

LIFE ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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



INTRODUCTION

In Brussels, 2024 was a year dominated by the “in with the new, out with the old” game of musical chairs, with the changing of legislatures in the European Parliament halfway through the year, and with the entry of a new College of Commissioners at the end of the year. In the latter case, we saw Fisheries and Oceans being split off from Environment policy, with a restructured decision making framework giving the EC President greater powers over the College.

This changing of the guard came at a time of much unfinished business, with the outgoing Commissioner having set in motion an evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), a promise to publish a Vademecum on Article 17, with various new agenda being worked on, including: on decarbonisation (under the Energy Transition Partnership), creating an attractive profession for the fishers of the future, and developing an Action Plan for Protecting and Restoring Marine Ecosystems for Sustainable and Resilient Fisheries.

January 2024 the amended Fisheries Control Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2023/2842) entered into force, meaning that the clock is now ticking for SSF to comply with the requirements for digital/ electronic catch reporting and electronic vessel monitoring by January 2028. Whilst much progress has been made to develop appropriate technologies for SSF, there still remains a huge gap between administrative expectations and fisher acceptance. LIFE has an important role to play, and will endeavour to try and bridge this gap in the coming period.

Decarbonisation of the fishing fleet through a process of “energy transition” developed into a key policy theme in 2024. LIFE published a position on Energy Transition and Decarbonisation, and joined Client Earth in the “Decarbonise Now” campaign.

To keep small-scale fishing high on the policy and legislative agenda, together with Blue Ventures and Patagonia, LIFE launched the Make Fishing Fair Campaign, and followed this up by publishing LIFE’s “Manifesto for the Xth Legislature”. These two initiatives provide the bare bones on which LIFE will develop an agenda for small-scale fisheries in the coming next period.

2024 was also an important year for building synergies and developing strategic alliances with our partners. LIFE joined a number of campaigns with NGOs, including joining the “European Food Policy Coalition” Working Group on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

2024 was also a pivotal year for the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) as the organisation deepened its commitment to championing fairness, sustainability, and equity for Europe's small-scale fisheries (SSF). Against a backdrop of environmental crises, economic challenges, and institutional change at EU level, LIFE remained steadfast in advancing the rights and voices of coastal communities.

New Direction for LIFE: Participation in EU Projects

2024 marked a new direction for LIFE, in the sense that we started to participate in EU funded projects. The new projects are seen as a way to “punch above our weight” by linking our advocacy work at European level to knowledge and experience gained at the waterface - as well as developing solutions for our hard pressed small-scale fishers. The new projects include investigating the potential of invasive species in the Baltic Sea - the Round Goby project; trialing potential solutions for fleet decarbonisation for SSF - the SeaGlow project; and engaging in the development of digital solutions for fish marketing and fishery management - the Fish-X project.

The latter potentially has an important bearing on the implementation of the Control Regulation and the requirement for Member States to track vessels of less than 12 metres in length overall, and to receive position data from them at regular and sufficiently short intervals, and for vessels to transmit and record catch data electronically.

1. Shaping the Future: LIFE's Vision for SSF under the New EU Mandate

At the start of the year, in March, Commissioner Sinkevičius announced an evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The announcement coincided with the [launch of two important processes for small-scale fisheries](#), namely the development of social indicators for fisheries that could be used to allocate fishing opportunities under Article 17 criteria, and to develop guidance for Member States on the implementation of Article 17 through publishing a “Vademecum” on the subject.

Ahead of the new legislature and the new College of Commissioners, in partnership with Blue Ventures and Patagonia, LIFE launched the “[Make Fishing Fair Campaign](#)”. This project built on LIFE's [previous advocacy work](#) with the European Parliament dating back to the start of the previous legislation in

December 2019. With an [open letter addressed to the Commissioner Sinkevicius](#), the Make Fishing Fair Campaign called on the European Commission and institutions to “address the inequalities generated by European fisheries policies through a just transition that ends harmful subsidies and secures fair access for small-scale, low-impact fishers to financial support and fishing opportunities in Europe”. The letter was signed by 35 fishers’ associations and endorsed by 15 NGOs.

