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Summary Report Fish-X High-level event at the EU Parliament

Small-scale fisheries turning digital: how to do it right?

Wednesday, 23 April 2025, 10:00-11:30 CEST





From left to right: Jana Stünkel (TransMarTech S-H, Fish-X coordinator), Laure Guillevic (WWF EU), MEP Željana Zovko, Nelson Caracol (Portuguese small-scale fisher), Marko Kožul (Croatian small-scale fisher), Eckehard Reussner (Head of unit C4, DG Mare, EU Commission).



From left to right: MEP Željana Zovko, Nelson Caracol (Portuguese small-scale fisher), Marko Kožul (Croatian small-scale fisher), Eckehard Reussner (Head of unit C4, DG Mare, EU Commission).



From left to right: Jana Stünkel (Trans Mar Tech, Fish-X coordinator), MEP Stéphanie Yon-Courtin, Laure Guillevic (WWF EU)

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Background information

The high-level event was initiated by the Fish-X project and organised by WWF European Policy Office (EPO). Željana Zovko (EPP, Croatia) and Stéphanie Yon-Courtin (Renew, France), Members of the European Parliament, kindly co-hosted the event.

The event unpacked the provisions of the EU revised Fisheries Control Regulation (EU) 2023/2842 related to small-scale fisheries, specifically with regards to the Article 9 on Vessel monitoring systems (VMS) which should become mandatory for all vessels by 2030. Based on the pioneering case studies from three sea basins (Baltic, Atlantic, Mediterranean), the event exposed the challenges and opportunities of the digital transition for the fisheries sector, maritime authorities, research and regulators when it comes to data collection, exchange and storage. Fishers' acceptance and literacy towards digital tools will also be discussed together with the multi-use of digital innovation for maritime spatial planning and fisheries management.

This event forms part of a series of Fish-X events to mobilise and engage with stakeholders involved in the digitalisation of the SSF sector. More information about Fish-X can be found on social media ([LinkedIn](#)), its [website](#) or by subscribing to the [newsletter](#).

The Power Point presentation and some pictures of the event are [accessible here](#).

Here is a [Bluesky thread](#) and a [LinkedIn post](#) from the WWF European Policy Office capturing some of the main points of the discussion.



Acknowledgement

The Fish-X consortium would like to thank the two Members of the European Parliament who co-hosted the event, Željana Zovko and Stéphanie Yon-Courtin and their Accredited Parliamentary Assistants (APA), Daria Knezevic and Clément Chaillou. We would like to thank the four speakers: Jana Stünkel, Eckehard Reussner, Marko Kožul and Nelson Caracol. The Fish-X consortium is also thankful to Laure Guillevic for moderating the event. The summary report was drafted by Luca Eufemia (WWF MMI) and Laure Guillevic (WWF EPO) and reviewed by Fish-X partners.

The speakers included (in the order of appearance):

- **Željana Zovko**, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Committee on Fisheries, European People's Party, Croatia
- **Jana Stünkel**, Fish-X Coordinator, TransMarTech S-H
- **Eckehard Reussner**, Head of Unit C4 (Fisheries Data Management) at DG MARE, EU Commission
- **Marko Kožul**, Small-scale fisher, Croatia
- **Nelson Caracol**, Small-scale fisher, Portugal
- **Stéphanie Yon-Courtin**, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Fisheries, Renew, France

The event was moderated by **Laure Guillevic**, Ocean Policy Officer, WWF European Policy Office.



Discussion

The conference opened with a speech by **Željana Zovko, Member of the European Parliament (Croatia)**, who emphasised the importance of digitalising small-scale fisheries (SSF) to promote social justice. Small-scale fishers are not only the backbone of our coastal communities, but they are the stewards of tradition, local food systems, and sustainable ways of life. And yet today, they find themselves at a crossroads – caught between increasing regulation, environmental pressures, and unfair competition from third countries. She encouraged us to simplify reporting processes for fishers, making it easier to declare catches, comply with rules, and ultimately help protect our marine resources. She introduced the Fish-X project as a trust-building initiative between fishers and the EU supporting small-scale fishers to become more digital and more competitive. She also addressed the challenges SSF faced due to international competition, particularly from third countries, and underscored the relevance of the EU Green Deal.

Laure Guillevic (WWF) then introduced **Jana Stünkel, Project Coordinator of Fish-X**, who presented the project's scope and progress over the past three years. Jana Stünkel stressed the role of digital tools in bringing transparency and fairness to SSF and introduced the nine consortium partners involved. She referenced the EU Control Regulation, which requires SSF to install tracking devices on board and to report their catches by electronic means. Over the three years, a total of 104 monitoring devices were deployed on 104 vessels in Ireland, Portugal, and Croatia, with positive feedback from fishers.

