

Fisheries & Biodiversity Conservation

Cross
Gov

Roadmap to Enhanced
Policy Coherence

Marine
Strategic
Framework
Directive

Common
Fisheries Policy

Biodiversity
Strategy for 2030

European
Green Deal

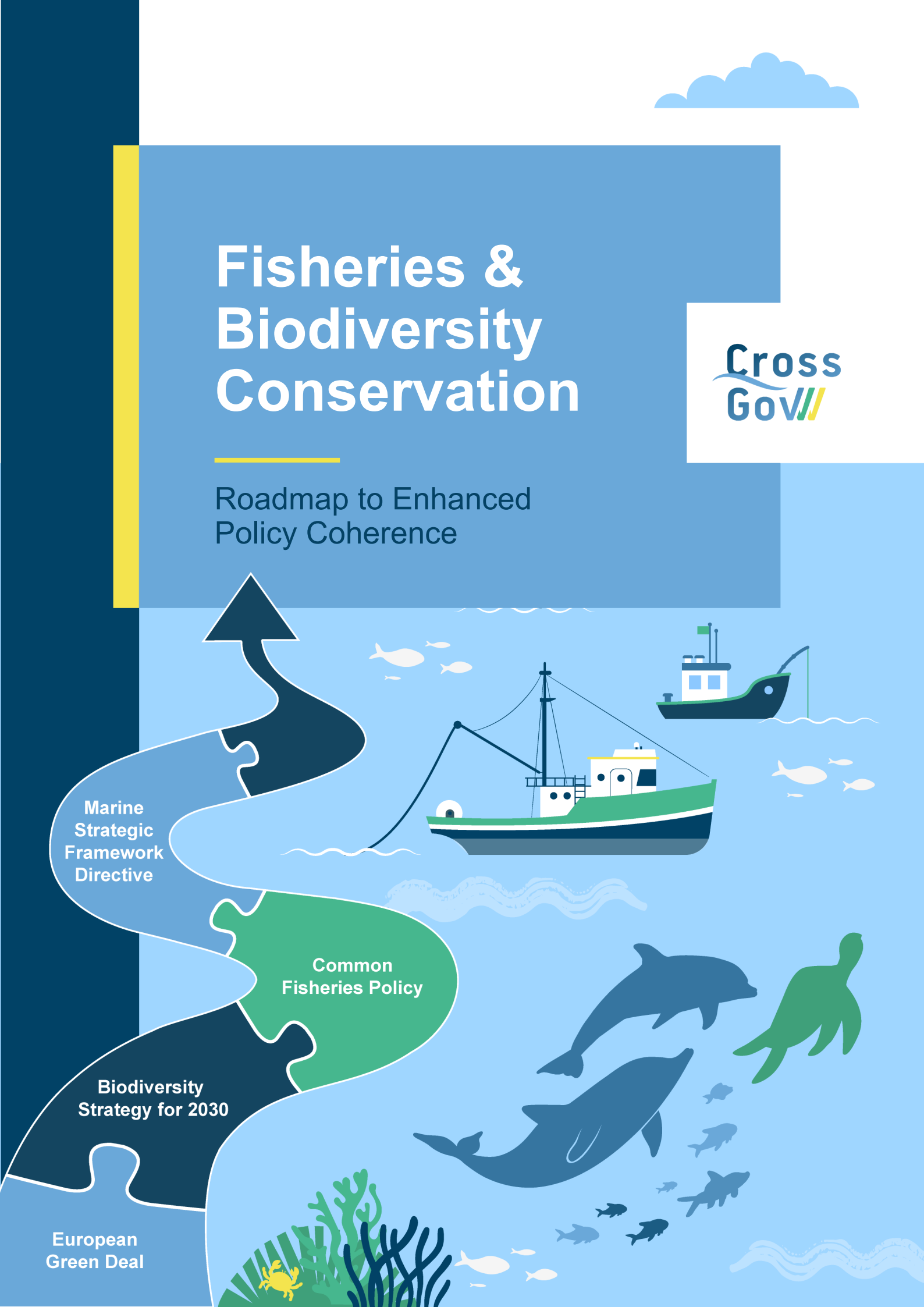


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Roadmap Summary

The European Union has set ambitious targets through the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, aiming to reverse biodiversity loss and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. Healthy marine ecosystems are central to these goals, playing a critical role in climate regulation, food security, and the livelihoods of coastal communities. However, the EU's marine environment continues to face significant pressures, including from unsustainable fishing practices.