Throughout the year, LIFE worked with Seas at Risk and a plethora of partners to draft a future vision for European fisheries through the “Rethinking Fisheries” project, which led to the publication of the “[Fisheries for a New Era](#)” report, containing 10 case studies with examples of innovative business models developed by small-scale fishers from across Europe.

LIFE joined the [EU Food Policy Coalition](#), working collectively to promote food sovereignty, environmental justice, and participative governance.

LIFE’s [Manifesto for the 10th EU Legislature](#), launched to coincide with the start of business for the incoming Xth legislature in September 2024, was central to our advocacy in 2024 and beyond. Addressed to MEPs and EU institutions, the document laid out LIFE’s vision for fisheries that are fair for fishers, future generations, and nature. It advocated for a differentiated policy and management approach for small- and large-scale fisheries, calling for SSF to be recognised, protected, and prioritised as part of Europe’s Green Deal and Sustainable Development Goals. The Manifesto reiterated that fisheries are a public resource, integral to food sovereignty and cultural heritage. LIFE therefore advocates for policies that ensure fair access to resources, markets, and infrastructure for SSF, while promoting the application of Article 17 of the CFP to reward low-impact, high-social-value fisheries. Our campaigns push to re-balance power, to end harmful subsidies, and to channel public funds toward public goods.

One of the highlights of the year was LIFE’s engagement with and participation in “[Oceans Week](#)” in Brussels from September 30 to October 4, where we partnered with Patagonia, Blue Ventures, Oceana, Seas at Risk and Client Earth to make small-scale low impact fishing a key plank of the Ocean Week agenda. LIFE and several of its members took part in panels, presentations, and interactions with functionaries and political representatives over the week. The Oceans week was also the right time to promote the LIFE Manifesto via a social media campaign across LIFE channels featuring graphic design and tailored captions. In particular, a public-facing event called “Rethink Fisheries! For Thriving Seas and Communities” was organised in a tent on the Esplanade Solidarnosc, in front of the European Parliament, bringing together a large and diverse crowd of

stakeholders and was completely sold out. LIFE members took the floor as panellists, with a view to underscoring the importance of empowering small-scale fishers in reimagining Europe’s approach to fisheries management. The event was underpinned by a public photo exhibition, featuring portraits of LIFE members with explanatory quotes.



The venue and photo exhibition on the Esplanade Solidarnosc, Brussels, October 2024

Throughout the year, LIFE held meetings with MEPs from across the political spectrum and participated in hearings and workshops. It strengthened calls for inclusive marine spatial planning, co-management regimes for inshore zones, and greater support for SSF Producer Organisations and short food supply chains. These actions reflected LIFE's call—through its CFP 2025 submission—for a ring-fenced allocation of fishing opportunities to SSF and amendments to Articles 5 and 17 to legally enshrine fair access and preferential treatment within the 12-nautical mile zone.

LIFE’s consistent presence at PECH Committee sessions, stakeholder dialogues, and the EU Commission-related events and fora contributed to make sure that SSF priorities were reflected in EU-wide ocean governance discussions.

LIFE also called for:

- stronger implementation and enforcement of existing laws (including the MSFD, CFP, and the Nature Restoration Law);
- improved scientific advice, with BMSY established as the standard reference point for stock management;
- inclusive and coherent marine spatial planning and integrated coastal management that gives SSF a real voice; and
- a shift from the current “Blue Economy” narrative, which risks cumulative harm to ecosystems, towards a “blue doughnut” approach that respects ecological boundaries while securing social foundations.

Advancing the Green Transition

The green transition remained high on LIFE’s agenda in 2024.

LIFE advanced innovation tailored specifically to the needs of SSF through projects such as [Seaglow](#) and [Fish-X](#). These initiatives piloted solutions including green propulsion technologies and digital tools for traceability and monitoring, with the dual aim of reducing the sector’s already relatively low carbon footprint and strengthening its socio-economic resilience.



