

REPORT

Meeting: **Conference ‘From Waves to Wisdom: Empowering Fishers through Sustainable Fisheries Training’**

Parties: **‘Catching the Potential’ Project Consortium (Europeche, PVA etc.)**

Date: **21 September 2023**

Location: **European Parliament**

Chair: **MEP Isabel Carvalhais**

Rapporteur: **Tamara Talevska**

The conference was organised in honour of the finalisation of the EMFF project **‘[Catching the Potential](#)’** (CTP) on sustainable fisheries training standard and the inclusion of sustainable fisheries training in the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F).

The Catching the Potential project focuses on developing a standard for sustainable fisheries training to be implemented in the EU. By approaching sustainable fisheries from the **three pillars of sustainable development (People, Planet, Prosperity)**, the project aims to ensure good prospects for fishers, fishing communities and the marine environment through training and certification of fishers in the European Union.

To ensure structural implementation of sustainable fisheries training, the project successfully used the revision of the STCW-F to include sustainable fisheries training in the international training requirements at the IMO with the support of the FAO and ITF. The project contributed to the establishment of adequate and uniform **competence requirements for fishers**. The STCW-F revision will likely be concluded in the fall of 2023.

By undertaking pilot trainings across the various European sea basins, the project managed to develop a **sustainable fisheries training** for the EU. This training is important since the job has drastically changed over the years. As a result, **new knowledge and skills** are required for fishers to enable them to play a key role in the transition towards a more sustainable fishing industry. The training provides a basic understanding of the marine environment, fisheries management, economics, relation with society and various other challenges. Next to the training standard and training materials, the project provides guidelines for trainers and governments to prepare them for the revised STCW-F.

The conference presented a unique opportunity to highlight the value of investing in the competences of fishers, as they play a central role in achieving the sustainability goals set out in the **Common Fisheries Policy**. Investing in the training infrastructure of fishers in the EU does not only enhance the capacities of the people in the industry, but also facilitates the **mutual recognition of certificates and free movement of labour**. Moreover, it emphasizes the pivotal role of EU policy makers in advocating for vocational training, mutual recognition

of certificates, career development, and the growth of a prosperous, societally accepted fishing industry that cares about the well-being of our seas.

The conference was hosted by **Isabel Carvalhais, MEP**. In her opening address, she explained the rationale behind the need for standardised training for sustainable fisheries and investment in fishers' competence. She explained that the current differing national training and certification rules go against the EU's free movement of labour. With guidelines on sustainable fisheries practices, fishing methods, bycatch reduction and alignment of national regulations with international guidelines, she believed STCW-F certification should be hinged upon sustainable fisheries training. The CTP project underlines the need to address all three pillars of sustainability and places special attention to thus far sidelined social sustainability.

A representative from DG MARE Unit A1 on Maritime innovation, Marine Knowledge and Investment, presented on the role of training to improve interactions between fishing and the marine ecosystem. She noted that the CFP highlights the three pillars of sustainability to ensure the continuity of the sector, the environment and the economy.

In her presentation, she underlined that times are changing: increasing competition for space, looming climate change, unfavorable political developments and changing business environment require a shift in knowledge. Traditional methods and know-how will need to adapt to deal with new challenges.

She provided an overview of the policy context:

- **2023 as the European Year of Skills:** addressing skill gaps, focus on digital and green technologies.
- **Fisheries and Oceans Pact:** recognising importance of training skills and training to achieve the three objectives (training to be more efficient, resilient, and safer, to reduce environmental impact and to provide additional and alternative livelihoods, as well as to support the energy transition)

In terms of funding, both **EMFF and EMFAF** recognise the importance of investing in training, professional training, lifelong learning, and dissemination of knowledge.

- Training through Shared management (shared by MS): 21 million EUR
- Funds for direct management ('blue career calls' contributing to development of next generation of blue skills): 10,9 mio EUR

CTP was one of projects funded under EMFF addressing training of fishers. Its main objective was to develop international standard for sustainable fisheries training. She concluded that the sector needs to make use of all available tools and that skills and trainings are crucial for resilience.

Michael Kingston, a Managing Director and [Michael Kingston Associates](#), and **IMO Consultant** for Fishing took the floor to provide an overview of the process of **STCW-F revision**. The first iteration of STCW-F was adopted in 1995, but its ratification has been slacking. There are notable absentees from EU MS, which calls for action. The proposal for STCW-F review came in 2015 and it took 10 years to be concluded (entry into force expected

in 2026). Revision of the structure of STCW-F: it is now divided in STCW convention and Part A (mandatory) and part B (recommendatory). Part A represents minimum standards. New features are:

- Requirement to use simulators;
- Medical standards and certificates for officers in charge of engineering watch
- Division of engine propulsion power for engineer officers
- Detailed requirements for basic training and new requirements for onboard officers

The new STCW-F code provides tables containing specifications of minimum standards of competence for each capacity, function and training requirements.

Kingston also emphasized the need to implement the **Cape Town Agreement** covering

- Safety of Fishing Vessels
- Safety of crew
- Protection of the environment
- Protection of rescue services
- Protection of society – food security
- Fight against IUU
- Creating a base convention for enhanced safety provisions in harsh polar regions

The Cape Town Agreement was established in 2012 but has not entered in force. The treaty will enter into force when at least 22 states, with over 3,600 fishing vessels of 24m in length sign the treaty. As of November 2022, there are 17 contracting States to the agreement which represent approximately 1,925 eligible fishing vessels.