While both fisheries policy, primarily governed through the **Common Fisheries Policy**, and biodiversity policy, anchored in instruments like the **EU Biodiversity Strategy**, the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** and the **Habitats and Birds Directives**, seek to promote sustainable marine resource use, the sectoral policies operate under distinct legal mandates and governance structures, creating challenges for coherent action at the EU, regional sea, and national levels.

This **roadmap examines policy coherence between fisheries and biodiversity policies in the EU**, identifying key governance and implementation challenges. Drawing on case studies and stakeholder insights from the Mediterranean Sea, it outlines **practical recommendations for improving policy coherence** and ultimately advancing both a sustainable fishing industry and a healthy marine environment.

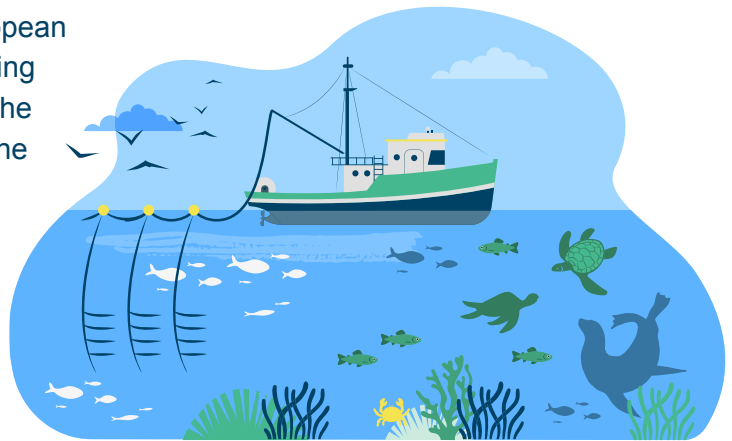


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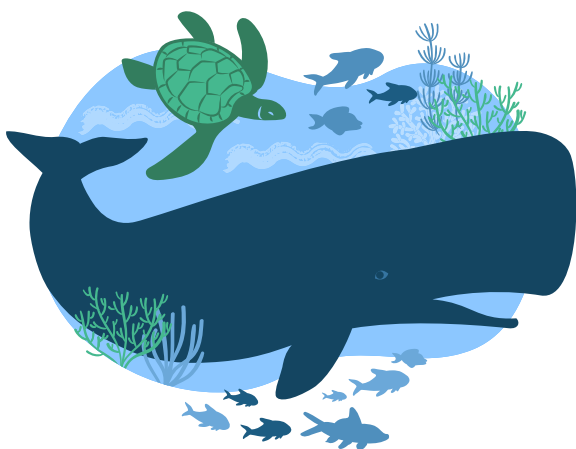
Striving for sustainable fisheries and a healthy marine environment in the European Union

Launched in 2019, the **European Green Deal** aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 while fostering a sustainable economy that prioritises environmental health and human well-being. As a part of the Green Deal, the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** aims to put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030. Central to both policies is the ocean, which is critical to achieving the European Union's environmental goals.

The **Common Fisheries Policy**, the European Union's primary regulatory framework for fishing and aquaculture, traces its origins back to the Treaty of Rome (1958). Since its inception, the policy has undergone significant change. In 1983, environmental measures, in the form of conserving and managing fish stocks, were integrated into the policy for the first time. The current framework, resulting from the latest 2013 reform, aims to ensure that EU fisheries are **economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable**. The policy serves as the key instrument for aligning fisheries management with the objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy .



Ambitions to protect biodiversity in the EU



The European Union's biodiversity vision is ambitious: a world where ecosystems, from coastal wetlands to the deep ocean, are restored to health, resilient to future shocks, and safeguarded for future generations. One of the potentially most transformative commitments is to designate at least 30% of marine areas in the EU as legally protected zones by 2030. This includes strict protection for at least 10% of all waters.

The **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** recognises that fisheries management is integral to the conservation of marine biodiversity, stating that “fish stocks are key to the long-term prosperity of fishermen and the health of our oceans and biodiversity”. The Strategy outlines measures critical to the protection of fish stocks, such as reducing or eliminating by-catch to support the recovery of threatened species, establishing conservation-based fishery management plans in marine protected areas, and maintaining or, where necessary, reducing maximum sustainable yield levels.