LIFE staff at the kick-off meeting of the Seaglow project, Denmark, June 2024

At the end of the year, LIFE's Executive Secretary Marta Cavallé was appointed by the European Commission as coordinator of the *Working Group for Small-Scale Coastal Fisheries* under the [Energy Transition Partnership](#). This platform will provide in 2025 a space to channel the perspectives and priorities of small-scale fishers into the broader EU transition process.

Supporting the Nature Restoration Law

LIFE strongly endorsed the adoption of the *Nature Restoration Law* and advocated for marine protection strategies grounded in inclusive co-management principles. We emphasised that effective restoration must build on the active participation and knowledge of small-scale fishers, ensuring that protection measures are socially just as well as ecologically sound.



LIFE attended European Maritime Day 2024, Denmark, May 2024

EMFAF and CMO

Within the frameworks of the EMFAF and the CMO, LIFE reiterated its longstanding call for differentiated treatment of SSF, equitable access to financial support, and simplified procedures for securing EMFAF funds. In addition, LIFE

advocated for amendments to Articles 6 and 22 of the CMO to facilitate the establishment and recognition of dedicated SSF Producer Organisations—an essential step in strengthening the representation and resilience of the sector.

Key Activities at Brussels level:

- Work on the [EU Control Fisheries Regulation](#)
- Engagement with DG Mare on social indicators in fisheries and a Vademecum on Article 17
- Participation with Seas at Risk in drafting a new vision for European fisheries through the “Rethinking Fisheries” project and the publication of the “Fisheries for a New Era” report.
- Launch of “Make Fishing Fair” Campaign with Blue Ventures and Patagonia
- Launched [LIFE Manifesto](#) and presented it to EU institutions and MEPs
- Participation in Oceans Week in Brussels
- Held meetings with EU policymakers and political group representatives
- Joined the EU Food policy coalition
- Joined the Energy Transition Partnership (ETP), where Marta Cavallé was appointed as “Coordinator” for the small-scale fisheries working group. The SSF working group is part of the ETP support group, comprised of 10 coordinators. One of the main tasks of the Support Group is to advise the European Commission on an energy transition roadmap, to be delivered by 2026.
- In May, attended the European Maritime Days in Denmark, as a speaker for the European Blue Forum

International events

LIFE Participated in the FAO SSF Summit event organised by the GFCM on the assessment of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (RPOA SSF), with many of our mediterranean members assessing the progress of this important instrument for SSF in the

Region. LIFE advocated for reserved fishing areas and co-management-based governance.

2. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES: LIFE AT THE WATERFACE

ATLANTIC, MEDITERRANEAN & BLACK SEA

LIFE rejoined the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC), reinforcing its commitment to ensuring SSF voices influence regional policy.

In Galicia, LIFE supported Mulleres Salgadas and the traditional shellfish gatherers in their legal and institutional recognition struggles. This included pushing for equitable representation, better working conditions, and gender-inclusive policies. The Mulleres Salgadas became a full member of LIFE in April 2024, an association representing 1695 women fishers, of whom 1296 are shellfish gatherers (on foot).

At the III Congreso Internacional de Pesca Artesanal in Spain, LIFE underscored the bio-cultural and socio-economic value of SSF and its alignment with regenerative and fair food systems.

In France, LIFE joined calls to exclude industrial purse seining on meagre fisheries within 6-nautical miles, highlighting the risks of displacement and ecological degradation posed to local SSF.

BALTIC AND NORTH SEAS

The key issue for LIFE members and fishers across the Baltic region is a lack of fish and a lack of access to fish stocks. 2024 saw a worsening of the situation. Despite the EU Council largely setting fishing limits in line with the scientific advice for the past decade there have been significant declines in almost all stocks. There are a few exceptions to this, most notably herring in the Gulf of Riga.

Throughout the year LIFE continued to work on how to best apply scientific knowledge to successful fisheries management. Beginning in January with MIAC and MIACO working groups, at which ICES meets with representatives from the Advisory Councils, we have raised the problems that the current interpretation of the single-species maximum sustainable yield management system leads to in

terms of repressed fish stock biomass, in particular for predator stocks, and how this does not serve the interests of the small-scale segment or the food web in the wider marine environment.

