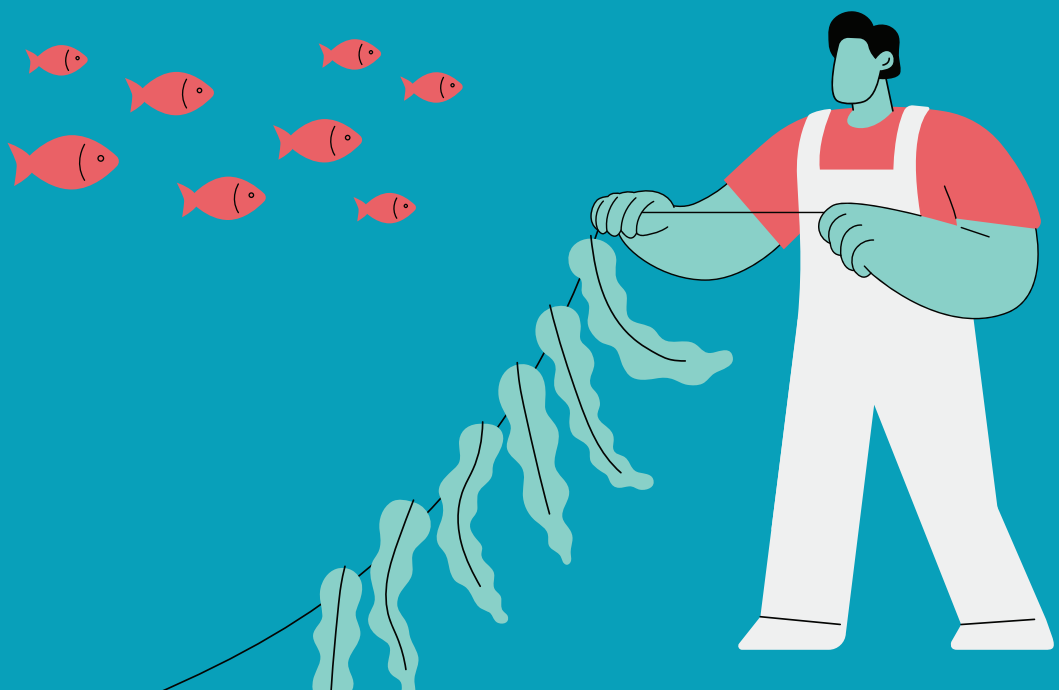
A just transition towards fair, low-impact fisheries in Europe

Shifting from destructive fisheries practices towards low-impact, economically viable, and socially inclusive fisheries, requires more than just a shared vision. It demands deliberate, coordinated action to not only restore ecosystems and fish populations, but also reshape food systems to prioritise the use of fishery resources for direct local human consumption.

Such a shift is only possible through a just transition – one that emphasises quality over quantity, values sustainable livelihoods and employment, and ensures that the benefits of fishery activities are shared within local communities. This transition should be organised in a way that fairly distributes both the costs and benefits of the ecological shift, without assigning blame for current or future challenges to the transition itself. It is essential to recognise the transition as a necessary response to pressing environmental and societal needs, not the primary cause of broader economic or social difficulties.

While this ecological and social transition is a vital public objective, it will inevitably bring short- and medium-term disruptions, including investment burdens, market uncertainties, and changes to existing business models. To ensure fairness and maximise the chances of acceptance and long-term success of the transition, targeted support is needed for those most affected. At the same time, opportunities should be actively created for those who stand to benefit. The pace of change must also be realistic, allowing time for adaptation.



How to implement a just transition to fair, low- impact fisheries

To bring the Vision into life, the transition should be implemented through concrete and actionable roadmaps that incorporate the following key actions:

1. Initiate the transition towards low impact fisheries
2. Restore fish populations and marine ecosystems
3. Take a differentiated approach to protect small-scale, low-impact fisheries
4. Guarantee fair representation and shared decision-making for all fishers
5. Use public money for the public good
6. Establish co-management in Marine Protected Areas and inclusive Maritime Spatial Planning
7. Develop a 'women in fisheries' action plan
8. Facilitate generational renewal and diversification of activities
9. Enhance transparency and monitoring
10. Promote low-trophic level and multi-trophic regenerative aquaculture
11. Foster a new culture of seafood
12. End the over-exploitation of third-country and international waters
13. Ensure seafood imports comply with EU standards

This Vision for fair and low-impact fisheries in Europe was developed with a bottom-up approach, convened by Low Impact Fishers of Europe and Seas At Risk, incorporating the views of a diverse group of experts from the fisheries community, fishmongers, environmental NGOs, scientists and institutions.

