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Women in fisheries—a perspective from Catalonia

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Introduction

I am aware that throughout their careers women may face unique challenges. My narrative is of a woman studying Marine Sciences and then working in Catalan Government on fisheries and aquaculture. Personally, I have always had the support of my mentors, work colleagues and the fisheries sector, and have not experienced any barriers during my studies or throughout my professional career in the government. However, I can recognize the need to implement measures to reconcile work, family and personal life and the need to support women working in various areas of fisheries to obtain more of a gender balance. Linked to this, must be mentioned that in Catalonia we are actively addressing the issue through initiatives designed to promote women working in the fishing sector, empower them and, most importantly, to give women the much needed visibility and recognition they deserve.

Professional background and current role

As for my professional background, I studied Marine Sciences in 1992 at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. My professional career subsequently developed and progressed while working for the Catalan Government, in the General Directorate of Maritime Policy and Sustainable Fisheries since 2006. In this Directorate, I have held various positions of responsibility. Currently I am the Deputy Director General of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

The roles overseen by the sub-directorate are varied, and include the management of the fishing fleet, the management of commercialization of fishing resource products, support and mentoring of the representative structures of the sector “confraries de pescadors”, and management of the structural fisheries and aquaculture funds (Figure 1). In addition, I am also involved in promoting fisheries initiatives: e.g., the improvement of fishing methods in terms of sustainability, such as using pelagic otter boards which can reduce both fuel consumption and seabed contact and the reduction of fishing effort such as the temporary cessation of fishing activity, and the establishment of closed fishing areas. We also promote the creation of fish producers’ organizations to help establish improvements in fisheries management in order to maintain the status of commercial fish stocks and we develop campaigns to promote the consumption of locally caught fish and little-known seasonal fish species in order to support sustainable fishing practices.

In all these areas, my work is aimed primarily at guaranteeing the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and their resources. Furthermore, we are currently implementing fisheries co-management, which implies participation by fishers, fisher’s associations, scientists, NGOs, administration and other stakeholders in the decision-making process on an equal footing basis.



FIGURE 1

Ms. Itziar Segarra, Deputy Director General of Fisheries and Aquaculture at the General Directorate of Maritime Policy and Sustainable Fisheries, Generalitat de Catalunya, presenting insights on the work being conducted at the Catalanian Hub at Seafood 2024.

Empowering women in fisheries: actions and initiatives

Within the framework of my organization, my aim is also to support and prioritize both women and young people's access to these areas. As an example, I will briefly mention some of the actions that are being carried out in our administration to give visibility and empowerment to women in the fisheries sector: (1) the creation and maintenance of the "Catalan association for women of the sea", (2) the creation of the "Advisory Council for Rural and Maritime Women", a body whose objective is to advise and propose policies that promote gender equality in these sectors, (3) the promotion of training and capacity building for women through specific programmes in areas such as the management of fishing companies, sustainable aquaculture and innovation in the blue economy, which highlights the importance of female entrepreneurship, (4) the creation of a working group on Gender Mainstreaming in Grants and Subsidies to identify improvements to introduced gender criteria, positively valuing those projects led by women or which actively

contribute to gender equality, (5) the promotion of women's participation in governance bodies, such as co-management committees, mentioned previously, in which members representing all stakeholders decide and implement measures for resource conservation and socio-economic development (it is worth noting that since the creation of co-management committees, women's representation has increased) and (6) the use of inclusive language in regulations to avoid gender bias.

Still today there remains a need for more women working in the field of fisheries and aquaculture in our region, but on the positive side, there has been an increase recently in the presence of women in technical positions within fisheries sectoral organizations, as well as in management and administration roles. This has meant a change in the relationships that we have with fishers, the advantage and benefits of which should be highlighted. Recently, the entry of young women into the sector in recent years has also been observed. That being said, it is a fact that women are underrepresented in senior roles. From my personal experience, I can say that reaching those positions takes a lot of dedication, which can make work and family life balance extremely difficult.

Conclusion: women's involvement in fisheries matters

In conclusion, I strongly encourage women to join the different fisheries sectors, as they bring a different perspective and have a complementary vision that helps to ensure the transition toward environmental, economic and social sustainability of fisheries resources and fisheries sector.

Moreover, rising the visibility of women and promoting their empowerment in fisheries is key for reaching a more inclusive and equitable sector. That's why I believe that it is essential that society and government continue to support their participation in all levels of decision-making.

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