LIFE participated in a number of ICES processes including the Advice Drafting Group on Baltic fish stocks and working groups on species interactions, fleet analyses and mixed fishery management.

LIFE continued to call for a fairer and more inclusive participation of SSF in Advisory Councils. Within the Baltic Advisory Council new rules of procedure were adopted to this end.

We have also adopted a number of positions within the Advisory Council during the last period including proposals to reform the Baltic Management Plan, the use of social indicators in the allocation of fishing opportunities, criteria used to define small-scale fishing, as well as contributing to the recommendations on the Commission Consultation on the CFP.



Member of the European Parliament Isabella Lövin and LIFE Board Member Bengt Larsson at the event on the Baltic Cod Closure organised by LIFE, Brussels, June 2024

Marking five years since the Baltic cod closure, LIFE hosted a Brussels event spotlighting systemic failures in stock management and the urgent need for structural reform. LIFE argued that predator-prey relationships, ecosystem functionality, and fisher knowledge must shape scientific advice and quota-setting.

The [Round Goby Project](#), co-led by LIFE, exemplified how SSF-led innovation can support sustainability and create new economic opportunities. Partners from Sweden, Poland, Latvia, and Denmark tested selective gears and strategies to manage invasive species.

LIFE supported Sweden's trawl ban in central Baltic herring waters, called for full traceability, and criticised the reduction of the fishing industry's dominance over food-grade fish access. At BSAC, MIAC, and ICES meetings, LIFE stressed the need for better MAPs and a reorientation of CFP implementation.

The TAC and quota negotiations, culminating in October 2024, was central to our work during the second half of the year. In July we developed and published an internal [LIFE position on fishing opportunities](#), based on the recently published ICES advice, which also formed the basis for [our recommendations at the Baltic Sea Advisory Council](#). LIFE focused on the need to prioritise biomass growth as the policy priority for managers. Cod, salmon, herring and sprat - key commercial and ecological Baltic stocks – are all in bad shape and at or close to record low biomass levels.

A consensus position was developed with angling organisations to support significant reductions in the Bothnian herring quota, in order to increase the prey availability for salmon while also allowing a larger proportion of the stock to age.

As part of its work to improve management of the Baltic herring stocks, LIFE has participated in dialogue with the researchers responsible for the new scientific models behind the central Baltic herring and Bothnian herring stocks.

Main activities at regional level

- Position on [the Swedish Government assignment to conduct a scientific project on pelagic stocks in the Baltic Sea](#)
- [Call for an immediate revision of the EC's proposal and for fishing limits to be reset in line with a more precautionary MSY](#)
- Position on the [Baltic Sea: Total Allowable Catch 2025](#)
- [Analysis and related proposals to tackle the Baltic Emergency](#)

- Monitored CFP failures in the Baltic, especially the cod closure and ecosystem decline
- [Led workshops and discussions to mark 5 years since the Baltic cod emergency](#)
- [Call for a overhaul of current fisheries management](#)
- Responded to the EC consultation on the Baltic Sea MAP
- Developed proposals to reform fisheries management in light of science-policy gaps
- Rejoined the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) to strengthen SSF representation in regional policy
- Response to the [public consultation on the European Commission's proposal to modify the Multiannual Plan \(MAP\) for the Baltic Sea.](#)
- [Call for the adoption of stricter regulations to prevent pellet spills](#)
- [Contributed to the SSF Summit in Rome and the mid-term review of the RPOA-SSF.](#) advocating for reserved fishing areas and co-management-based governance
- Supported Mulleres Salgadas and traditional shellfish gatherers in Galicia, promoting their legal and institutional recognition, better working conditions, and gender-inclusive policies
- Highlighted the bio-cultural and socio-economic value of SSF at the III Congreso Internacional de Pesca Artesanal in Spain
- Efforts continued to empower its members through capacity-building and regional coordination, promoting the creation of SSF Producer Organisations and enabling access to local and fair food markets.