Take action! Read the full vision and endorse it:
www.rethinkfisheries.eu

SEAS AT RISK

LOW IMPACT FISHERS OF EUROPE

OCEANS5

Life

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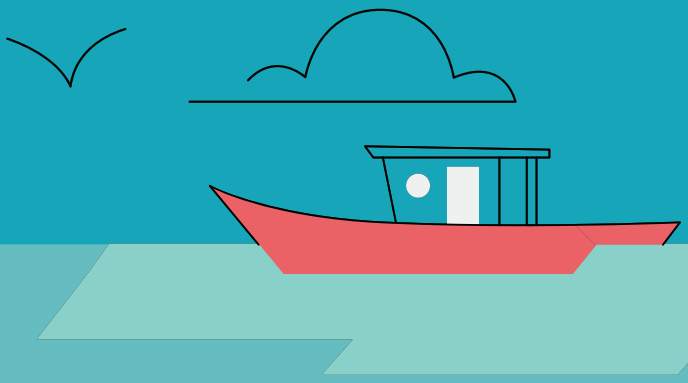


Rethink Fisheries

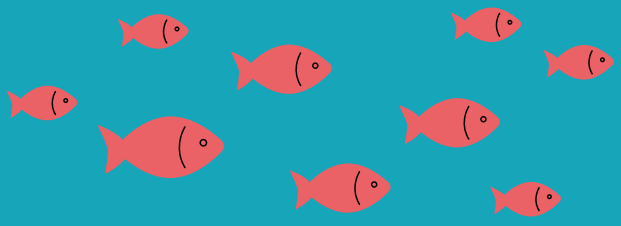
A vision for low impact and fair fisheries

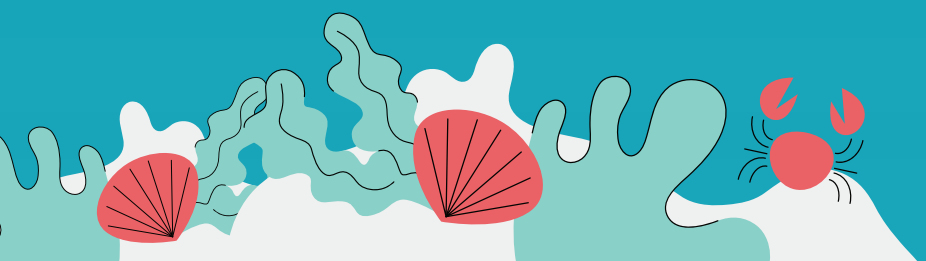
European fisheries are at a crossroads. Overfishing, climate change, pollution, and growing inequalities within the sector are depleting fish populations, threatening marine biodiversity, and pushing small-scale fishers to the brink. The current system fails to balance economic needs with environmental protection, deepening both ecological and social crises.

One thing is certain: there can be no fishing without fish. As the world undergoes rapid ecological and societal change, fisheries must also evolve. The future lies in low-carbon, low-impact fishing systems that conserve biodiversity, restore ecosystem functions, uphold social justice, and ensure that marine space and resources are shared fairly.

The Vision sets out a path towards fair, low-impact fisheries in Europe. It calls for a deep transformation that requires drastically reducing environmental impacts, decarbonising the sector, building adaptability to global change, and restoring the economic viability, cultural relevance, and attractiveness of fishing communities.

The Vision provides a guiding framework to shape, inform, and continuously improve actions over time, inspiring progressive change in the years to come.



