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New coalition of 17 organisations representing small-scale fishers, anglers and NGOs launches Our Living Seas as EU fisheries ministers meet in Brussels on Europe's fishing future

At a decisive moment for Europe's seas, with key EU policies and funding being shaped (new Ocean Act, next EU budget, and implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy), the coalition calls on the EU to enforce existing rules and put ocean health at the heart of a fairer deal for coastal communities

Brussels, 24 November 2026 – A coalition of 17 organisations representing small-scale, low-impact fishers, anglers and NGOs today launches **Our Living Seas**, calling on the EU to fully enforce its existing ocean and fisheries rules, deliver an Ocean Act with binding commitments, give low-impact coastal actors a decisive voice and direct public money to healthy seas.

Europe's seas are central to its economy and its people. Around 40% of the EU's population lives within 50 kilometres of the coast[1], the EU's blue economy supports nearly 5 million jobs[2], and the ocean helps to regulate the climate and sustain ecosystems.

Yet these seas are under growing pressure. Overfishing, destructive activities and pollution are straining marine ecosystems, while a warming planet adds to the burden. Too often, decisions about Europe's seas are still taken sector by sector, on fragmented information, with no one accounting for their combined impacts.

The launch comes at a decisive moment. In the coming years, Europe will decide the future of its seas through the implementation of Vision 2040 and the Common Fisheries Policy, a first-of-its-kind Ocean Act, and the budget that funds all of it, just as pressure to weaken environmental protections is at its highest. In its Vision 2040[3], the European Commission reaffirmed that the sustainable management of fish populations must remain an uncompromised policy objective, alongside a competitive, resilient sector and a fair transition towards low-impact fishing. The coalition is calling on the EU to turn those commitments into reality.

These decisions will determine whether Europe's seas, and the coastal communities built around them, recover together or are lost together.

Maria Damanaki, former European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, said: "A decade ago, Europe committed to end overfishing and follow the science. Where it has, fish stocks and fishing communities are recovering. That progress must not be undone in the name of simplification. Our Living Seas brings fishers and environmental groups together behind a shared goal, and the EU should listen: a healthy ocean and thriving coasts go hand in hand."

Thriving coastal economies depend on a healthy ocean, and its recovery is essential to their prosperity. Yet for too long, industrial operators have set the agenda while those who have cared for Europe's waters for generations, such as small-scale, low-impact fishers, low-trophic sea farmers, anglers and other coastal activities, have been crowded out of both the decisions and the measures that should support them.

Small-scale, low-impact fishers make up nearly three-quarters of Europe's fishing fleet[4] and around half of the people it employs, yet they land only a small share of the catch[5], far less than the industrial fleet.

Marta Cavallé, Executive Secretary of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), commented: "The Ocean Act presents a once-in-a-generation chance to move small-scale fisheries from a policy outlier to a central pillar of EU ocean governance. Low-impact fishers are not merely part of Europe's heritage; we are a strategic asset for ocean health, sustaining coastal livelihoods, and contributing to the provision of local, low-impact food across Europe. We are joining forces with fellow low-impact sectors across Europe to make sure our collective value is recognised and prioritised in the years ahead."

Steve Trent, CEO and Founder of the Environmental Justice Foundation, said: "Europe has some of the strongest ocean and fisheries rules in the world. The problem is not the law on paper; it is the will to deliver it. A healthy ocean is the foundation of coastal jobs, secure livelihoods and the future of fishing communities, and an enforced Ocean Act is how Europe protects them. Public money must back the fishers and sea farmers who do things right, not the practices that strip our oceans bare."

Our Living Seas calls on the EU to:

+ **Make the rules work.** Apply and enforce existing rules fully and consistently, with no watering down of hard-won protections under the banner of simplification.
+ **Deliver an Ocean Act with teeth.** Binding, time-bound commitments to Good Environmental Status, an enforceable end to destructive fishing in marine protected areas, and priority coastal-zone access for low-impact activity.
+ **Give low-impact coastal actors decisive influence, not just a seat at the table.** Recognise them as strategic sectors, with priority access, support and co-management of inshore waters.
+ **Spend public money for the public good.** Fund thriving seas and the people who depend on them, not the practices that deplete them, such as fleet expansion.

The coalition frames the stakes beyond Europe's own waters. As a major ocean actor, Europe's choices shape seas and communities worldwide, and an ambitious Ocean Act and enforcement of existing rules are essential if the EU is to meet its global commitments, including under the Global Biodiversity Framework, the High Seas Treaty and the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. Closer to home, a healthy ocean underpins Europe's economic resilience, strategic autonomy and climate stability.

Sources

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3. European Commission (2026). A long-term vision for a successful fisheries and aquaculture sector. News article, Directorate-General for Communication, 20 October 2026, presenting the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture, COM(2026) 701 final.
4. European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (2025). Commission publishes guidelines to help EU countries support small-scale fishers and enhance transparency in the allocation of fishing opportunities. News announcement, 14 November 2025.
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Notes to editors

About Our Living Seas

Our Living Seas is a European coalition of 17 organisations comprising small-scale, low-impact fishers, anglers, low-trophic sea farmers, NGOs and sector allies. Together, they call on the European Union to place ocean health at the heart of its priorities, as the foundation of Europe's economic resilience, strategic autonomy and climate stability, and of a fairer share of what its seas provide.

At the time of launch, members include: Agissons pour le Climat, Associazione Casette dei Pescatori, Casa dei Pesci, ClientEarth, Défense des Milieux Aquatiques, Deutsche Umwelthilfe, European Anglers Alliance, Environmental Justice Foundation, Low Impact Fishers of Europe, Manche Nature, Marsempre, Mulleres Salgadas, Oceana, Only One, Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and Wildwatch.

For more information, visit ourlivingseas.org.

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