

## Press Release

### Closing of the ECOFISH Programme A lasting legacy of sustainable fisheries for the EA-SA-IO region

**Ebène, Mauritius – 10 September 2025** – Over the past six years, the ECOFISH programme—funded by the European Union and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)—has laid solid grounds for the long-term future of the fisheries sector. Bold in its objectives, it placed responsible management at the heart of its strategy, covering Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, and addressing both artisanal and industrial fisheries.

Through strong regional cooperation, ECOFISH has delivered **innovative tools, strengthened partnerships, and high-impact community initiatives** that will keep shaping the future of the fisheries sector across the **Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Indian Ocean (EA-SA-IO)** region.

#### Tools for tomorrow's fisheries

One of ECOFISH's key achievements is the setting up of the **Eastern and Southern Africa Sustainable Fisheries and Blue Economy Coordination Platform (ESA-SFBE-CP)**.

Designed as a sustainable, inclusive and regional mechanism, this platform will serve as a cornerstone for fisheries and aquaculture governance.

It brings together practical instruments built around three pillars:

#### Firstly, smarter data for better management

- **BEFSA (Blue Economy Fisheries Statistical Account):** Measures the exact contribution of fisheries to GDP, trade and jobs, helping to demonstrate the sector's economic weight and justify investment and policy support.
- **Regional Shared Logbook System:** Centralises real-time data on species, quantities and fishing grounds, enabling precise stock management, reducing overfishing and limiting bycatch.

#### Secondly, finance and organisation for greater efficiency

- **Fishermen's Trust Fund:** Provides artisanal fishers with direct access to capital to upgrade equipment, boosting independence and reducing reliance on subsidies.
- **Project Coordination Mechanism:** Prevents overlap between initiatives, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and impact on the ground is maximised.

#### Thirdly, science and innovation for sustainability

- **Research Networks:** Link scientists and fishing communities, fostering knowledge exchange and adaptation to emerging challenges.
- **Climate-Fisheries Observatory:** Tracks the impact of climate change on fish stocks, helping policymakers design long-term protection strategies.

Together, these tools—tested and validated under ECOFISH—are expected to generate up to **€5 billion in annual economic benefits** for the region.

## Replicable models of good governance

ECOFISH has supported governance reforms that can be replicated across the region. In Seychelles, the **Sea Cucumber Fisheries Management Plan** introduced a simple, effective framework for licensing and small-scale fisheries management. In Zanzibar, an **Octopus Fisheries Management Plan**—building on the Rodrigues model, also supported by the IOC and the European Union—showed how ecosystem-based approaches can safeguard vital resources.

These experiences highlight a key lesson: **strong governance drives prosperity**, ensuring both economic returns and sustainable fisheries for future generations.

## Surveillance and enforcement that deliver results

The fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has been strengthened through joint monitoring and patrols. Since 2020, the **Regional Fisheries Surveillance Plan (PRSP)** has carried out **12 regional patrols**, detecting **37 offences** and diverting **3 vessels**. Over its 18 years of operation, the PRSP has coordinated **65 patrols**, inspected **723 vessels** and recorded **137 violations**.

Bringing together nine countries and territories—**Comoros, Kenya, France (Réunion), Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia and Tanzania**—the PRSP is a flagship of regional cooperation, combining naval, aerial, technological and human resources. ECOFISH has further supported capacity building through observer training and technical exchanges with the **European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA)**.

## Community initiatives that change lives

ECOFISH supported **nine demonstration projects**, providing €8 million in grants and directly benefiting more than **50,000 households**.

Highlights include:

- **ADPP Mozambique:** Built four fisheries centers, halving post-harvest losses, while community savings groups (72% women) mobilised over MZN 2.6 million (€35,000).
- **WWF Kenya:** Set up 24 village savings and credit associations, with women accounting for over half of the membership.
- **C3 Madagascar:** Collected over 56,000 fish landing records, creating an essential database for sustainable management.
- **UNDP:** Deployed five smart Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), renovated five landing sites, and trained 541 fishers in modern techniques in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

From cross-border governance in Namibia with **37 community-managed fisheries reserves**, to cold-chain improvements across coastal communities, these initiatives show how **local action can deliver both resource protection and socioeconomic gains**.

## University studies for youth in the blue economy.

As ECOFISH comes to a close, it also celebrates a milestone: the graduation of **the first class from the undergraduate course in Law, Blue Economy and Sustainable Fisheries Management**, launched with the Open University in 2021. Over three years, 20 professionals from Mauritius and across the region earned their degrees through this fully online programme, designed to make training accessible while strengthening the skills of the fisheries sector.

## Stronger and lasting partnerships

The achievements of ECOFISH are built on a **unique regional partnership** uniting institutions, technical agencies, civil society and local communities around one vision: to protect and sustainably harness fisheries resources. Central to this effort were the **European Union**, which financed and supported the programme, and the **Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)**, which coordinated its implementation, together with **COMESA, EAC, IGAD, SADC**, and specialized bodies including the **Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO)**, the **Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA)** and the **Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)**. NGOs and grassroots networks – among them **ActionAid, ADPP Mozambique, C3 Madagascar, Namibia Nature Foundation, UNDP, SOS Sahel, WWF Kenya** – anchored the programme's activities in local realities. This constellation of partners has created a genuine **regional network**, linking lakeshores and ocean coasts in support of sustainable fisheries, food security and resilient communities.

## What's next?

ECOFISH partners have called for a clear **roadmap for regional governance of the blue economy**, centered on:

- establishing a **regional trust fund**,
- empowering local actors,
- and creating a **two-tier system**, with political coordination led by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and technical expertise by Regional Fisheries Organisations (RFOs).

The European Union has already confirmed its continued commitment with a new **€58 million programme for the South-West Indian Ocean**, which will build on ECOFISH's achievements, strengthen food security, boost climate resilience, and further anchor fisheries as a shared pillar of economic growth.



## PROGRAMME ECOFISH

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## About ECOFISH

Launched in 2019, the **ECOFISH programme** was funded by the European Union under the 11th EDF, with a budget of €28 million and a duration of 62 months. It was coordinated by the IOC with support from the EU Delegation to Mauritius, in partnership with COMESA, EAC, IGAD, SADC, LVFO and LTA. Beneficiaries included **18 ACP countries** across Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean.

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