever fewer hands**. This is putting European food sovereignty at risk, and compromising the future prospects of coastal communities.

Fisheries are a public resource, providing food, livelihoods, and economic prosperity, anchoring communities and representing an invaluable cultural heritage. Four decades of Common Fisheries Policies

dedicated to promoting larger scale high volume fishing is putting all this at risk. Today, the European fisheries sector plays an increasingly minor role in supplying the EU market and meeting the demands of European consumers. To play a fuller role in food security and supplying the EU market, European fishery products need to compete on a level playing field with imported products, subject to equivalent social and environmental standards, complying with similar fisheries regulations, and subject to the same traceability.

The Importance of the European Parliament as Co-legislator

While the Council has exclusive competence for setting fishing levels (Total Allowable Catch/TACs) for individual stocks, the overarching fisheries management framework is provided by the CFP. **The Parliament as co-legislator has a vital role to play in ensuring that the CFP is effectively implemented.**

The 10th legislature will provide the opportunity to restructure Europe's unfair fisheries. The scene is set for such possibility thanks to work over the last legislative period and the plethora of Parliamentary Resolutions, notably on Small-scale Fisheries, Article 17, Co-management, or in the passage of new legislation like the Control Regulation or the Nature Restoration Law. However, these need to be effectively applied and implemented for European fisheries to be put back on track.

For this, LIFE urges the European Parliament to legislate and steer policies that are **Fair for the Fishers, Fair for Future Generations and Fair for Nature**, aligned with the following priorities:

LIFE PRIORITIES FOR THE 10th LEGISLATURE 2024-2029

Priority 1: Develop a Differentiated Policy and Management Approach for Small- and Large-Scale Fisheries

LIFE believes that in Europe there is a place for both small-scale and large-scale fishery activities, which are very different in nature, respond to different needs, and contribute in different ways to achieving Europe's Green Deal targets for 2050. However, successive CFPs have skewed the balance unfairly in favour of larger scale higher volume fisheries to the detriment of SSF and the marine environment.

This is why **LIFE is calling for a differentiated approach to managing small-scale and large-scale fisheries**, to protect SSF with secure rights (to access resources, infrastructure and fishing areas and to access markets with differentiated value chains for their products) and to incentivise and reward those fishing with the least environmental impact. This will include securing wider **inshore fishing areas reserved for small-scale low impact fishing, effectively managed through adaptive local co-management regimes.**

Similarly, **small-scale fisheries need to be placed at the heart of the Blue Economy**, whilst recognising the tenure and customary rights of the SSF sector, protecting it from displacement through spatial squeezing by competing or incompatible activities. We advocate for a **"blue doughnut" approach to the blue**

economy, building on social foundations and respecting ecological ceilings, and for an **inclusive Marine Spatial Planning process**, in which small-scale fishers are supported to participate effectively. In our view, only such a differentiated approach can secure a bright future for SSF.

Priority 2: Restore fish stocks with better use of science and better decision-making processes

We need to restore fish stocks and ecosystems' functionality. This requires **effective fisheries management** and the **best use of science combined with the experiential and traditional knowledge of fishers** to advise management decisions. In our view fishers' knowledge is a grossly underutilised asset which if properly incorporated, could be a game changer for fisheries management.

Article 2.2 of the CFP makes restoring and maintaining populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield a priority. Yet, the current fisheries management approach in the EU is not geared towards delivering such a stock recovery. Rather, misinterpretation and misuse of the biological reference points have been constant in both the design of the Multiannual Management Plans (MAPs) and in the way that scientific advice has been arrived at and applied, especially in the Baltic but also in other cases like the Pollack closure and bass exemptions. Stocks are kept around the lowest available biological reference points (Btrigger and Blim), while predator/prey relationships and population structure of fish stocks are constantly ignored when setting fishing limits. This has meant that scientists have consistently overestimated biomass and set fishing levels too high, resulting in low and dysfunctional fish stocks which have already collapsed (like the Baltic Cod) or are now in serious decline (sprat and herring).

In this upcoming legislature **LIFE urges the European Parliament to address the issue of scientific advice and how it is provided, seriously evaluate the MAPs in all sea basins, and deal with shortcomings that undermine fish stock growth.** The latter is best achieved by setting quotas that support building biomass and expand the size of fish and the age structure of fish populations, as well as prioritising fishing for direct human consumption (especially SSF catches) over reduction fishing for fishmeal and oil.

For more information, check LIFE's [analysis and related proposals to tackle the Baltic emergency](#), published following LIFE's recently organised workshop in June to mark 5 years since the emergency closure of the Baltic Sea cod fishery.

Priority 3: Implement Article 17 to Promote Low Environmental Impact Fishing with a High Social Value

Due to historic injustices, the SSF fleet is only able to access around 6% or less of the fishing opportunities, yet it contributes between 15 and 20% of the value of catches landed. This relatively high value addition provided by SSF is down to the nature of their fishing operations: relatively short in duration, small low impact vessels land high quality fresh "catch of the day" fish, which is highly sought after.

The key to dealing with the critical state of EU fisheries and unlocking the potential of SSF is Article 17 of the CFP, which has lain dormant this past decade. By applying transparent and objective criteria of an environmental, social and economic nature to the allocation of fishing opportunities, as laid down in Article 17, sustainable practices can be rewarded and a shift towards low-impact fishing encouraged.