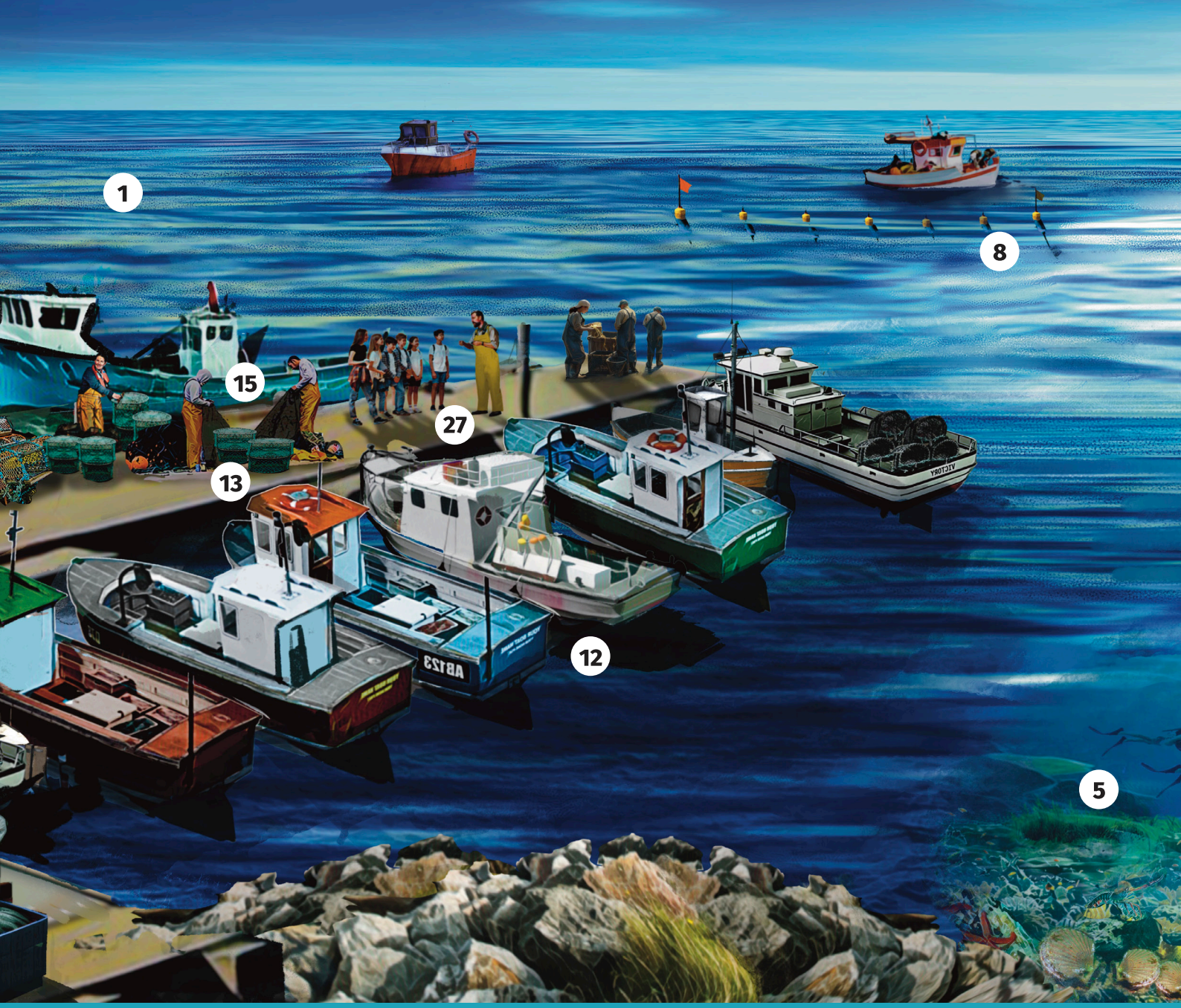


PURPOSE – A thriving ocean, thriving communities.

1. Fair low-impact fisheries empower vibrant coastal communities, ensuring healthy ecosystems and decent livelihoods, which foremost priority is to produce food for direct human consumption.
2. Fishers often own their own boat, live and work where they fish, and are deeply rooted in their communities
3. Low-impact fishers are recognised and rewarded stewards of the seas they rely on.
4. Access to natural resources is fair and equitable. Fishing rights are managed collectively, transparently based on socioeconomic environmental criteria and are not subject to privatisation.

CULTURE – Fishing and consuming respect for the ocean and life itse

5. Humans are viewed as part of nature, and h met within planetary boundaries.
6. Fishing respects marine life: no needless su no wasted life.
7. Everyone has a right to safe, nutritious food sovereignty based on real dietary needs, wi compromising other territories or future ge



