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## SMALL - SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

# Diversifying livelihoods through tourism and other commercial activities

This workshop focused on the diversification of activities in the small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector, giving the spotlight to initiatives led by the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) of Bari and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). LegaCoop Agroalimentare and CIHEAM Bari presented the Fishery Mediterranean Network (FISH MED NET) project, which contributes to creating new job opportunities in the SSF sector, followed by a case study with the Tunisian Association for the Development of Small-Scale Fisheries (ATDEPA). Then, WWF presented initiatives on processing alien species and business incubators, inviting small-scale fishers to directly share their own experiences.

## Summary of discussions

### **Sustaining small-scale fisheries diversification activities through business alliances: the FISH MED NET project**

The FISH MED NET project provides support to fishers and their families seeking to improve and diversify their businesses. A business alliance, made up of a network of Mediterranean fishers who have joined the programme, has been created in the scope of the project. Furthermore, FISH MED NET comprises an e-platform for exchanging information and experiences. The e-platform is an open resource; fishers beyond the scope of the project are welcome to visit the website to learn more about FISH MED NET and Mediterranean fishers' experiences.<sup>1</sup>

The FISH MED NET project finds that fishers are particularly interested in diversifying their activities in relation to tourism, often by collaborating with restaurants or by catering fish products, but also with regard to aquaculture and public or community services (e.g. renting out fishing boats for use in research or coastal monitoring). The motivations for diversifying are mostly dwindling incomes due to decreasing fish catches as a consequence of overfishing and climate change, but also an interest in engaging with new people and activities.

Stories were shared by fishing families in different locations around Italy. Fishers and their spouses or partners have created new businesses, with support from the FISH MED NET project, by expanding on their traditional fishing activities into pescaturism and preparing

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fishmednet.com/>

meals for tourists. In addition to earning better incomes, they also appreciate the interactions with tourists and the interest their customers take in fish and the fishing process.

### **Reconciling small-scale fisheries and seafood processing to diversify livelihoods: case study in Tunisia**

In Tunisia, the fisheries sector employs more than 100 000 people. It is a political priority in the context of a blue and circular economy, recognizing the need for responsible fishing practices. With the support of ATDEPA, an association aimed at improving the sustainable livelihoods of targeted SSF communities and contributing to the integration of coastal communities in the Blue Economy, the FISH MED NET project assists fishers and fish workers in implementing complementary income-generating activities linked to seafood processing and the aquaculture and restaurant businesses. This support includes advice on marketing and visibility.

An example illustrating the diversification of fishery businesses can be found in Sidi Mechreg, in Bizerte. Here, a fisher has developed a new business and now manages a seafood restaurant. In addition to employing family members, he employs locals and sees his business as an opportunity to offer employment to young people, while also promoting his region. The FISH MED NET project supported this initiative through seafood processing, marketing and giving visibility to the fisher's project aiming to diversify livelihoods.

### **Pescatourism, processing alien species and business incubators**

The World Wildlife Fund helps fishers and their communities to diversify through a programme on business incubators, with the dual objective of achieving more sustainable fisheries and healthier ecosystems, as well as improving the livelihoods of fishing households. An example of this is the support given to the creation of fisher cooperatives in Croatia, including a pre-assessment of their potential economic viability. These cooperatives facilitated the introduction of more selective fishing gear. As a result, larger-size fish are now caught, leading to increased incomes.

In Italy, fisher families have received support to diversify into pescatourism; in Tunisia, support has been provided for fish product value addition to low-value species (for example sardines) to create viable income-generating activities and promote sustainable fisheries. Another goal has been to teach women about processing alien species and setting up a women-led association.

For European Union countries, support to diversification can be provided through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). Grants from this fund can support fishers in the initial phases of diversification. The World Wildlife Fund has provided assistance to fishers in writing applications and filling in the required forms, as well as with regard to co-funding.

## **Conclusions**

The experiences shared by fishers and fish workers across the Mediterranean show that there is great potential for successful diversification and that fishing families are interested in exploring such opportunities. However, there is often a need for political, economic and technical support, including with regard to business planning and marketing, to ensure sustainable businesses. It is also important to create an enabling environment, in the form of a legislative framework that allows for diversification. Italy, for example, has enacted legislation for pescatourism.