A [call for action](#) has recently been re-launched by 35 small-scale fishers associations from across Europe affiliated with the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) and supported by around 20 NGOs and companies. The call is for the **widespread use of Article 17 to re-balance Europe's seas**, to favour environmental sustainability, economic viability and social justice.

To enable this to happen, LIFE is calling on the EC to **establish a detailed and binding implementation plan for Article 17 along with clear guidelines** on how to develop and apply transparent and objective criteria to reward sustainable fishing practices and protect ecosystems and local communities.

For further information on Article 17, its potential and how to apply it, please refer to [LIFE's and OurFish Report on fishing opportunities as an agent of change](#).

Priority 4: End Harmful Subsidies, Use Public Monies for Public Good, and Increase Support for SSF Producer Organisations and Direct Marketing

We call for an end to harmful subsidies and for small-scale, low-impact fishing activities to be prioritised, including providing support for the decarbonisation of the sector through the development of the most appropriate technology and infrastructure; and to increase the share and widen the scope of the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) used to promote nature restoration and regenerative practices.

By redirecting public money spent on harmful capacity-enhancing subsidies for larger-scale, high-impact fishing, the EU could support those within the fisheries sector who provide the greatest benefits for society and the environment and restore degraded marine ecosystems. Public money should be for the public good, supporting collective projects that bring benefits to communities. This could be done by increasing the CLLD budget (from 3 to 5% of the envelope) and widening its scope to channel support to collective projects to build infrastructure and provide training for SSF on fisheries management, fish handling and marketing, small-business management and other areas of need.

To maximise the SSF contributions to food supplies, **direct support is needed to set up SSF Fish Producer Organisations** dedicated to securing access to fishing opportunities for SSF on the one hand, and marketing opportunities on the other. LIFE also calls for procedures to be simplified to enable SSF associations to obtain easier access to EMFAF grants.

Further information can be found in [“LIFE's Perspective on Energy transition and Decarbonisation of the fishing fleet”](#) and [“LIFE's report on The Pros and Cons of Creating Producer Organisations \(PO\) for Mediterranean Small-Scale Fishers”](#).

Priority 5: Co-management: an invaluable tool to secure sustainable inshore fisheries

Getting the governance right is one of the key challenges facing fisheries today. The challenge is ever more complex given the development of the blue economy and the need to accommodate new economic sectors (aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy, etc.) within areas traditionally occupied by fisheries.

LIFE believes that fisheries management in European seas should be adapted to the geographical and regional specificities of each fishery, and for the people who exploit natural resources to be central in the decision-making on how these resources are used and managed. Part of the solution lies in a **decentralised adaptive co-management approach within each fishery and/or fishing area**, devolving power to fishers, scientists and NGOs (on equal footing with the public administration).

A bottom-up, co-management approach is particularly appropriate for SSF and should also be the way forward to implement the 30 by 30 Strategy, in the designation of new MPAs/NTZs and their management plans and, looking forward, in the design of the restoration plans. In particular, LIFE advocates for an **increase in reserved areas dedicated to small-scale low impact inshore fishing within the 12 nautical mile zone, subject to co-management regimes.**

As called for in the European Parliament resolution on Co-management, besides appropriate legal frameworks at Member State level, it is necessary to provide the resources for adequate implementation and capacity-building for all those involved and to support effective SSF participation. To achieve this, LIFE advocates reserving 20% of the next EMFAF (2027-2033) for supporting the development of inshore fishing zones reserved for low impact fishing under co-management regimes.

For more information see LIFE's Report on ["Co-management for Small-scale fisheries: principles, practices and challenges"](#) and LIFE's report ["On the Road to Participative Governance of Marine Resources"](#).

Priority 6: Local, fair and sustainable food systems

The prevailing food system, with centralised markets and long, complex and opaque supply chains, undermines fisheries sustainability and works against the interests of small-scale fishers. It forces them to be price takers, when their viability depends on recuperating the value addition they provide. Low tariff and tariff free imports that are not required to meet EU social and environmental standards, combined with high volume landings have a depressing effect on prices, over which SSF can exercise no control.

LIFE calls for fair and sustainable food systems that address the challenges faced by small-scale fishers and fishworkers in accessing markets and infrastructure, obtaining a fair price for their products, and for networks to be established that connect them directly with consumers, enhancing their visibility and viability.

By developing new SSF POs, shortening the distance between producers and consumers and developing guarantee systems on a set of shared values (of an environmental and social/ cultural nature) on the way food is produced and consumed, the shortcomings in the prevailing market system can be addressed and the unfair situation faced by small-scale producers can be reversed.

SSF requires fully traceable short-chain food systems that work for nature and people – both consumers and the small-scale producers who depend on them for their livelihoods.

In developing policies and regulations to achieve food security in Europe, where we feel fisheries should play an important role, we call on the European Parliament to take particular account of small-scale producers and the need for fair and sustainable food systems.

There is a danger that without adequate policy support and implementation, the small-scale fishing sector will continue to decline and eventually disappear. This will be to the detriment of coastal communities, their local economies, traditions, culture, knowledge and skills, and for the future generations for whom all this will be lost and the opportunity to harness their potential to achieve wider social, environmental and economic sustainability goals will be squandered.