The **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** serves as the primary legislative tool to protect the marine environment. Under the Directive, EU Member States are required to achieve **good environmental status** in their marine waters. **Descriptor 1** of the Directive directly addresses biodiversity, mandating that the long-term viability of species should be ensured, by observing the mortality rates and abundance of species, as well as their distribution and several other characteristics, such as body size and age.

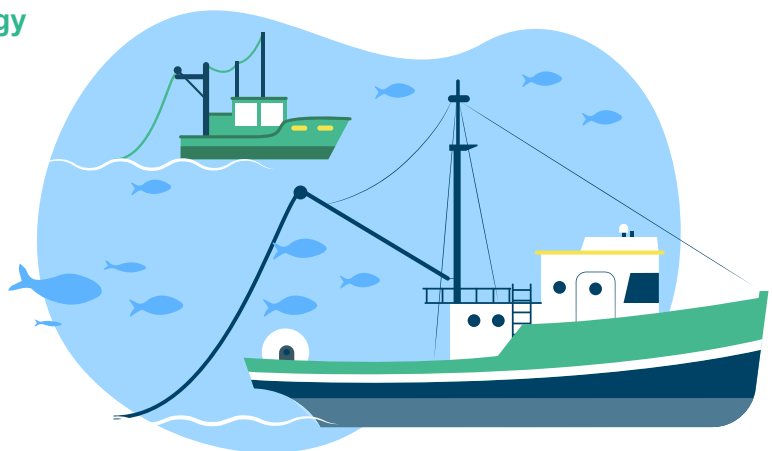
Fisheries management in the EU

The core policy for regulating fisheries management in the EU is the **Common Fisheries Policy**. The policy’s regulatory scope is multifaceted: it regulates the sustainable management of fisheries and the fleets that exploit those resources, while also extending into markets and financial measures, including aquaculture and the processing and marketing of fish products

The Common Fisheries Policy mandates the **precautionary approach** to fisheries management, meaning that conservation measures to preserve fish stocks, such as setting limits on how many fish can be caught or protecting specific species, should be taken before serious damage to the marine environment is caused. Further, the newest iteration of the policy from 2013, outlines that an **ecosystem-based approach** to fisheries management should be implemented to ensure that the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem are minimised. Further, it is outlined in the policy that steps should be taken to make fisheries policy coherent with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Descriptor 3 of the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** directly addresses fisheries, mandating that all commercially exploited fish stocks must be healthy and not declining.

The Directive requires fisheries to be managed following an ecosystem-based approach and aims to support the integration of environmental concerns into other policies, such as the Common Fisheries Policy.



B

Sustainable fisheries and biodiversity policy: Barriers to coherence

The current state of policy coherence between fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the EU reveals both signs of progress and persisting challenges. While measures to increase coherence exist, challenges in implementation continue:

Article 11 of the Common Fisheries Policy: Complicating the ability of Member States to enact conservation measures

Although environmental objectives have been incorporated into the **Common Fisheries Policy**, fisheries management is yet to align in practice with the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive**. While Member States are legally required to achieve good environmental status under the directive, their ability to implement fisheries regulations within their Exclusive Economic Zones is constrained in areas beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast.

Article 11 of the Common Fisheries Policy states that a Member State may adopt conservation measures in its own waters to comply with EU environmental directives, provided that the measures do not affect fishing vessels from other EU Member States. However, beyond 12 nautical miles, fishing vessels from other EU Member States have equal access to fisheries resources. For that reason, the possibility to enact fisheries measures to ensure a good environmental status of the marine waters beyond 12 nautical miles is limited.

The country implementing the measure is required to submit a joint recommendation with the other affected Member States or request the Commission to act. This requirement has led to Article 11 being highly ineffective and falling short of its goals. Attempts to enact Article 11 have led to drawn-out procedures, high levels of bureaucracy and watered-down action. Currently, only a few Member States have utilised the tool because it is complicated and time-consuming, which ultimately has led to limited environmental protection in waters beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast.

Sustainability provisions in the Common Fisheries Policy: Gaps in implementation

The Common Fisheries Policy contains **direct provisions to manage the impact of fisheries on the environment and protect biodiversity**. These include

fishing quotas, temporary fishing bans by season or area, and regulations on fishing gear. These measures have proven to be effective if limits and restrictions that support sustainable fish stocks are set and implemented. However, to date, these measures have not been able to eliminate overfishing in European waters. While good examples do exist, catch limits have not always been effective due the lack of reliable data on the level at which they should be set. Further, public authorities have been reluctant to take up gear restrictions and temporary fishing bans, by season or zone of interest, due to lengthy administrative procedures and pressure from the fishing industry.



