

A vision for fair, low-impact fisheries

Low-impact and fair fisheries is a model that sustains the long-term stability of marine ecosystems and coastal communities through two core principles:

- **Harvest prudently** – minimising the impact of fishing on all ecosystem components, including target species, seabed, juveniles, and sensitive species.
- **Maximise collective benefit** – ensuring each kilo of fish caught delivers the greatest social, economic, and societal value to coastal communities, not just a few large operators.

Purpose: from concentration of power to collective wellbeing

Low-impact and fair fisheries prioritise the wellbeing of people and nature by fostering fair fisheries management, healthy ecosystems, thriving fishing communities, and decent livelihoods. Profits remain within coastal areas and are equitably shared. Fishers are recognised as stewards of the sea — key actors in marine regeneration — and those delivering the highest social, economic, and environmental value are rewarded.

Access to the blue commons is fair and equitable, prioritising fishers using low-impact methods. Fishing rights are held in public trust, managed collectively and transparently, not privatised. The main goal is to provide food for direct human consumption, generate fair returns across the value chain, and strengthen the resilience of producer communities through short, traceable, community-based supply chains.

Resources: from extraction to regeneration

Low-impact and fair fisheries restore and maintain healthy ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, and allow all fish populations to recover. Rather than pursuing maximum yield, the focus is on stable yields and business predictability, protecting nursery areas, and avoiding harm to endangered species.

Fishing uses selective, low-impact gears that respect seasonality and life cycles, causing minimal disturbance to habitats. Ghost fishing and plastic pollution are actively prevented. High-impact, carbon-intensive methods such as trawling and dredging are phased out in favour of selective, low-energy techniques like lines, traps, nets, and diving.

The entire seafood system is managed to minimise biodiversity loss and waste, applying circular economy principles such as recyclable gear and sustainable packaging. Climate impacts are reduced through decarbonisation and carbon sequestration, while short, transparent value chains connect consumers directly to fishers, reducing transport and processing.

Labour: from exploitation to cooperation

Low-impact and fair fisheries are built on a human rights-based approach that guarantees dignified work and fair treatment throughout the value chain. Justice, equity, and cooperation guide every stage of production and trade. Women, youth, and marginalised groups are recognised, respected and included.

Decent jobs in low-impact fishing and related sectors strengthen community resilience. Locally rooted organisations, practices, and technologies that sustain employment within ecological limits are prioritised. Fishers are organised in democratic dedicated structures, empowered as agents of change and stewards of sustainable and equitable food systems. Knowledge sharing, mentorship, and social innovation are

encouraged. Safety, working conditions, and social protection is enhanced. By fishing less intensively, fishers enjoy better health and work-life balance. Their expertise informs co-managed solutions that balance human activity with marine health.

Culture: from consumerism to care

Low-impact and fair fisheries embody a culture of respect for the ocean and life itself. They recognise humans as part of nature, dependent on it for shared wellbeing. Fishing follows principles of respect and restraint – avoiding waste and unnecessary suffering and meeting the human needs within planetary boundaries.

This culture promotes a decent quality of life for all, ensuring access to safe, nutritious food and food sovereignty based on real needs and aspirations, without harming other regions or future generations. It is grounded in cooperation, fairness, and solidarity, where resources are collectively managed and shared equitably.

Governance: from command and control to power sharing

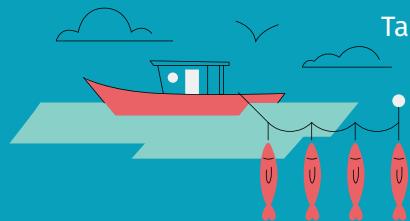
Low-impact and fair fisheries rely on participatory, ecosystem-based governance where decisions are made collectively and transparently by fishers, scientists, public authorities, environmental groups, and communities. Fisheries are managed as part of the blue commons – sustaining resources and livelihoods for the long term.

Fishing opportunities are allocated transparently, based on clear socio-economic and environmental criteria. Producer organisations and lobby groups operate accountably, with dedicated small-scale fisheries POs created where needed.

Traceability and full documentation ensure accountability along the value chain. Community Supported Fisheries and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) foster trust and communicate the value and story behind each catch. Communities actively monitor and improve practices, ensuring continuous learning and better outcomes.

Low-impact and fair fisheries offer a guiding framework for collective action – shaping decisions today and inspiring progressive, regenerative change for the future.

Publication date: December 2025.



Take action! Read the full version and endorse it:

www.RethinkFisheries.eu



This work has been funded with the support of Oceans 5, Patagonia and the EU LIFE programme. The content of this work should not be regarded as reflecting the position of the funders.