



SECURING THE FUTURE OF SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN CYPRUS

A Joint Call to Action for the Future of
Small-Scale Fisheries in Cyprus

MAY 2026

A CALL FROM SMALL-SCALE FISHERS OF CYPRUS

We, small-scale fishers of Cyprus, together with representatives of our communities, partners, and national and international organisations, are issuing this Joint Call to Action at a critical moment for the future of our sector.

At a time when Cyprus holds a central role in shaping European fisheries discussions, and as national and European policy decisions are being prepared, we cannot ignore the reality: **small-scale fisheries in Cyprus are at a turning point**. Without immediate and decisive action, the sector risks irreversible decline.

KEY CALLS TO ACTION

This Joint Call to Action calls for:

- The development and implementation of a long-term National Strategy and Action Plan for Small-Scale Fisheries in Cyprus
- Fair access for small-scale fishers to marine space, fisheries resources, and traditional fishing grounds
- Stronger environmental resilience measures and sustainable fisheries management
- Greater support for the socio-economic sustainability of the sector and generational renewal
- Meaningful participation of fishers in decision-making and fisheries governance
- Improved monitoring, control, and enforcement of recreational and illegal fishing activities
- Stronger market opportunities and support structures for small-scale fishers
- Better alignment of national and EU fisheries policies and funding instruments with the real needs of small-scale fisheries
- Increased support to help fishers address external pressures, climate impacts, and economic uncertainty

WHY SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES MATTER

Small-scale fisheries are the backbone of the Cypriot fishing sector. We represent the overwhelming majority of the fleet, sustaining coastal communities, preserving cultural heritage, and providing fresh, local seafood to the public yet a minority in policy attention and resource allocation.

Yet, despite our importance:

- Our contribution remains undervalued in policy decisions
- Our role in sustainable fisheries is often overlooked
- Our future is increasingly uncertain

The sector remains **essential for local economies, food systems, and the identity of coastal Cyprus**.

A SECTOR UNDER PRESSURE

Small-scale fisheries in Cyprus face a combination of structural, environmental, socio-economic, and governance challenges that are threatening the future viability of the sector.

1. Absence of a Long-Term Vision and Strategy

There is **no coherent national strategy or long-term plan** for small-scale fisheries. Policy decisions remain fragmented, reactive, and disconnected from realities at sea. This lack of direction creates uncertainty, weakens the sector's resilience, and undermines trust between fishers and authorities.

2. Increasing Competition for Marine Space and Resources

Small-scale fishers are being progressively displaced by competing activities, including tourism, aquaculture, recreational fisheries and other blue economy sectors. As marine space becomes more congested, fisheries.

Fishers say: *'In several coastal areas of Cyprus, we are losing access to traditional fishing grounds due to tourism-related activities, recreational fisheries and expanding maritime uses, limiting our ability to operate effectively.'*

At the same time, growing competition with recreational fisheries for the same fishing grounds and target species is placing additional pressure on already limited resources and increasing tensions within the sector.

3. Environmental and Resource Pressures

Declining fish stocks, climate change impacts, invasive species, and pollution are directly affecting our catches and increasing uncertainty. These pressures are intensifying and require urgent, coordinated responses.

Fishers say: *'We have experienced reduced catches over the past years possibly linked to climatic changes and the spread of invasive species, adding further economic strain to our already vulnerable operations.'*

4. Socio-Economic Fragility and Ageing Workforce

The sector is ageing, with limited entry of young fishers. Low and unstable incomes, high operational costs, and lack of incentives discourage generational renewal, threatening the continuity of the profession.

Without targeted support measures, the future sustainability of small-scale fisheries in Cyprus is at serious risk.

5. Weak Governance and Limited Participation

Fishers are rarely meaningfully involved in decision-making processes that directly affect their livelihoods. There is a **lack of structured co-management and consultation mechanisms**, leading to policies that are often ineffective or poorly adapted.

6. Insufficient Monitoring and Control of Recreational and Illegal Fishing

The lack of effective monitoring and control of recreational fishing activities, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, creates significant pressures on fish stocks and undermines the sustainability of the sector.