C An attempt to increase coherence: The EU Marine Action Plan

In response to the shortcomings laid out above and the desire and need to accelerate the shift to more sustainable fishing practices, the European Commission published the **EU Marine Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries** (2023). The action plan is part of the Commission's efforts to implement the EU's environmental and fisheries policy coherently. The plan includes provisions on reducing the catch of juvenile fish, using technology to prevent the catch of sensitive species, and phasing out bottom fishing in marine protected areas. Interviews conducted by CrossGov reveal that Directorate-Generals within the Commission view the Marine Action Plan as a critical tool for achieving results. To date, however, the plan has not gathered the necessary political support outside of the Commission to be consistently effective, leading to mixed results in its implementation.

D Policy coherence at the regional seas level

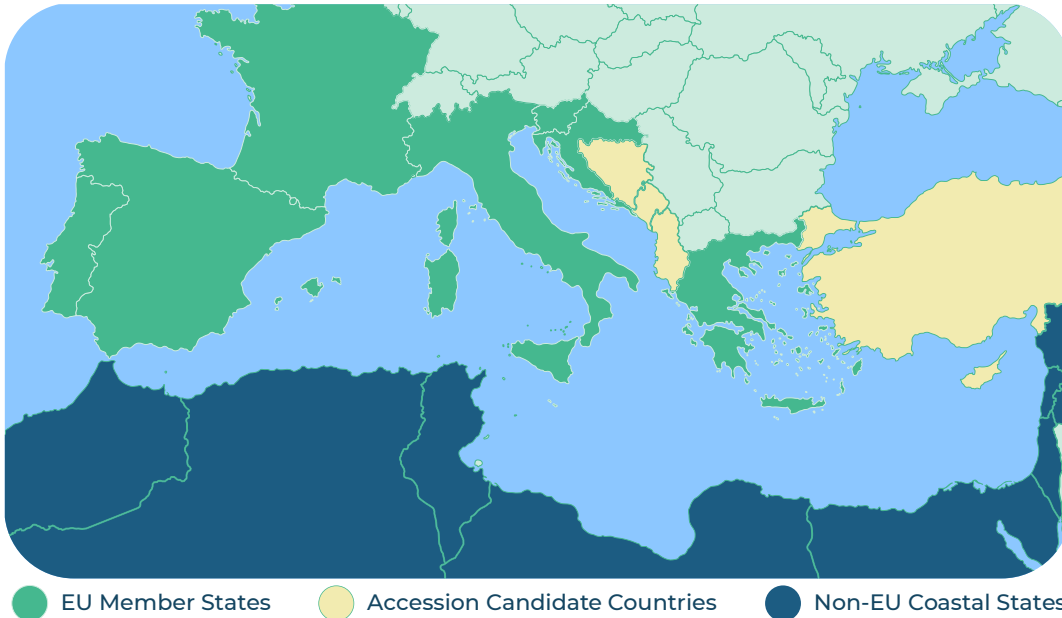
Fisheries Policy is implemented at the regional and national levels through a **shared governance system** involving international frameworks, the EU, Member States and regional bodies. **At the sea basin level**, the Common Fisheries Policy encourages **regional cooperation** to allow for a more tailored and effective management of fisheries. Regional bodies address sea basin specific environmental and fisheries challenges and allow for a broad range of authorities and stakeholders to participate in the fisheries management process. The following section explores policy coherence between fisheries management and biodiversity protection in the Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea is a **global biodiversity hotspot** facing mounting pressures. Climate change is causing acidification and warming, which is displacing fish species and leading to fish die-offs. Further, overfishing has led to the over exploitation of more than 60% of Mediterranean fish stocks. While nearly 10% of the Mediterranean is designated as marine protected areas, only 1% is appropriately managed, leaving much of the region's rich biodiversity vulnerable to exploitation (WWF Mediterranean: [Fisheries](#) & [MPAs](#)).

