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Practical experience and lessons learned from participation of small-scale fishers in Advisory Councils (ACs) Workshop Conclusions

The small-scale fishers of Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden, together with invited guests and LIFE staff, have met in Hamburg on 2 October in a workshop to discuss the lessons from their involvement in the work of Baltic and North Sea Advisory Councils (BSAC and NSAC). The discussions lead to the conclusions outlined below.

1. Re-balance fisheries interests in Advisory Councils; ensure that small-scale fishers' voice is heard and heeded

Since the beginning of ACs functioning, a domination of large scale interests has ensued and persisted, largely due to delayed, insufficient and in some cases non-existent self-representation of the small-scale sector. This is changing now with LIFE's and its Members' activities. A continued support for this involvement is central to making a lasting positive impact on decisions affecting small-scale fishers' livelihoods.

2. Make the most of existing legal possibilities; continue the capacity-building

EU legislation currently in force¹ provides some good opportunities to reach Conclusion 1, such as: ExCom expansion from 25 to 30 members, additional compensation for attending meetings, use of the funds available for interpretation in ACs' budgets. These options must be used in practice within the relevant Advisory Councils to improve their working conditions for small-scale fishers, and coupled with continued capacity-building activities.

3. Local Ecological Knowledge of small-scale fishers can add great value to ACs' work and improve the CFP practice

Small-scale fishers possess the practical knowledge from their daily operations at sea, often scientifically referred as Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK). The discussions in ACs and their advice to decision-makers have not yet fully benefitted from this kind of knowledge. More emphasis on LEK in ACs work will help in filling the frameworks provided by EU legislation (such as Multiannual Plans) with smart and practice-based regional and local solutions to real issues faced by fish stocks and fisheries.

4. Involve local authorities and bodies in strengthening small-scale fisheries

Coastal communities cannot last without viable small-scale fisheries. Their market motto is: *"quality not quantity"*, making their business model completely different

¹ In particular, Commission Delegated Regulation 2015/242 of 9 October 2014 laying down detailed rules on the functioning of the Advisory Councils under the Common Fisheries Policy

from that of large-scale sector, part of a globalized quantity-based FMCG trade. To remain the backbone of their communities, small-scale fishers must be able to tell the powerful story behind their produce to a consumer willing to pay extra for their sustainable & low impact, fresh & top-quality, locally fished & traditional products. Local authorities (municipalities in particular) and bodies (such as FLAGs) should prioritize ensuring a decent marketplace for their small-scale fishers, if the coastal communities are to survive and develop long-term.

5. Build and implement a strategic vision for fisheries and the corresponding policy

The ultimate objective of small-scale fishers' involvement in ACs is a lasting change of the Common Fisheries Policy, which hitherto has largely been about reacting to conservation risks to marine resources, rather than proactively shaping the future of fisheries. It is high time that small-scale, low impact fishers, a large majority of fishers in Europe, respond to the challenges their profession faces.

This is best done by elaborating a vision of the future in which the fish stocks and their habitats are safe, the small-scale fisheries low impact, sustainable and profitable, thus benefitting their coastal communities. Therefore, in the next CFP review, we need from decision-makers, among many others, a long hard look at ACs' functioning, to make sure they represent a full picture of the sector, with the proper recognition of the crucial role small-scale fishers play in their coastal communities.