Recreational fishing effort remains largely unquantified, while instances of illegal sales and unregulated practices distort the market and create unfair competition. This situation not only impacts fish stocks but also places disproportionate pressure on professional small-scale fishers, who operate under strict regulatory frameworks.

Fishers say: *'In Cyprus, the current structure of Category C licenses creates ambiguity between professional and recreational fishing, leading to gaps in monitoring, control, and fairness within the sector.'*

Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure fairness, transparency, and effective fisheries management for all users of marine resources.

7. Weak Market Position and Lack of Organisation

The absence of a fisheries producers' organisation limits the bargaining power of small-scale fishers, contributes to price instability, and reduces the sector's ability to compete fairly in the market.

At the same time, limited promotion of locally harvested fish products and weak market structures reduce economic opportunities for fishers.

8. Limited Alignment Between Fisheries Policies, Funding Opportunities and the Real Needs of Small-Scale Fisheries

Small-scale fishers in Cyprus continue to face difficulties accessing and benefiting from national and European fisheries policies and funding mechanisms.

There is growing concern that the current insufficient implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, as well as existing and future funding instruments such as the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), do not sufficiently reflect the realities, priorities, and operational needs of the small-scale fisheries sector.

Fishers say: *'Funding opportunities are often difficult to access, overly bureaucratic, insufficiently targeted, or lacking transparency, limiting our effectiveness and impact on the long-term sustainability of the sector.'*

Ensuring that policies and funding mechanisms genuinely support small-scale fisheries is essential for the future resilience and viability of coastal fishing communities in Cyprus.

9. Additional External Threats

Small-scale fishers are also increasingly affected by external pressures beyond their control, including interactions with marine megafauna, extreme weather events, rising operational costs, fuel price increases, and broader economic instability.

These challenges create additional uncertainty and economic pressure on an already vulnerable sector.

**THE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES SECTOR IN CYPRUS IS
UNDER PRESSURE FROM ALL DIRECTIONS, YET
THERE IS STILL NO COHERENT LONG-TERM VISION
TO SUPPORT ITS SURVIVAL, RESILIENCE, AND
FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY.**

OUR VISION

We envision a future where small-scale fisheries in Cyprus are:

- Recognised and supported as a vital sector
- Economically viable and socially sustainable
- Actively involved in decision-making processes
- Able to coexist fairly with other marine sectors
- Resilient to environmental and economic challenges

OUR CALLS TO ACTION

We call on the Government of Cyprus, the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research (DFMR), and all relevant national and European institutions to take immediate and concrete action to secure the future of small-scale fisheries in Cyprus.

1. Develop and Implement a National Strategy for Small-Scale Fisheries

Urgently develop and implement a National Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF), based on a participatory, bottom-up process, providing a clear long-term vision, strategic priorities, and measurable actions.

The strategy should:

- Establish a clear long-term vision for the sector
- Define measurable objectives and actions
- Address environmental, social, and economic sustainability
- Ensure continuity beyond political cycles
- Include dedicated support mechanisms for small-scale fishers

2. Ensure Fair Access to Marine Space and Fisheries Resources

Protect the rights and access of small-scale fishers to traditional fishing grounds and fisheries resources by:

- Integrating fisheries into marine spatial planning processes
- Addressing growing conflicts with tourism, aquaculture, coastal development, and other blue economy sectors
- Ensuring fair and sustainable management of competition with recreational fisheries
- Safeguarding priority access for low-impact small-scale fisheries

3. Strengthen Environmental Resilience and Sustainable Fisheries Management

Develop coordinated measures to address:

- Declining fish stocks (e.g. temporal closure measures and science-based stock management)
- Climate change impacts through improved weather and sea condition information systems, fisher training, and adaptive fisheries management approaches
- Pollution and habitat degradation
- The spread of invasive species

Support should include:

- Science-based fisheries management, including socio-economic aspects of small-scale fisheries
- Strengthened collaboration between fishers, scientists, and decision-makers
- Targeted support to address gear damage, catch losses, and operational impacts caused by invasive species, marine megafauna, and environmental pressures
- Adaptive management approaches that strengthen the resilience and long-term sustainability of the sector

4. Support the Socio-Economic Sustainability and Generational Renewal of the Sector

Develop targeted measures to improve the economic viability and long-term sustainability of small-scale fisheries by:

- Supporting income stability and fair working conditions
- Reducing operational pressures on fishers
- Creating incentives and opportunities for young fishers
- Expanding access to training, diversification, and professional development opportunities
- Improving safety and working conditions at sea

5. Establish Meaningful Co-Management and Participatory Governance

Create formal mechanisms for the systematic involvement of fishers in decision-making, ensuring transparency, accountability, and better policy outcomes.

