



MAKE FISHING FAIR

Roadmap

A roadmap to achieve fair fisheries and
support small-scale fishers in Europe



Introduction

For more than three decades, the potential and importance of small-scale fisheries¹ has been highlighted in many relevant international and European fora and some limited milestones have been achieved which recognise their value and potential to be part of the solution to Europe's ailing seas and related food security. Despite this, it has not sufficiently translated into real changes to enable small-scale fisheries (SSF) to have a decent livelihood and to fulfil their potential.

The Make Fishing Fair Forum, taking place one week before the Implementation Dialogue on Small-scale Fisheries organised by DG Mare, is timely to take stock of the current situation for the SSF sector and the cumulative pressures it is facing. The SSF has reached a tipping point in decline, which is becoming increasingly challenging to reverse if urgent action is not taken. The EU cannot afford any further delay in protecting and promoting this sector and its potential to legislate and steer policies that are fair for the fishers, fair for future generations and fair for nature.

While the Ocean Pact makes support to SSF a priority and outlines relevant actions² which are potentially good steps forward, no details are provided on the nature of such support, or how this priority will be ensured in the Future Ocean Act. This is essential for safeguarding the survival of SSF, ensuring that application of policies protect their rights and reflect the unique needs of small-scale fishers rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach that favours larger-scale, high impact operations.

¹ We use the EMFAF definition of small-scale fishing - vessels under 12 metres using passive gears. While this one size fits all definition is imperfect and does not completely account for regional differences, we see it as a "good enough" classification.

² The Ocean Pact concretely outlines the following: Support for small-scale fisheries as a priority. Relevant actions include the issuance of a vademecum presenting best practices the Member States could use in the allocation of fishing opportunities in order to improve transparency, and promote sustainable fishing, and a dedicated implementation dialogue. The Commission will also consider the establishment of a dedicated Advisory Council

Our Call to Action

Against this backdrop, we call upon **the European institutions to establish a Plan of Action for Small-scale Fishing in Europe by 2026**, incorporating the principles of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), based on a differentiated policy and management approach to SSF and larger-scale fisheries (LSF).

This plan should include concrete measures to the European Institutions and to Member States, which include the following items:

- Restore fish stocks using better science and traditional knowledge to rebuild ecosystem health
- Protect SSF from competing impactful blue economy sectors by securing preferential access within the territorial waters, extending out to the 6 mile and 12-nautical mile zone where appropriate
- Apply adaptive co-management systems in all coastal areas
- Ensure fair allocation of fishing opportunities based on social, economic and environmental criteria
- Foster generational renewal by removing barriers and providing incentives, offering training, mentorship and decent livelihoods for young fishers.
- Build resilient communities able to adapt to climate change
- Guarantee fair access to sectoral support and markets
- Promote gender equity by recognising women's contributions and ensuring equal participation and opportunities

Key priorities for a fair and sustainable future

1. Restore fish stocks using better science and traditional knowledge to rebuild ecosystem health

Without fish there is no future and currently, this is a major threat in all sea-basins. We need to restore fish stocks and ecosystems' functionality. This requires co-managed Marine Protected Areas, restoration plans and effective fisheries management and the best use of science, taking into account all factors affecting fish stocks, combined with the experiential and traditional knowledge of fishers to advise management decisions. As a first step, we ask for the establishment of a dedicated Small-scale Fisheries Advisory Council.

As a priority, the European Commission needs to review the scientific advice process, and the implementation of the MAPs, prioritise low impact fisheries, utilise BMSY as the target reference point and address shortcomings that undermine fish stock recovery. The latter is best achieved by setting quotas that support building biomass, taking account of 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.

We urge the European Commission to use all of its powers as Guardian of the Treaties to enforce existing Regulations, including setting an ambitious concrete programme of measures to achieve "good environmental status" as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

We call for the elimination of loopholes in the Control Regulation – notably the exemption from the margin of tolerance reporting requirements of small-pelagic unsorted catches, using instead modern control techniques like eDNA to assess unsorted catches, and the application of appropriate means and measures to address illegal recreational fishing, including removal of the caudal fin on all landed catches as a mandatory measure for European recreational fishers.

2. Protect SSF from competing impactful blue economy sectors by securing preferential access within the territorial waters, extending out to the 6 mile and 12-nautical mile limit where appropriate

Small-scale fisheries need to be placed at the heart of the Blue Economy, recognising the tenure and customary rights of the SSF sector, protecting it

from spatial squeeze by competing or incompatible activities through the creation of “small-scale stewardship areas”.

We advocate for an approach to the blue economy which builds on social foundations and respects ecological ceilings and marine targets (Good Environmental Status), and for an inclusive Marine Spatial Planning process, in which small-scale fishers are supported to participate effectively.