Stretching across **22 countries**, eight of which are EU Member States, the Mediterranean's policy landscape is complex. Around the Mediterranean, countries can be placed into three groups:

- 1 EU Member States**, which are bound by the core EU policies on biodiversity and fisheries
- 2 Countries at various stages of EU accession**, which are gradually aligning parts of their legal frameworks with EU legislation but not bound by EU law.
- 3 Countries not subject to EU law**, the nine remaining Mediterranean countries which are not bound by EU policy on biodiversity and fisheries



In sea basins like the Mediterranean, which include both EU and non-EU countries, the application of EU policies on fisheries and biodiversity is limited to EU Member States, making policy alignment more challenging. To govern fisheries and biodiversity across the entire Mediterranean Sea, mechanisms at the international level (i.e. under the United Nations), have been developed. Aimed at supporting fisheries management and biodiversity protection, these frameworks are necessary to align both EU and non-EU countries in the region.

Policy Framework in the Mediterranean

The key biodiversity and fisheries frameworks for the Mediterranean are the following:

- **The Barcelona Convention** is the overarching environmental policy umbrella addressing biodiversity. It is administered through the United Nations Environmental Programme Mediterranean Action Plan.
- **The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and Black Seas**, operating under the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, manages fisheries across the Mediterranean and counts 22 countries and the EU as its contracting parties.
- **The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas** oversees the management of tuna and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

Coherence with European Union Policy



Efforts have been made to ensure policy coherence between the Mediterranean level policies and EU level policies on biodiversity and fisheries

- The Barcelona Convention's **Post-2020 Strategic Action Plan for Biodiversity** is central to aligning the region's biodiversity objectives with the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**. The plan echoes that 30% of marine areas should be protected by 2030, though it does not stipulate that 10% should be under strict protection.
- The **Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme**, one of the implementing arms of the Barcelona Convention, closely mirrors the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive**, including the definition of **Good Environmental Status** and related ecological objectives.
- The **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean 2030 Strategy**, the principal fisheries strategy in the Mediterranean, aligns with the **Common Fisheries Policy** to ensure the sustainable management of fisheries and reduce the environmental impacts of fishing. As the EU is itself a contracting partner in the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, the EU helps shape the policy, seeking to align it with the rules and standards set out in the Common Fisheries Policy.
- While the **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean's recommendations** are not automatically binding under EU law, the **EU transposes them through annual Commission Implementing Acts**, which set fishing opportunities (i.e., annual catch limits). The result of this is that recommendations from the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean are **legally binding for EU Member States in the region**.

Successes in the Mediterranean: What can other regions learn?



→ Fishery Restriction Measures: Bridging sustainable fisheries and marine conservation

The establishment of new **Fishery Restricted Areas**, in combination with the **lowering of fishing quotas**, the implementation of **seasonal closures**, **reducing by-catch** and **managing gear**, by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean has contributed to a **31% reduction in overexploited stocks** over the past decade (FAO: [The State of Mediterranean Fisheries](#)). A minority of the designated Fishery Restricted Areas are now being considered for designation as **Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures**. This recognition would allow them to count toward the goal of protecting 30% of marine waters by 2030. This action would then also support not only sustainable fisheries, but conservation targets, contributing directly to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Barcelona Convention.

→ Species Action Plans: Protecting vulnerable species and ensuring sustainable fisheries

Recent research projects such as **MedByCatch** and **Depredation** highlight the concrete benefits of enhanced cooperation between bodies under the **Barcelona Convention** and the **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean**. These joint efforts have led to the development and update of species action plans. In turn, the fishing commission has taken these plans into account in its decision making, ensuring that vulnerable species are consistently protected. These actions have helped to ensure that conservation and fisheries policies are aligned when it comes to the protection of vulnerable fish species.

→ Successful management measures for the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna

The **International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna** provides a strong example of how governance, science-based management, and strict compliance mechanisms can lead to the recovery of overexploited fish stocks. The commission's approach includes robust quota systems, monitoring and control measures, and the integration of scientific advice into decision-making. These **sustainability measures** directly contribute to reducing pressures on the Atlantic Bluefin Tuna populations in the Mediterranean Sea. The organisational models and technical strategies implemented by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas provide lessons to be learned for other fisheries in the Mediterranean and the EU

E Policy coherence at the national level

The **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean** issues recommendations for geographic areas, which result in management plans for specific fisheries. At the EU level, these recommendations then feed into **Commission Implementing Acts** set by the European Commission, which define yearly fishing opportunities (i.e., annual catch limits). Through this process, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean's recommendations are directly integrated into the Common Fisheries Policy, which makes them obligatory immediately for all EU Member States.

