

## **Press Releases**

### **ECOFISH EXIT PROGRAMME**

#### **Final Steering Committee of the ECOFISH Programme: A Legacy of Knowledge and Regional Cooperation for Fisheries Sustainability**

**Mauritius – 8 September 2025** – The 7th and final meeting of the Steering Committee of the ECOFISH Programme was held on the September 8 in Mauritius, bringing together Regional Economic Communities, technical and financial partners, as well as implementing partners.

#### **Achievements and Results**

During this final session, partners presented the consolidated achievements of the five work plans and cross-cutting activities of the programme. The results include:

- concrete progress in sustainable fisheries management and regional governance,
- strengthened institutional capacities and partnerships,
- improved livelihoods of fishing communities, and
- the emergence of pilot projects and innovations with potential for replication.

#### **Lessons Learned and Challenges**

The discussions allowed participants to share lessons learned during implementation, notably the importance of stakeholder ownership, the value of regional cooperation, and the need for continuity mechanisms beyond the closure of the programme. Technical, administrative, and logistical challenges were also examined, along with perspectives for integrating the achievements into national and regional frameworks.

#### **A Shared Legacy**

Marc Maminiaina, Officer in Charge of the ECOFISH Programme at the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), who chaired the Steering Committee, stressed that the ECOFISH Programme, launched in 2019, laid the foundations for coherent and sustainable regional fisheries governance. He highlighted concrete progress such as the regional statistical system on the contribution of fisheries to economies, a climate network to anticipate impacts on fisheries, and the relaunch of the Regional Fisheries Surveillance Programme. He recalled the investment of nearly €8 million in nine pilot community projects, transforming the livelihoods of fishers.

*“The future of fisheries in Africa will not be built by simply adding up isolated initiatives. It requires a shared vision, collective commitment, and concerted governance. ECOFISH is a concrete demonstration of this. At the time of closure, our responsibility is clear: to consolidate the gains, ensure their sustainability, and strengthen their institutional integration. It is up to us to make ECOFISH a catalyst for a coherent, coordinated, and forward-looking fisheries governance system.”*

For his part, José Maria Troncoso Perera, Head of Cooperation at the European Union Delegation in Mauritius, the programme's financial partner, recalled that ECOFISH, financed since 2018, embodies Europe's commitment to the sustainability of oceans and lakes, combining science, cooperation, and field action. He insisted on the importance of capitalising on results and ensuring sustainability, making sure every euro spent is justified.

*“One of the foundations of our collective action is cooperation. Marine resources know no borders and, as we know, fisheries and marine ecosystem management are transnational challenges. Our expectation for this final Steering Committee meeting is to ensure that the results of the ECOFISH Programme have a lasting impact, both environmentally and socio-economically.”*

Representatives of AU-IBAR and the Lake Tanganyika Authority respectively praised the work carried out by the programme over recent years.

## Next Steps

ECOFISH partners called for a clear roadmap to strengthen regional fisheries governance. They recommended entrusting political coordination to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), while Regional Fisheries Organisations (RFOs) would focus on technical aspects. Co-management and rights-based reforms must be implemented to empower local actors. An ESA Trust Fund, managed by the RECs, was proposed to ensure sustainable financing. Finally, participants stressed the need to scale up flagship platforms developed by ECOFISH – such as **BEFSA, FIMS, and FPT-CP** – and to promote flexible, modular, results-oriented programming to maximise impact.

The meeting adopted this series of recommendations and validated the ECOFISH exit strategy, ensuring continuity of results and their integration into national, regional, and continental frameworks.

## Glossary

- **BEFSA – Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account**  
→ An accounting and statistical tool that measures the real contribution of the fisheries and aquaculture sector to a country's blue economy.  
It is a satellite account that complements traditional national accounts by integrating

the economic value of fisheries-related activities (production, processing, distribution, employment, etc.) into official statistics.

- **FIMS – Fisheries Information Management System**

→ A regional system for fisheries information management.

It enables the collection, harmonisation, and real-time analysis of fisheries data, supporting decision-making, monitoring, and sustainable resource management.

- **FPT-CP – Fisheries Projects Tracker – Coordination Platform**

→ A tool for tracking and coordinating fisheries-related projects.

It lists and monitors initiatives implemented by RECs, RFOs, and technical and financial partners, helping to avoid duplication and improve synergy among actions.

👉 **BEFSA = quantifies the economic weight of fisheries in the blue economy and informs policy and budgetary decisions.**

👉 **FIMS = data & information.**

👉 **FPT-CP = project tracking & coordination.**

## The Legacy of ECOFISH: Creation of the ESA-SFBE-CP Platform for Sustainable Fisheries and the Blue Economy

**Mauritius – 9 September 2025** – After six years of action, the ECOFISH Programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by the IOC in collaboration with COMESA, EAC, IGAD, and SADC, has come to an end. But its story does not stop there: its main legacy is now a reality — the **Eastern and Southern Africa Sustainable Fisheries and Blue Economy Coordination Platform (ESA-SFBE-CP)**.

