



Press Kit



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1. Press Release

LIFE OASIS: enhancing aFADs to protect sea turtles and support sustainable fishing

Science, the fishing sector, and conservation unite to combat ghost fishing and safeguard marine biodiversity

The Mediterranean, a vital enclave for biodiversity and maritime activity, faces a challenge: each year, many sea turtles can become trapped in lost or abandoned fishing gear (LAF). However, this is not the only risk they face. Protecting its ecosystem requires coordinated action and shared responsibility, as it is a sea shared by multiple countries and various fleets operate within it. This situation impacts not only biodiversity but also the sustainability of fisheries and maritime safety. LIFE OASIS was established to address this issue, a pioneering project that combines technology, research, and direct collaboration with the fishing and maritime sector on an international level.

A solution designed for and by the fishing sector

Aside from previous EC LIFE projects and a USFWS Marine Turtle Conservation Act initiative, **LIFE OASIS was built with and for the fishing sector**, co-funded by the **European Union** LIFE program for Natura 2000. LIFE OASIS is led by **ALNITAK** in collaboration with a strong international consortium that includes prestigious scientific entities such as the **Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM) of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)**, the **Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies (IMEDEA, CSIC-UIB)**, the **University of Valencia**, the **University of Pisa** and the **Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn**. The fishing sector also plays a central role, with the support of **CEPESCA**, the most significant fisheries confederation in Europe, technology companies such as **SATLINK**, and conservation organizations such as **Filicudi Wildlife Conservation and Nature Trust Malta**.

However, many more key stakeholders play a vital role in the basin-wide concerted effort to conserve the loggerhead turtle and fisheries' sustainability, including relevant authorities, marine wildlife rescue centers, ports, patrol boats, etc.

The project has a clear objective: to prevent gear loss, enhance fishing sustainability, and protect marine biodiversity through innovative solutions, including developing an **intelligent anchored Fish Aggregating Device (aFAD)** model.



The result: a solution that effectively combats ghost fishing and reinforces the sector's sustainability, ensuring a viable future for coastal communities that depend on this activity.

Sea turtle rescue and mapping of abandoned gear

One of LIFE OASIS's main goals is to promote a collaborative network involving fishers, navigators, and marine wildlife rescue centers across the Mediterranean. This already active network facilitates the rescue of sea turtles trapped in ALDFG, optimizing conservation efforts at sea.

Additionally, reports and data provided by fishers and navigators on the location of marine debris will enable LIFE OASIS to create detailed maps forecasting ALDFG accumulation hotspots and identifying the source sites. These maps will serve as a critical tool to prevent ghost fishing and mitigate its long-term impacts.

A commitment to sector sustainability

In collaboration with fishers from Malta, Sicily, and the Balearic Islands, LIFE OASIS is co-developing a practical and affordable aFAD model built on fishers' knowledge and experience. This innovative approach ensures the prototype is designed by fishers, for fishers—reducing gear loss, minimizing bycatch, and maximizing efficiency using biodegradable materials. By integrating traditional expertise with modern sustainability solutions, the project directly addresses ghost fishing while reinforcing the long-term viability of the fishing sector and the coastal communities that depend on it.

LIFE OASIS is using the Mediterranean as a “miniature ocean laboratory” to develop technological measures that artisanal Mediterranean fishers will share with their knowledge to coastal communities that urgently need an alternative to illegal fishing.



2. Background information

- Over 8 million tons of plastic enter the oceans annually (UN IMO).
- 70% of this marine plastic waste consists of abandoned or lost fishing gear, also known as ghost fishing gear (UN IMO).
- Since 2017, the MEDTOP (Mediterranean Top Pelagics Monitoring Program) detected an exponential increase in ALDFG adrift resulting from IUU fishing activities. MEDTOP estimates that between 6.000 and 8.000 ALDFG artifacts are constantly adrift in the Alboran Sea, Algerian Basin and Sicily Channel, entangling over 10.000 loggerhead turtles every year. Just the aFAD fishery in the Mediterranean contributes to ALDFG with over 150.000 Km of polypropylene rafia every year (MEDTOP – FAO GFCM Working group on aFAD fishing).
- ALDFG poses a significant threat to:
 - Marine biodiversity.
 - The sustainability of fisheries.
 - Maritime safety.