Small-scale fishers must be effectively included, and enabled to participate meaningfully in maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management on an equal footing with other stakeholders. The local, traditional and experiential knowledge of SSF should be incorporated alongside scientific advice in making decisions concerning SSF.

The Ocean Act must recognise SSF’s customary rights (access to fishing areas and resources) and protect the sector from the encroachment of more powerful blue economy sectors by establishing a regenerative area, giving preferential access in their territorial waters, extending out to the 6 mile and 12 nautical mile limits where appropriate for small-scale low impact fishing, where management plans are set through co-management schemes.

Improve data collection and research to provide accurate data on the ecological, socioeconomic and cumulative impacts of the blue economy activities, including recreational fishing and new energy activities.

3. Apply adaptive co-management systems across all coastal areas

Apply adaptive co-management across all coastal areas, starting in Marine Protected Areas and Restoration Plans, that includes small-scale fishers, guaranteeing their shared authority in decision-making guided by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and equity in European coastal waters.

The Ocean Act should clearly make co-management a mandate, defining the roles and shared responsibilities of authorities and small-scale fishers and urge Member States to establish specific legal frameworks that embrace this governance scheme in coastal waters. These frameworks should ensure that adequate financial resources are allocated in annual national budgets to support co-management systems and social dialogue, enable effective implementation, and build the capacity needed for meaningful participation of small-scale fishers in decision-making processes.

4. Ensure fair allocation of fishing opportunities based on social, economic and environmental criteria

Small-scale fishers should have preferential access to fishing resources, based on social, cultural, economic, and environmental criteria and efforts should be made to put an end to the privatisation of access to fishery resources.

To address the gap of implementation and unleash the full potential of Article 17, clear guidelines and weighting for these criteria are needed.

The upcoming “vademecum” should provide a binding implementation plan for the full implementation of Article 17, including good-practice guidance on social, economic, and environmental sustainability and how such good practice can be promoted through the allocation of fishing opportunities.

Guidelines should recommend criteria, weighting, indicators and measurement methods for member states to implement Article 17 fairly and in the spirit of the law. They should ensure equitable allocation to small-scale fleets, e.g. by reserving a minimum of 20% of total opportunities (TAC and effort) in those fisheries managed through TACs and quotas, with safeguards to prevent erosion, and transparent management, as exemplified by Denmark’s inshore reserved pool. Allocations should also facilitate access for new entrants, young fishers and women, who currently have barriers.

We urge the European Commission to use all its powers as Guardian of the Treaties to ensure enforcement action, including through infringement proceedings, and include specific provisions in the Ocean Act.

5. Foster generational renewal by removing barriers and providing incentives, offering training, mentorship and decent livelihoods for young fishers

Europe’s fishing future depends on its young, their commitment and enjoyment of a job that can have difficulties which reduce its appeal. Issuing an Action Plan for SSF in Europe is a way to address the critical issue of generational renewal in the fisheries sector, which threatens the long-term viability of small-scale fisheries. The plan has to have the objective of offering long term decent and secure livelihood prospects to young people and new entrants.

Barriers to new generation entry under the implementation of existing policies, training and licensing need to be addressed with measures that incentivise a new generation of small-scale fishers, including guarantee quota access, financial support and establishing facilities for their formal training, including online training.

Support young workers in fisheries by technical support and administrative guidance, establish mentoring and apprenticeship schemes and training, including on leadership and communication skills. Establish concrete specific

training to small-scale fishers adapted to their needs, throughout one's life. Promote specific small-scale fisheries research and development to be promoted and resourced through EU and national research programmes. Further explore and support collective ownership schemes and initiatives like the Project Mer de Liens.

Support the establishment of youth networks and information sharing groups, like the Low Impact Fishers Youth Network, to have their voices incorporated in the decision making processes that will affect their future.

Ensure decent work and social rights for SSF, such as access to social security, appropriate health protection, education, safety at sea in ways that enhance the attractiveness of the sector for the young.

If clearly supported through policy and funding, the energy transition could serve as both an environmental and social enabler – improving working conditions, raising the sector's profile and attracting young entrants in the SSF fleet.

6. Build resilient communities able to adapt to climate change

Develop, with fishing communities, specific policies and plans for climate change adaptation and mitigation, including restorative measures to ensure healthy marine and freshwater ecosystems, and measures to mitigate environmental and economic shocks, for disaster risk reduction and emergency response.

Support an adaptive approach to fisheries management that takes into account the impact of climate change and accommodates the specific needs of small-scale fishers and fishworkers.

Support initiatives that improve the communities' resilience, particularly facing resource scarcity, helping them reduce post-harvest losses and/or to develop alternative resources, including the development of innovative solutions for the valorization and utilization of invasive species or safety measures for handling new poisonous species.