Therefore, at the national level in the Mediterranean, **EU Member States** are **responsible for implementing both the recommendations of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the Common Fisheries Policy**. The following section explores two EU cases of policy coherence in the Mediterranean: The Northern Adriatic Sea in Italy and the French Mediterranean.

The Italian Northern Adriatic Sea

The Northern Adriatic Sea is a key area for fisheries in Europe, shaped by the mixing of freshwater inflows from five Italian rivers and saltwater. While the fisheries sector has a deep socio-economic importance in the region, it also exerts significant pressure on the marine ecosystem, particularly through bottom trawling and hydraulic dredging. Additionally, small-scale fisheries target a diverse range of species, presenting challenges for their management.



Key policies, planning instruments & tools



- The **National Triennial Programme for Fisheries and Aquaculture** provides strategic policy direction in Italy and is guided by overarching goals linked to the Common Fisheries Policy: the advancement of sustainable fisheries (by reducing fleets' capacity and intensifying control over Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing) and the achievement of Maximum Sustainable Yield in all commercially exploited fish stocks.
- The **National Management Plans** adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forestry constitute also key instruments through which the Ministry manages specific fishing techniques (e.g. hydraulic dredging and trawling), while also regulating (e.g. through fishing bans, fishing permits, regulation of minimum landing size of catches, gears selectivity) their impacts on marine ecosystems and biodiversity.
- The **National Operational Programme under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund** is the key financial tool for implementing fisheries policy. It provides funding to a wide range of actors, including public authorities, fishers and producer organisations to support the transition to **sustainable fishing practices**. Further, in its aim to ensure sustainable fishing, it directly contributes to **Descriptor 3** of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which states that all commercially exploited fishing stocks should be healthy and not declining.
- The **Maritime Spatial Plan for the Adriatic** incorporates objectives and measures that support sustainable fisheries into its framework. These include **spatial protections and area-based planning**, which help ensure that fisheries and environmental goals are both considered.

Successes in the Northern Adriatic: What can other countries learn?



→ Involving Fisheries Local Action Groups & local stakeholders

The **Northern Adriatic Fishing District** and **Fisheries Local Action Groups**, funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund, play a crucial role in facilitating shared management of fisheries in the Northern Adriatic. While the **Fishing District** promotes partnerships with producers and businesses in the fisheries sector to propose actions for sustainable fisheries management, **Fisheries Local Action Groups** have the potential to play a pivotal role in the integration of biodiversity objectives and sustainable fishing.

In collaboration with research institutes and NGOs, Fisheries Local Action Groups in the Northern Adriatic have, for example, contributed to biodiversity projects such as those on the protection of Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*). Further, the local fisheries groups have been involved in the development of management plans for two marine Natura 2000 sites located in front of the Po Delta. These examples showcase how joint action for sustainable fisheries and the marine environment can have a potential positive impact when local stakeholders are involved and empowered in the decision-making process.

→ Using EU directives as integrative tools

The **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** and **Maritime Spatial Planning Directive** provide a framework for better integrating fisheries and biodiversity policies. Cross-referencing these policy goals has the potential to foster more coherence and integration. The **Maritime Spatial Plan for the Adriatic** contains objectives and measures on fisheries, which are closely aligned with those of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, furthering coherence. This includes, for example, the goal to promote cooperation between small-scale fisheries operators and marine protected area managers to improve the co-management of Marine Protected Areas.

The French Mediterranean

As in the Northern Adriatic Sea, fishing is deeply embedded into the cultural identity of France's Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. In this region, 20% of fish stocks are overfished, and 2% have collapsed. This has resulted in increased pressure on marine ecosystems and local fisheries. With the added strain of climate change and increased economic activity at sea, there is a recognised need for coherent policies that align environmental protection with sustainable fisheries management.



Key policies, planning instruments & tools



- The French **National Action Plan for Sustainable Fisheries (2022)** aligns with France's broader maritime policies and the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund**. The action plan provides a strategic framework to improve knowledge of fish stocks and modernise the sector.
- **France's National Operational Programme under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund** distributes funds to fisheries stakeholders, prioritising the realisation of sustainable fisheries. The plan outlines eleven objectives, one of which specifically addresses biodiversity protection. This is a shift from previous versions of the programme which were entirely centred on economic development and competitiveness of the sector.
- **Management plans for various fishing techniques**, such as dredging, implement recommendations from the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and thus the Common Fisheries Policy. These plans aim to ensure the sustainable exploitation of stocks and marine ecosystems.

