

Voices from the Mediterranean

Small-Scale Fishers' Experiences with the EU Common Fisheries Policy



// INTRODUCTION

The Med Sea Alliance (MSA) commissioned the documentation of how small-scale fishers (SSF) in the Mediterranean experience the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Through filmed interviews and supporting materials, content produced from this project aims to provide evidence-based insights to contribute constructively to the CFP evaluation process, grounded in the lived experiences of small-scale fishers.

Between November 13 and 25, 2025, six small-scale fishermen were interviewed across the Mediterranean:

Spain

Luis Rodríguez
Cabo de Gata, Spain

Macarena Molina
Cabo de Gata, Spain

France

Gérard Carrodano
La Ciotat, France

Baptiste Canville
Palavas-les-flots, France

Cyprus

Fotis Gaitanos
Larnaca, Cyprus

Panayiotis Peratikos
Oroklini, Cyprus



Locations of the fishermen interviewed in the Mediterranean Sea

// Restoring Fish Stocks Above MSY Levels – Article 2 CFP

All fishers described [dramatic declines in fish populations over recent decades](#), representing a fundamental transformation of Mediterranean marine ecosystems and the work of small-scale fishers. In France, Baptiste Canville, a fisher with more than 20 years of experience, describes a [“clear decline in the resource as a whole,”](#) driven by pollution, climate change, and fishing pressure. He illustrates how red mullet fishing has shifted from three people using 500 meters of net to a single fisher deploying up to 2 km, reflecting a shared experience across interviews: more gear and effort are now required to catch the same amount of fish.

In Cyprus, Panayiotis Peratikos, who started fishing with his father when he was eight years old, says coastal fishermen are [“barely breathing,”](#) deploying four to five times more net to make the same income. Fotis Gaitanos, who fishes bonito, goatfish and bogue, among others, notes that [species once common are now seen only in photos](#), with striped red mullet available locally only as imports.

Fishers also describe invasive species as fundamentally altering working conditions. In Cyprus, pufferfish and lionfish destroy gear and catches, forcing fishers to adapt their fishing times. Dedicated pufferfish removal programs are one of the few government initiatives Cypriot fishers praise.



// Allocating Fishing Quotas Transparently and Objectively – Article 17 CFP

Quota allocation, particularly for bluefin tuna, has generated significant frustration among SSF, particularly in France. Although Article 17 requires transparent criteria and incentives for low-impact fishing, fishers report systematic failure in implementation.

Baptiste Canville, who has been a boat captain and spearfisher since the 1908s, notes that in France, [large tuna seiners hold 94.4% of the quota](#). Legal interventions modestly increased small-scale allocations, but disparities remain extreme. Fishers say [allocation rewards historical overfishing rather than sustainability](#), excluding hook-and-line fishers while industrial fleets received the largest shares.



Macarena Molina, who has worked at sea for more than 20 years, outlines a positive vision of Article 17 that would [reward local employment, training, environmental respect, and intergenerational transmission](#). This aligns with small-scale fishers' insistence that sustainability depends on maintaining polyvalence (the ability to adapt fishing practices across species and seasons). As Baptiste explains, [“polyvalent small-scale fishing is an art... it adapts to the seasons, to the species, to the size of the fish.”](#)

Fishers argue that fair allocation of fishing opportunities is essential to preserve this adaptability.

[“Fishing opportunities are not distributed fairly, not access to resources, not subsidies, not administrative processes,”](#) says Macarena. [“Economic models don't fit artisanal fisheries, they are designed for industrial ones, which then get more aid, more negotiation power, more influence. It's not fair.”](#)

// Adopting Conservation Measures for Ocean Recovery – Articles 8 & 11 CFP

Fishers are almost universally in favor of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in principle and discuss at length their benefits, but find fault in how they are being implemented and enforced.

In Spain, Macarena states that [“if this area weren't protected, I'm absolutely sure that fishing as we know it in Cabo de Gata would have disappeared.”](#) She says that primarily MPAs have protected the small-scale fishers' way of life.

In Palavas, Baptiste reports rapid ecological recovery in a no-take zone, followed by poaching due to lack of surveillance. [“Very quickly, fish sense the tranquility and take refuge in the protected zone,”](#) he says. [“That was fast, faster than expected. We quickly realized it worked. Unfortunately, an MPA is vulnerable, and it gets poached.”](#) Funding for monitoring eventually came from the local government, not EU programs.

G rard advocates [permanent reserves, citing successful examples in Corsica](#). Across interviews, fishers stress that exclusion from reserve design and management undermines legitimacy and effectiveness.

“*A marine reserve that doesn't include its main actors isn't truly legitimate.*”

Macarena Molina

// Balancing Fleet Capacity with Fishing Opportunities – Article 22 CFP

Engine power and capacity illustrate how weak enforcement encourages unsustainable practices. Luis explains how [engines certified at low RPMs produce far greater power in reality](#), resulting in vessels with several times their legal capacity.

Macarena traces this to policies that encouraged vessel consolidation and oversized engines through European funding, benefiting administrators and large vessel owners while imposing fuel costs and economic pressure on fishing communities. Fotis warns that without capacity limits, the Cypriot sea “would be chaos” and degrade even faster.

// Future Generations

The absence of young people entering the profession is the most troubling theme. “No young person gets into the profession,” Panayiotis says. Across countries, fishers describe collapsing generational renewal driven by low income, policy barriers, and fishing’s invisibility to society.

Luis emphasizes that fishing knowledge is learned over a lifetime, not through licensing alone. “If there's no new generation taking over, it's because we're doing something wrong. And that's something to think about,” he says.

Without intervention addressing root causes – declining stocks, unfair quota allocation, rising costs, administrative burdens – fishers believe recruitment will remain near zero.

// Lack of Control and Enforcement in MPAs – Article 11 CFP

Despite the small-scale fishers’ broad support for the existence of MPAs, the consensus is that there is a significant lack of protection and enforcement of these protected areas.

Macarena states that “declaring a marine reserve without protecting it is the same as not declaring it.” Luis goes a step further to suggest that, “if you protect an area and don't monitor it, what you're really protecting are the rule-breakers.”

One of the most common complaints was that monitoring was conducted during limited daylight hours and in specific areas, focusing heavily on targeting small-scale fishers.

“*The fisherman is the person with the greatest interest in conserving the environment. Because it's their resource, it's their life. And if the sea is in bad shape, the fisherman won't survive.*”

Luis Rodríguez

// CONCLUSIONS

Across France, Spain, and Cyprus, small-scale fishing communities are in crisis because the core provisions of the CFP regulation are poorly implemented.

Fishers do not oppose regulation; they oppose misguided and uneven implementation.

“*We need to be honest, not with the administration, but with the sea. The sea won't fine us; it will simply stop sustaining us.*”

Macarena Molina