

Coastal fisheries in Europe are not what they were: ecological, social and economic changes

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Coastal fisheries, whether they are artisanal (small-scale or traditional) or recreational, represent important socio-economic activities in European coastal waters. These fisheries currently face a number of changes that are modifying the traditional perception of these fisheries, often considered (compared to industrial fisheries) as being ecologically more sustainable, having a high sociocultural value and being important for human health and well-being. From the biological standpoint, the selective character of coastal fisheries -which often use fishing gears that actively select certain species, sizes and sexes, the deployment of fishing gears on certain fragile habitats, the loss of fishing tackle (nets, weights, etc) and the use of exotic species as bait are examples of how these fisheries can threaten the sustainability of vulnerable coastal species and habitats. From the socioeconomic standpoint, several factors are altering the original character of coastal fisheries, among which the decline of traditional fisheries, which are disappearing or being substituted by more industrialised, technical fisheries, are leading to a loss of the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) held by fishers, and to a decline of seafood available to coastal communities, which is of particular concern in developing countries. On the other hand, the increase of subsistence fisheries in some southern European countries as a consequence of economic crisis and the increase of recreational fisheries are also altering the classic features of coastal fishing. In this context, it is necessary to integrate the different approaches (biological, social and economic), with active participation from stakeholders, government and relevant research institutions, to better evaluate and manage coastal fisheries and the challenges they face if a sustainable use of coastal resources and healthy livelihoods are to be achieved.