4. INTERNAL PROCESSES

The December 2024 General Assembly approved governance updates, reaffirmed LIFE's strategic direction, and elected a new board member for the Atlantic region to fill an empty seat.

After Annya Crane left the communications officer position, in April we welcomed Caludia Orlandini to the team, as new senior communications and outreach officer. LIFE was glad to have her back at the team now in a full-time position.

The [European Association of Fishermen in the Black Sea](#) joined LIFE which includes 103 members (commercial coastal and inland fishing) with 46 boats from Romania and Bulgaria.

LIFE strengthened alliances with key new partners including Patagonia and diversified its sources of funding by becoming members of consortia for EU funded projects including Fish X, Seaglow and Round Goby.

Key results:

- Strengthened LIFE's internal capacity and governance
- Diversified sources of funding, through corporate funding and EU funded projects
- Deepened cooperation with partner NGOs and platforms across Europe
- Membership of LIFE increased

5. LOOKING FORWARD

2025 presents critical opportunities. The evaluation of the CFP, a new Commissioner for Fisheries, and a newly seated Parliament open a window for LIFE to advocate for legislative change in line with its Manifesto.

Key policy advocacy will centre on the effective implementation of Article 17, improving scientific advice, ending harmful subsidies, and embedding SSF into local, fair and sustainable food systems in contrast with emerging blue economy sectors. LIFE will also advocate for amendments to the CFP to guarantee preferential access to the 12-mile zone and ring-fenced quotas for SSF.

The coming year will also witness the development of LIFE's 2025–2029 strategic plan, which will consolidate LIFE's role as the driving force behind equitable, resilient and low-impact fisheries across Europe. Our ambition remains for SSF to

be recognised as a central solution to the challenges facing Europe's seas, communities, and food systems.

With unwavering commitment, LIFE will remain at the forefront of the movement to restructure Europe's unfair fisheries and secure a sustainable future for the sector, our seas, and coastal communities.

6. LIFE Accounts Balance Sheet 2024

Details	Income	Expenditure	Budget 2025
Income			
Bank account carry forward	€59,269.43		€216,743.96
Velux Grant	€170,000.62		€170,000.00
Patagonia	€13,631.41		€28,615.03
Round Goby	€28,111.67		€135,852.72
Fish-X	€16,496.36		€2,878.64
SeaGlow	€141,652.21		€0.00
Greenpeace (15.000 GBP)	€17,813.67		€0.00
Fonds Meyer Louis Dreyfus	€50,000.00		€0.00
Only One (Make Fishing Fair)			€48,533.22
Membership Fees	€2,113.52		€3,100.00
Sub total	€499,088.89		€605,723.57
Expenditure			
Salaries		€214,402.46	€357,138.15
Salaries Brussels Office		€95,334.11	€166,891.36
Salaries Spanish Office		€58,086.79	€67,876.99
Salaries Swedish Office		€60,981.56	€122,369.80
Overheads and running costs		€30,416.02	€42,880.04
Brussels Office and General running Costs		€22,683.93	€30,724.04
Spanish Office Costs		€5,124.30	€5,530.00
Swedish Office Costs		€2,607.79	€6,626.00
Project Activities		€37,526.45	€167,575.06
Round Goby Activities			€20,000.00
SeaGlow Activities		€5,375.86	€12,624.14
Interpreters		€5,374.50	€12,000.00
Rethinking fisheries comms materials			€2,000.00
Senior Adviser Fees and financial support PGS			€23,218.03
AC Fees		€1,600.00	€1,300.00

Event in June (Baltic Sea) in Brussels		€11,402.75	
PGS workshops and travel			€6,500.00
UNOC-3			€12,800.00
BoD + Senior Adviser travel		€3,178.09	€33,552.07
Travel and subsistence Brussels and Baltic staff		€10,595.25	€43,580.82
Totals	€499,088.89	€282,344.93	€567,593.25
Carry forward to 2025	€216.743,96		