Successes in the French Mediterranean: What can other countries learn?



- **Developing a science-policy interface**
To support the coherence between biodiversity policies and fisheries, the French transposition of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive includes spatial maps and tools that track both activities at sea and indicate how biodiversity conservation and economic use of the sea can be coordinated. These maps and tools support improved decision-making based on both conservation and economic objectives, strengthening coherence between biodiversity and fisheries policies
- **Temporal fishing bans to support biodiversity goals**
The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean has defined **two Fisheries Restricted Areas** in the French Mediterranean Sea. One small zone is completely restricted to fisheries, and the other to demersal fishing for certain months each year. These restricted areas have had a very positive impact on hake stocks, which had previously collapsed, reducing catches by 57%.
- **Conditional funding from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund**
The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund operational programme is aligned with the priorities of the French transposition of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. A clear mention is made to the science-policy interface: "Priority will be given to projects that include a dimension of improving knowledge of the impact of climate change on stocks of interest to fisheries". As a driving force behind current fishing practices, funding can support biodiversity protection objectives by adding environmental conditionalities as prerequisites for eligibility.

The following recommendations co-developed within the CrossGov project highlight actions to improve coherence of fisheries and biodiversity policy at the European Union and national levels:



Strengthen Alignment Between Fisheries Policy and Biodiversity Objectives

To maximise conservation outcomes, fisheries regulations, such as gear restrictions, catch limits, temporal closures, and no-take zones, should be more directly aligned with biodiversity targets. Clearer integration of these objectives can ensure that fisheries management actively contributes to biodiversity goals.



Enhance Stakeholder Participation Across Sectors

At the national level, actively involving fisheries stakeholders, particularly small-scale operators, in biodiversity policy implementation can foster shared ownership and lead to more integrated, practical solutions. At the EU level, initiatives like the EU Marine Action Plan and the forthcoming European Ocean Pact can play a pivotal role in facilitating cross-sector engagement. For instance, the newly established working group under the EU Action Plan brings together fisheries and environmental authorities to support more coordinated governance.



Promote Cross-Sector Collaboration to Map Vulnerable Ecosystems and Key Habitats

Enhanced collaboration between environmental authorities and the fisheries sector is essential to identify and map vulnerable marine ecosystems and essential fish habitats. This shared effort can support the designation of Fishery Restricted Areas and the implementation of Other Effective Area Based Conservation Measures.



Leverage Existing Coordination Platforms, such as Fisheries Local Action Groups

Established mechanisms such as Fisheries Local Action Groups offer valuable opportunities to integrate biodiversity considerations into fisheries policy discussions. In regions like the Mediterranean, cooperation projects involving a wide range of stakeholders have proven effective despite geopolitical challenges and should be further encouraged and expanded.



Align Funding Instruments with Biodiversity Goals

Currently, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund does not fully incentivise sustainable fishing practices. While enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Strategy Framework Directive remains largely regulatory, funding is ultimately a key driver of fishing behaviour. Introducing environmental conditionalities for accessing funds could ensure stronger alignment between financial incentives and biodiversity conservation objectives.

Conclusion

Achieving sustainable fisheries and robust marine biodiversity in the European Union requires stronger policy coherence between environmental and fisheries frameworks. While instruments like the Common Fisheries Policy and Marine Strategy Framework Directive have made strides, implementation gaps and structural challenges limit their effectiveness. Encouraging regional collaboration, science-based management, and stakeholder engagement, as seen in the Mediterranean, offers valuable lessons. Integrating biodiversity objectives directly into fisheries governance and aligning funding with environmental goals will be critical. Ultimately, a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach is essential to ensure healthy oceans and resilient fisheries for future generations.

This Roadmap is a result of the CrossGov project which aims to enhance knowledge on how coherence and cross-compliance of marine related policies and legislation affect the ability to realise the EU Green Deal's goals. The roadmap is based on the findings from the following CrossGov publications and reports:

- [Handbook on Policy Coherence: An easy guide to assess and understand policy coherence](#)
- [Mapping EU policies and Green Deal objectives: observations for policy coherence in the marine domain](#)
- [Horizontal coherence in EU law and policy: Analysing, explaining and improving the horizontal coherence of EU policy design,](#)
- Publications within work package three of CrossGov, to be published in fall 2025. Please stay tuned to the [CrossGov website](#) for more information.

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