She outlined three key technological tools developed under Fish-X:

- **Fish-X Data Space:** Developed with a technology readiness level (TRL) of 6–7, the Data Space allows for secure data exchange, collection and storage.
- **Insight Platform:** An AI-powered tool for visualising fishing locations, with a TRL of 7.



- **Traceability App:** Enables fishers, suppliers and consumers to track seafood products along the seafood supply chain, with a TRL of 5 at the project's conclusion.

Jana Stünkel emphasised the value of ongoing collaboration with SSF and the need for continued engagement beyond the project's official end. Lessons learned include the importance of demonstrating benefits to fishers and strengthening stakeholder cooperation to drive fair and sustainable digital transformation.

Eckehard Reussner, C4 Head of unit at DG MARE, followed by emphasising the EU's support for digitalisation through the implementation of Regulation 2023/2842. He detailed the new digital logbook requirements for small-scale vessels, including data points such as catches, discards, species, gear used, and location. He noted that the new mobile app—currently in development and set for release in Q1 2028—will be user-friendly and supported by training for fishers.

The conference then featured testimonies from two SSF representatives:

Marko Kožul (Croatia) is a small-scale fisher based in the Velebit Channel. His journey in fishing began in childhood, when he started going out to sea with his grandfather and father. Today, he is a professional fisher, using bottom longlines, nets, and traps in his daily work. He also owns a pescaturism licence.

He joined the pilot testing of Fish-X to try out the two devices (VMS and e-gear markers) to improve the monitoring the movement of his vessel and buoys, while suggesting some improvements for the devices that would be useful in fishing at night and in some bad weather conditions. He acknowledged the usefulness of these devices to fish more sustainably with greater control of all vessels and to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.



Nelson Caracol (Portugal) is a small-scale fisher from the Algarve. Fishing has always been part of his life; he started going to sea with his father and became a professional at 16 years old. For the past five years, he has focused mainly on octopus fishing using traps. He represents an association of 18 vessels and spoke positively about the vessel tracking devices used in the Fish-X project. He praised the solar-powered, low-maintenance equipment and the emergency button to improve fishers' safety at sea. He noted that data collected helped his community protect fishing grounds and support management decision-making such as fishing closures to let the fish biomass reproduce itself and benefit from the spillover effects.

During the Q&A session, key points included:

- Challenges in equipping vessels under 12 meters with monitoring devices, prompting the development of alternative mobile applications (now used by over 2,000 fishers).
- Jana Stünkel identified the Insight Platform as the most promising tool for scaling up, particularly for applications like maritime spatial planning.
- Brian O'Riordan from the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LFIE) highlighted the need for fair SSF product labelling and market access, noting that some countries restrict direct sales outside auctions.
- A participant asked how older fishers were encouraged to adopt the tools. The response emphasised targeting those most in need who were already preparing for regulatory compliance.
- Eckehard Reussner clarified that regulatory simplification is a priority, and digitalization will proceed despite initial challenges.
- Jana Stünkel added that policy recommendations would be published by the end of May and that further development, including an EMFAF application, is underway.
- In a final exchange, Laure Guillevic asked Nelson Caracol what should come next. He responded that ensuring sustainable fish populations is key so that fishers know when and where to fish without compromising future resources.



The conference concluded with remarks from **MEP Stephanie Yon-Courtin** (Renew, France), who congratulated the Fish-X team and participating fishers. She acknowledged the scepticism around digitalisation in the fisheries sector but stressed its potential and benefits to support sustainability and empower SSF. She highlighted three pillars essential when working with fishers – engagement, acceptance, transition – and pointed out that data-sharing can create win-win outcomes for policymaking, fishers and sustainable practices. She also shared positive examples from her home region Normandy in France and committed to further promoting these initiatives in future reports.



Annex 1: List of the Fish-X partners attending the event

- Andrew Thorsen - TMT
- Ankith Kumar Kariyanakatte Vinayakumar – TMT
- Brian O’Riordan – Low Impact Fishers of Europe
- Camille Gilissen - WWF EPO
- Jana Stünkel - TMT
- Joana Oliveira - WWF Portugal
- Igor Gladkov - EUTECH
- Jacob Armstrong - WWF EPO
- Jean-Pierre Cauzac - CLS
- Laure Guillevic - WWF EPO
- Luca Eufemia - WWF Mediterranean
- Hrvoje Čeprija - WWF Adria
- Marcel Louwers - north.io
- Malte Blödorn - EUTECH
- Nicolas Blanc - Sciaena
- Raquel Pereira - Sciaena
- Rita Sá - WWF Portugal
- Sylvie Giraud ep Saint-Albin – CLS
- Yassine Atter - CLS