### ECOFISH's Legacy in Concrete Tools

The ESA-SFBE-CP platform is not just another project: it is designed as a permanent, inclusive, regional mechanism for fisheries and aquaculture governance. Hosted within the Regional Economic Communities, it will provide ready-to-use instruments:

- **BEFSA (Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account):** to measure fisheries' contribution to GDP, trade, and employment,
- **ESA-FIMS:** the regional fisheries information system,
- a **trust fund** for sustainable small-scale fisheries,
- a **project coordination mechanism** to avoid duplication,
- **networks** for research, training, and civil society,
- a **Climate-Fisheries Observatory** to bridge science and policy.

These tools, tested and validated under ECOFISH, will be consolidated within the platform and made available to all countries in the region.

At the consultation workshop, **Marc Maminiaina**, Officer in Charge of the ECOFISH Programme, recalled the importance of building an inclusive and resilient mechanism to strengthen regional governance. Discussions focused on validating institutional structures (Ministerial Forum, Executive Committee, Secretariat, and Technical Committees), integrating the tools developed under ECOFISH – such as BEFSA, the project tracking platform, and the Climate-Fisheries Observatory – and adopting a clear technical roadmap to operationalise the platform.

*“The results of this meeting should not be seen as mere technical conclusions; they must be perceived as the foundations upon which the sustainability of our regional fisheries and blue economy governance will rest.”*

**Dr Sunil Sweenarain**, economist, Technical Coordinator of the Programme, and designer of the platform, highlighted the exceptional value of this tool in view of its modest cost, describing it as a “no-regret” investment for the region:

*“With an annual cost of only €0.5 million, the ESA-SFBE-CP can generate up to €5 billion in economic benefits each year — a return on investment of more than 8,000 to 1. Even capturing just 1% of this potential would yield ten times its cost, making this mechanism a truly no-regret investment for our region.”*

## Replicable, Scalable, Regional

The platform is designed to be replicable and scalable. It builds on what already works — co-management, regional surveillance, innovative financing, and training. Anchored in the RECs, it represents a collective asset for the fisheries community, guaranteeing continuity of achievements and paving the way for extension to the continent under Agenda 2063.

## A Turning Point for Sustainable Fisheries Development

With ECOFISH, sustainable development has returned to the heart of fisheries resource management:

- combating IUU fishing,
- reducing post-harvest losses,
- promoting the inclusion of women and youth,
- integrating climate considerations into governance, and
- strengthening regional institutions.

The ESA-SFBE-CP platform embodies this transformation: a stable, shared, and recognised framework serving millions of fishers and their communities.

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## Key Figures on the Regional Context

- **5 million tonnes:** current annual fisheries production in Eastern and Southern Africa, representing €6.9 to €11.5 billion at landing value.
- **1.15 million direct jobs** and **5–7 million indirect jobs.**
- **30–40% post-harvest losses** in inland fisheries.
- **€184–276 million** lost annually due to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- **Western Indian Ocean tuna:** €1.84 billion at landing, but €6.4 to €8.3 billion on global markets — of which coastal countries capture only a fraction.
- With sustainable growth of +50%, production could reach **7.5 million tonnes/year**, generating between €8.3 and €17.5 billion on the global market.

## Mobilisable Economic Benefits

- **Marine fisheries:** potential of over €400 million/year through better governance and enhanced licensing.
- **Inland fisheries:** potential to double production through sustainable management.
- **Aquaculture:** potential of over €3 billion/year by 2030 (compared to less than €1 billion today).
- **IUU fishing:** recovery of €50–70 million/year ( $\approx$  10–15% of current losses).
- **Post-harvest losses:** halving them would save more than €500 million/year.



## ECOFISH Programme Closing Forum: A Lasting Legacy for Fisheries and the Blue Economy in the ESA-IO Region

**Belle Mare, Mauritius – 10 September 2025** – The Closing Forum of the ECOFISH Programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) in partnership with the Regional Economic Communities (COMESA, EAC, IGAD, SADC), brought together key regional, national, and community stakeholders to review six years of action and prepare for the sustainability of its achievements.

### A Transformative Programme

Over 62 months of implementation, ECOFISH delivered significant results in four main areas:

- **Policy and institutional reforms** integrated into national and regional frameworks;
- **Strengthened Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) capacity**, with new tools and enhanced cooperation between States;
- **Pilot projects** in sustainable small-scale fisheries, both inland and marine, improving livelihoods and ready for replication and scaling up;
- **Regional coordination platform for fisheries and blue economy governance (ESA-SFBE-CP)**, integrating innovative tools such as BEFSA, FIMS, and FPT-CP, and offering a sustainable cooperation framework for RECs, fisheries organisations, technical partners, and member states.