7. Guarantee fair access to sectoral support and markets

Small-scale fishers should have fair, transparent access to financial support and subsidies, prioritizing a just transition and sustainability, with secure market access while preventing overfishing. The economic performance of the business, measured in terms of net profit without subsidies, must be taken into account.

A dedicated SSF fund should support its energy transition, its fleet renewal, sustainable practices, market access and fisher-led technologies or digital tools, with capacity building, technical support and reduced administrative burdens to ensure full access. Such a fund ought to include access to low-emission propulsion technologies and climate friendly vessel design. SSF fleets should be prioritised for such investments based on their already low carbon footprint and strong socio-economic contribution to coastal areas.

Local, fair, and sustainable food systems should be strengthened to improve market access and profitability, including infrastructure, direct and short value chain initiatives like Community Supported Fisheries schemes, and a dedicated Small-scale Participative Guarantee System (PGS) for SSF based on environmental, social, and cultural values. EU fishery products must be enabled to compete on a level playing field with imports, subject to equivalent standards and regulations.

Build the capacity of SSF organisations by eliminating administrative burdens and increase specific funding to create more dedicated SSF Producer Organisations (POs), whilst giving full recognition (and support) to existing ones.

8. Achieve Gender Equity in Fisheries

The essential role of women in fisheries—often informal and undervalued—must be recognized and supported for its contributions to the economy, food security, and sustainable fisheries. Women face constraints from traditional and cultural norms rooted in patriarchy, which limit their visibility and opportunities.

Equitable participation in fisheries governance and decision-making must be ensured, enabling women to contribute their knowledge and experience, through effective support and inclusive practices. Women's voices and organisations should be strengthened to increase visibility, foster leadership, promote collective action, and support the next generation of leaders.

Women's livelihoods should be protected through principles of decent work, including social security, health protection (recognising occupational illnesses), and benefits such as maternity and paternity leave. Targeted research and gender-disaggregated data are needed to understand and support women's contributions. Capacity-building programmes should promote leadership and vocational skills for women, while gender-sensitive technologies and appropriate working conditions must be developed to meet the specific needs of women in fisheries.

The Importance and marginalisation 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, providing livelihoods and economic activities, especially in areas where there are few alternatives. Beyond their economic value, SSF also preserve intangible cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and contribute to bio-cultural diversity. SSF is distinct, and significantly different 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, generate at least 50% of the jobs in fishing and a significant share of the added value (15% of the value of landed catches), whilst amounting to 6% by volume, causing the least environmental damage, in contrast to large-scale, high-impact fishing. Globally, SSF is the 106 oceans' largest employer, relative to other fisheries, oil and gas, shipping, and tourism combined (OECD 2016, Smith and Basurto (2019)).

Small-scale fisheries (SSF) are primarily micro- and nano-sized family enterprises that support a range of ancillary activities — including administration, business management, and fish handling — and help distribute socio-economic benefits widely. Despite their benefits, 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 has the potential to play a greater role in strengthening European food security, make a vital contribution to implementing the Green Deal objectives for 2030 and 2050 and advance the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, the partially poor implementation of successive Common Fisheries Policies (CFPs), which led to favouring larger scale high volume fishing, has led to a distorted sea, with many of our important stocks being overexploited and

fishing capital, access to fishing opportunities, and influence concentrated in ever fewer hands. This is putting European food security and food sovereignty at risk, and compromising the future prospects of coastal communities.

Blue economy activities such as destructive forms of industrial fishing, oil, gas and poorly assessed and planned renewable energy exploitation projects, industrial scale aquaculture, pollution, and mass tourism have adversely affected the livelihoods of small-scale fisheries and disrupted the ecological balance necessary for sustaining living aquatic resources. This has a long-lasting impact on sustainable fish supply, stewardship of aquatic resources, employment, and generational renewal.

Final considerations: We must #MakeFishingFair

There is a danger that without adequate policy support and implementation of the action points mentioned above, the small-scale fishing sector will continue to decline and eventually disappear. This will be to the detriment of coastal communities, their local economies, food supply, 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.

We therefore resolve to work together to ensure that this Call for Action is widely disseminated, incorporated and implemented at all levels.

Signed by

Associazione Casette dei Pescatori

Casa dei Pesci

Cooperativa San Leopoldo

Associazione Pescatori di Pantelleria

Isole Eolie Pesca Responsabile

Association des Ligneurs de la Pointe de Bretagne

Union des communautés des prud'hommes pêcheurs de Méditerranée (UCPPM)

Prud'homie de Saint Raphaël

Pleine Mer

Latvian Fishermen Federation

Fischereischutzverband Schleswig-Holstein

Association of Small Coastal Fishermen of the Adriatic

European Association of fishermen at the black sea

Marsempre

Scottish Creel Fishers Association

Sveriges Yrkesfiskare Ekonomiska Förening (SYEF)

PO Kustfiskarna Bottenhavet Ekonomisk Förening

Ålands Fiskare r.f.