This should include:

- Structured consultation processes
- Co-management approaches at local and national levels
- Greater transparency in fisheries governance
- Recognition of fishers' knowledge and experience in policy development

6. Strengthen Monitoring, Control and Enforcement Across all Fisheries

Ensure effective, transparent, and equitable management of all fishing activities by:

- Improving monitoring and data collection of recreational fishing
- Strengthening enforcement against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing
- Preventing illegal sale of catches and market distortions
- Reviewing and addressing gaps linked to the current Category C licensing system
- Ensuring fair and equal application of rules across all users of marine resources

7. Strengthen Market Position, Organisation and Economic Opportunities

Support the economic resilience of small-scale fisheries through:

- The establishment of a fisheries producers' organisation
- Promotion and valorisation of locally harvested fish products
- Improved market access and fair pricing mechanisms
- Dedicated training programme to improve product knowledge and resource-protection practice
- Public awareness campaigns promoting sustainable local seafood
- Development of new economic opportunities linked to fisheries and coastal communities

8. Align National Action with EU Policy and Funding Opportunities

Ensure that national and European fisheries policies and funding instruments effectively respond to the realities and needs of small-scale fisheries by:

- Fully implementing the Common Fisheries Policy in ways that support low-impact small-scale fisheries
- Streamlining EMFAF application and ensuring that future EMFAF programming prioritises the real operational, environmental, and socio-economic needs of the sector
- Improving transparency, accessibility, and effectiveness of funding opportunities
- Reducing administrative barriers that limit fishers' access to support mechanisms
- Ensuring meaningful involvement of fishers in the design and evaluation of fisheries support measures

9. Provide Support for External Pressures and Crisis Preparedness

Develop scientific and compensate mechanisms to help fishers respond to increasing external pressures and allow to keep operating, including:

- Interactions with marine megafauna and invasive non-indigenous species
- Extreme weather events and climate-related impacts
- Fuel price increases and economic instability
- Emergency situations affecting fishing activities and livelihoods

Support measures should strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of the sector in the face of growing uncertainty.

A CRITICAL MOMENT FOR ACTION

The current political context offers a unique opportunity. With Cyprus playing a key role in shaping European fisheries discussions, and with upcoming national and EU-level decisions, this is a critical moment to act.

Failure to respond will accelerate the decline of small-scale fisheries, with irreversible consequences for coastal communities, cultural heritage, and marine sustainability.

OUR COMMITMENT

We stand ready to:

- Engage constructively in dialogue
- Contribute our knowledge and experience
- Work together towards solutions

But meaningful change will only be possible through political will, leadership, and immediate action.

SIGNATORIES

Christodoulos Charalambous, President, Union of Small Scale Coastal Fishers

Marios Papageorgiou, Executive Director, Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre

Vera Coelho, Executive Director and Vice President, Oceana Europe

Antonis Petrou, Representative of the Union of Small Scale Coastal Fishers at the Mediterranean Advisory Council

Marta Cavallé, Executive Secretary, Low Impact Fishers of Europe

Dr Xenia I. Loizidou, Chairperson, Board of Directors, AKTI Project and Research Centre

Dr Monica Verbeek, Executive Director, Seas At Risk

Anaïs Berthier, Head of Brussels and Associate Director for Europe, ClientEarth

Elsa Pullman, Senior European Campaigns Advisor, Blue Ventures

**UNION OF SMALL SCALE
COASTAL FISHERS**





**UNION OF SMALL SCALE
COASTAL FISHERS**



The Joint Call to Action has been developed in partnership
between the Union of Small Scale Coastal Fishers and
Enalia Pysis Environmental Research Centre.