In conclusion, Kingston emphasised the importance of leading by example. In his view, the industry should be leading regulators through proactive rather than reactive approach.

Florence Poulain, Fishery and Aquaculture Officer at FAO, took the floor to talk about the **FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries** from 1995. She noted that safety at sea is a legal, technical and social issue. Together with the ILO and IMO, the FAO produced the Guidelines on safety and decent work with several related products/reports. The FAO code of conduct for responsible fisheries recognizes the importance of Small Scale Fisheries, and underlines improved vessel safety and fishers' health in general.

Poulain reminded that ratification of fisheries instruments is generally lower than in merchant shipping. The recent Committee on fisheries (COFI) welcomed the FAO's capacity building work on decent working conditions and safety at sea (focus on reducing accidents and fatalities), and requested FAO to increase its support to developing countries on fishing safety matters and take the lead on establishing a repository for fisher safety data and accident and mortality information, which the FAO vows to do in collaboration with IMO. The FAO is also to develop model course material for e-learning to be implemented globally. For further information see: <https://www.fao.org/fishing-safety/en/>.

The next speaker was Tim Haasnoot, the director at [ProSea](#) NGO on marine education, who presented the Catching the Potential Project, its collaborative efforts and achievements.

Haasnot noted that fishers' job requirements changed and multilayered profiles are now required. A typical fisher today is required to have knowledge in fisheries, social science, environmentalism, economics, spatial planning, political science, law etc.

The business idea came from realization that training requirements for fisheries were largely absent. Trainings only existed in safety domain, but not for other aspects of the profession. This gap was addressed by the CTP project in collaboration with a number of organisations and institutes, as well as industry representatives. The project is working towards a standard that is generally applicable.

The stages of the project consisted of a desktop study on existing trainings, and creating a network of EU stakeholders. Country-specific trainings were then developed to be tested in pilot projects in 7 Member States. The project saw STCW-F revision as an opportune process for the inclusion of the international standard and implementation strategy. Azorean project was presented as the pilot project by **Alexandra de Carvalho dos Santos Garcia Guerreiro**, where Sea School Azores implemented the training courses.

Overall **results** included:

- 14 pilot trainings (300 fishers, and 20 trainers) in individual MS
- "Train the trainer" approach, with the objective of reaching hundreds of fishers annually

Identified **challenges**:

- Training pathways and requirements differ per MS;
- If STCW-F not ratified by all MS, the revised part also will not come into force;
- There is considerable movement of fishers as labour identified;
- Diverse and complex requirements pose a risk for fishers, other users and the marine environment and could contribute to illegal work and worker exploitation.

Recommendations include:

- maintain and extend educators' network;
- Promote structural implementation of the CTP-Standard in the EU and ratification of STCW-F through a Directive)
- Install a similar mechanism and scheme for mutual recognition of certificates of fishers, as was done for seafarers.

Haasnoot concluded with a reminder that fishers have a crucial part to play in adaptation and maintaining work practices that safeguard marine ecosystems.

In the panel discussion moderated by **Roos Swarts**, the course leader and project manager at ProSea, the panelists shared their experience with the CTP project. It was noted that there are globally many more fishers than seafarers and that the rate of fatal accidents in fisheries is such that four fishers will have died during this conference alone. Only 11 MS have ratified the necessary conventions so far. In relation to this, the EU Commission was urged to step up its work in strengthening the legal framework for fisheries through a directive, as it has been done for seafarers, noting that as it stands, STCW-F is limited in that it only provides guidelines for training of navigational and engineering officers. STCW-F is considered a minimum requirement. The role of EMSA was emphasized, which for merchant shipping is mandated to carry out inspections on behalf of the EU, and where certificates of the inspected country are

recognised in all other countries. It was noted that EMSA should have the same mandate in fisheries certificate of competence. This is necessary to operationalise the freedom of movement of labour. For this reason it was believed that DG MOVE should be involved as well. Other aspects highlighted were that sustainable fisheries means sustainable fishing communities, that the industry should be allowed to lead proactively and that the momentum for change could be created by industry's lobbying IMO through state delegations.

DG MARE representative reassured the participants that the Commission has been calling on MS to ratify STCW-F and that after the final adoption of the text, further legal possibilities will be envisaged. A lot can also be done at national and sub-national levels.

A question from the audience was posed by **LIFE representative** asking about how the role of women in seafaring had been taken into account when developing the standard. The response was that no particular attention was placed on women as the standard is considered to apply to all genders. In general, fishing convention is considered the most appropriate convention to address accommodating gender and religious differences. It was noted that IMO has had a key focus on encouraging the promotion of women in maritime sectors, where a dedicated committee was established to encourage that. Iceland was considered a contemporary best practice example in the inclusion of women in fisheries, where a cultural shift has seen parents encouraging girls to enter the sector. The change occurred also through a change in the narrative and risk profile. By enhancing preparedness to face safety challenges, the sector will become more inviting to younger generations, including women. Determined government action to promote safety and inclusion of women plays a significant role as well.

To keep the momentum alive, a **Resolution by the Project Consortium** was up for signature by the present organization.