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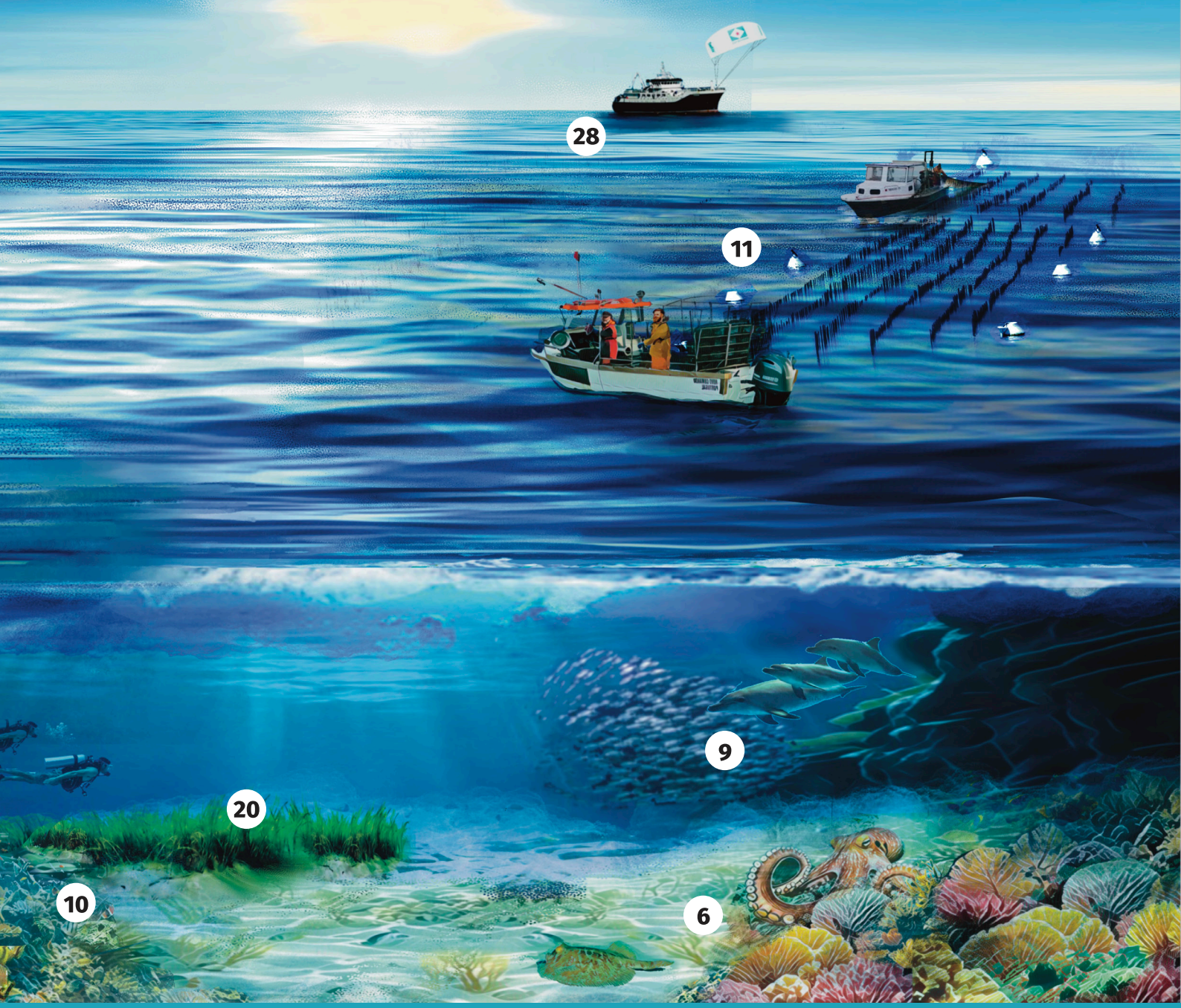
RESOURCES - Fishing in balance with nature.

8. Seafood is harvested using a diversity of low-impact practices, based on low-volume and selective methods that respect seasonality and natural cycles.
9. Fishing is always done within the limits of healthy ecosystems.
10. Fishing causes minimal disturbance to the seabed, habitats, juveniles, sensitive species and non-target species.
11. Low-impact aquaculture respects marine ecosystems and provides sustainable and nutritious seafood.
12. High-impact methods including trawling are phased out and replaced with low-energy, eco-friendly fishing techniques.
13. Ghost fishing caused by abandoned, lost fishing gear is prevented.

LABOUR - Fair livelihood

14. Fairness, equity, cooperation a
guarantees dignified work acro
15. Workers enjoy safe, decent wo
life balance, adequate income
organized into democratic, dec
16. Women are recognised, valued
opportunities.
17. Fisheries is an attractive sector
18. Short, transparent value chains
between consumer and produc
processing, transport and pack
19. Fishing vessels are decarbonis
possible.
20. Natural carbon storage contrib
21. The food system, from product
waste, and follows circular eco
22. Decent, local jobs and practice
secured and maximised.



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GOVERNANCE - The ocean collectively & responsibly managed.

23. Marine resources are treated as a shared public good, managed equitably for both present and future generations.
24. Public money is used exclusively for public good.
25. Inclusive participatory governance schemes enable adaptive and efficient management and steer co-responsibility among local stakeholders in 100% of coastal areas.
26. Fishers' experience and expertise are valued in fisheries management through co-management and the co-development of solutions.
27. Fishers and other workers in the seafood economy can complement their incomes and diversify their activities, supported by training.
28. Coastal areas act as regenerative zones for biodiversity protection and low-impact fishing.
29. End-to-end traceability is achieved through transparent fisheries documentation and trusted quality assurance systems that highlight the product's added value and story.