For **José Maria Troncoso Perera**, Head of Cooperation of the EU Delegation in Mauritius, the ECOFISH Programme represents much more than a technical initiative: it embodies a shared commitment between the EU and its African and Indian Ocean partners to the sustainable management of fisheries resources. He also recalled that the EU has already invested more than €1 billion in initiatives related to marine protection, the fight against IUU fishing, and the development of a sustainable blue economy, and announced a new €58 million funding package for the **Sustainable Western Indian Ocean (SWIO) Programme**.

*“ECOFISH is coming to an end, but the partnerships and progress it has fostered are set to last. Let us continue building healthier oceans, stronger economies, and more resilient coastal communities together.”*

**Mr. Edgard Razafindravahy**, Secretary General of the IOC, reminded participants that over the past five years, ECOFISH has driven major progress: policy and institutional reforms, strengthened MCS capacity, sustainable small-scale fisheries pilot projects, and the establishment of strategic tools such as BEFSA and the Climate-Fisheries Observatory. Efforts against IUU fishing, joint patrols, and the capture of illegal vessels also demonstrated tangible results. As the programme comes to a close, the priority is now to consolidate these gains and transfer them to regional institutions to guarantee sustainability.

*“The fundamental objective is to ensure that the legacy of ECOFISH endures well beyond its official closure, through sustainable systems, tools, partnerships, and institutional frameworks.”*

## A Legacy Looking Forward

The Forum confirmed that ECOFISH's closure does not mark an end, but a transition. The concrete tools developed — such as BEFSA (Blue Economy Fisheries Satellite Account), the project coordination mechanism, regional networks, and community co-management models — constitute a sustainable and replicable legacy for countries and regional organisations.

The European Union, the IOC, the RECs, and AU-IBAR reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining and scaling up these achievements, in order to strengthen food security, climate resilience, and the economic sustainability of fisheries in the region.

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## ECOFISH Achievements at a Glance

The ECOFISH Programme, funded by the European Union, has established a sustainable regional architecture for fisheries and blue economy governance in Eastern and Southern Africa.

- **Institutions:** Creation of the ESA-SFBE Coordination Platform, consolidation of the IOC Regional Coordination Centre for Fisheries Monitoring, Control, Surveillance, and Observation, and support to IGAD's Fisheries Agency.
- **Alignment:** Harmonisation of inland, marine, and small-scale fisheries through nine pilot projects and coordinated reforms among COMESA, EAC, IGAD, and SADC.
- **Tools:** Deployment of the Fisheries Information Management System (FIMS), piloting of the BEFSA satellite account in Kenya and Madagascar, launch of the Fisheries Project Tracker, and production of over 100 tools and publications.
- **Control:** Organisation of joint patrols, reinforcement of MCS infrastructure, and media coverage of reforms.
- **Policies:** Progress towards rights-based fisheries management, co-management, and regional institutional partnerships.
- **Knowledge:** Over 25 regional events, South-South exchanges, and strong involvement of non-state actors and local communities.
- **Impact of the 9 demonstration projects:** The lives of **50,000 families transformed**.

These integrated achievements make ECOFISH a regional lever for resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth in the fisheries sector.

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## PROGRAMME ECOFISH

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## About ECOFISH

Launched in 2019 with the European Union as its sole financial partner, the ECOFISH Programme aimed to strengthen the sustainability of fisheries and the blue economy in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

- **Duration & Budget:** 62 months (2019–2025), €28 million funded under the 11th EDF.
- **Implementation:** Led by the IOC, with the support of the EU Delegation to Mauritius, in partnership with 4 Regional Economic Communities (COMESA, EAC, IGAD, SADC), LVFO, and LTA.
- **Beneficiary Countries:** 18 ACP countries from Eastern, Southern Africa, and the Indian Ocean region.
- **Objectives:**
  - Strengthen fisheries policies and governance,
  - Build capacity for Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS),
  - Implement 9 sustainable small-scale fisheries pilot projects.
- **Workplans:** Great Lakes Fisheries (LVFO, LTA), coastal fisheries (IOC + RECs, including PRSP), pilot projects, and cross-cutting actions (technical assistance, patrols, evaluations).
- **Legacy:** Creation of the ESA-SFBE-CP Platform as a permanent regional mechanism, integrating concrete tools (BEFSA, information systems, Climate-Fisheries Observatory, regional networks) to ensure sustainability and regional cooperation in fisheries and the blue economy.

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