Foreningen for Skånsomt Kystfiskeri Producentorganisation (FSK-PO)

Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO)

C-LIFE

Pot Fishing Agency

Pescartes

Asociación de atuneros con linea de mano del mediterráneo

Mirac Canarias

Cofradía la restinga (El Hierro)

Mulleres Salgadas

Bivdu

Norges Kystfiskarlag

Snowchange

Federatia Delta Dunarii

Erris Lobster Conservation and Restocking Association

Pancyriot Association of Professional Coastal Fishermen

Zygi Fishermen Association

Wolińskie Stowarzyszenie Rybaków Empesca't

Associazione Casette dei Pescatori

Arts Menors Costa Brava

Darłowska Grupa Producentów Ryb i Armatorów Łodzi Rybackie

About Make Fishing Fair

The **Make Fishing Fair** campaign is led by small-scale fishers from across Europe, seeking to redress the imbalance between low-impact, small-scale fisheries and high-impact, industrial operations through a just transition. The Make Fishing Fair Forum will convene 45 fishers from 17 countries alongside policymakers, scientists, and NGOs to tackle the urgent challenges facing the sector. The Forum aims to strengthen solidarity among fishers, expand support for small-scale fisheries, and ensure their voices remain central in EU policy discussions ahead of the Implementation Dialogues.

30 Years of Action for Europe's Small-Scale Fisheries

1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries: Article 6.18 calls for the rights of small-scale and artisanal fishers to secure and just livelihoods, with preferential access to traditional fishing grounds under national jurisdiction. (Global foundation for SSF rights.)

2009 cvApril: EU Green Paper on CFP Reform proposes a differentiated approach for Small-Scale (SSF) and Large-Scale Fisheries (LSF).

November: Brussels Workshop Statement on SSF and CFP Reform strengthens advocacy for inclusion of SSF voices in EU policy.

2010 Ocean2012 Campaign: Promotes allocation of fishing opportunities to those fishing sustainably and delivering the greatest societal benefit

2012 May: Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests endorsed by the UN Committee on World Food Security.

November: First European Artisanal Fishermen's Congress Statement sets a shared vision for European small-scale fishers and calls for the creation of LIFE

2013 Second European Artisanal Fishermen's Congress builds regional cooperation.

New Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) adopted — introduces Article 17, promoting fairer, sustainability-based allocation of fishing opportunities

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- 2014** FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries adopted — a global framework linking SSF with food security and poverty eradication.
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- 2015** UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted — includes SDG 14.b, ensuring access for small-scale fishers to marine resources and markets.
- LIFE (Low Impact Fishers of Europe) formally established; opens Brussels office as a dedicated SSF voice at EU level.
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- 2018** Regional Plan of Action for SSF (RPOA) launched for the Mediterranean and Black Sea — a first regional roadmap for sustainable small-scale fisheries.
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- 2019** "A Fair Deal for SSF" Campaign calls to right historic wrongs and promote fair access to resources.
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- 2021** October: LIFE & Our Fish publish report on Fishing Opportunities as an Agent of Change.
- November: LIFE issues Statement on CFP Implementation, highlighting the need for a differentiated SSF approach.
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- 2022** June: UN Ocean Conference (Lisbon) — SSF organizations worldwide unite in an "SSF Call to Action" for implementing SDG 14.b.
- European Parliament Resolutions On Article 17 implementation and On the SSF situation and future perspectives in the EU
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- 2023** November: LIFE publishes Call to Action for Better CFP Implementation through a differentiated approach.
- IYAFA Regional Workshop (Galicia, Spain): Adoption of a "General Statement" and "Women in Fisheries Action Plan."
- European Parliament Resolution on co-management in EU fisheries and the sector's role in implementing management measures.
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2024

May: [Make Fishing Fair Campaign](#) launched — 38 fisher groups & 20 NGOs call for Fair Quota Access, Just Transition, and Transparency in subsidies and allocations.

July: [Manifesto for the Xth Legislature](#) (2024–2029) outlines SSF policy priorities for the next EU mandate.

2025

February: LIFE presents [Views on the Ocean Pact](#) to influence global ocean governance.

March: [Make Fishing Fair Parliamentary Event](#) bringing together small-scale fishers from across Europe and the UK at the European Parliament to advocate for fairer access to fishing opportunities and greater support for low-impact practices.

June: [Fishers' Call to Action](#) gains visibility at UNOC3, elevating SSF issues on the global stage.

September: [LIFE addresses Commissioner Kadis](#) regarding the Article 17 Vademecum, reinforcing fair allocation principles.



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