In the Mediterranean, ghost fishing activities have increased exponentially since 2016. Each year, tens of thousands of sea turtles become trapped in this gear, suffering severe injuries or death.



3. Key Facts and Statistics

- **8 million** tons of plastic enter the oceans annually.
- Over **150,000 km** of polypropylene fibers end up in the Mediterranean every year.
- Approximately **8,000 ghost fishing artifacts** drift in the Alboran Sea and Algerian basin alone.
- Since 2016, ghost fishing and IUU (Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported) fishing activities have risen significantly in the Mediterranean.
- In the Western Mediterranean, **over 70%** of sea turtles found are affected by plastic or fishing gear.



4. Partner profiles

Coordinator:

ALNITAK: a leading marine conservation organization spearheading LIFE OASIS through research and action.

Scientific partners:

- **CSIC ICM (Institute of Marine Sciences)**
- **CSIC IMEDEA (Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies):** Experts in marine biodiversity and ecosystem studies.
- **University of Valencia** and **University of Pisa:** Specialists in ecology and sustainable fishing.
- **Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn:** Pioneers in sea turtle conservation and sustainable strategy development.

Fishing and technology partners:

- **CEPESCA:** Representing the fishing sector, promoting responsible practices.
- **SATLINK:** Innovators in tracking and managing fishing gear.

Conservation NGOs:

Filicudi Wildlife Conservation and **Nature Trust Malta:** Experts in sea turtle rescue and environmental education.

5. Visuals

Check out our gallery: <https://lifeoasis.eu/gallery/>



6. Featured quotes

«As a fisherman, I've seen firsthand the challenges that abandoned fishing gear poses to marine life. Working with LIFE OASIS has opened my eyes to the importance of sustainable practices. The new aFAD systems have made my work safer but are also helping protect turtles and other marine species. It's inspiring to know that my efforts contribute to a healthier ocean.»

Gori Mayol, fisherman in Balearic Islands.

«Every sea turtle rescue is a reminder of the fragility of marine life. Thanks to LIFE OASIS, we've seen a significant improvement in turtle survival rates. The increased reporting and retrieval of ghost gear have made our jobs easier, and working alongside fishers and marine conservationists has made a real difference. It's been an honor to be part of such a vital project.»

Clara Cánovas, biologist and conservationist.

7. Timeline

Check out the timeline of LIFE OASIS by clicking here:

<https://lifoasis.eu/timeline/>

8. FAQs

1. What is ALDFG (Abandoned, Lost, or Discarded Fishing Gear)?

ALDFG refers to fishing gear that has been unintentionally or deliberately abandoned, lost, or discarded in the ocean. This includes nets, lines, traps, and other fishing equipment. These items pose a significant threat to marine life, especially fragile habitat and also endangered species such as sea turtles and marine mammals, as they can become entangled or "ghost fish."



2. What is a aFAD (Anchored Fishing Aggregating Device)?

An aFAD is a man-made floating object or structure that attracts fish, providing a fishing hotspot. These devices are used in commercial and artisanal fisheries to create bait balls of pelagic fish caught with purse seines. Around the world, ancestral artisanal fisheries usually use aFAD to catch tuna and dolphin fish species. In the open oceans, the tropical tuna fishing fleets shifted to drifting aFAD operations targeting mainly yellowfin tuna and skipjack tuna.

In LIFE OASIS we focus on the Mediterranean *Coryphaena* (dolphin fish / Mahi mahi) fishery that uses aFADs in the Balearic Islands, Sicily, Tunisia, Malta & Gozo, and Lybia.

3. What does IUU Fishing mean?

IUU stands for **Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported** fishing. It refers to fishing activities that violate international laws or regulations, or that operate without any oversight, often leading to overfishing, harm to marine ecosystems, and increased waste in the ocean, such as abandoned fishing gear. In LIFE OASIS we include in this category rudimentary subsistence fishing activities have increased over the last years as a result of war, poverty and climate change.

4. What is ghost fishing?

Ghost fishing is a common term used for the effect of ALDFG, as these drifting or grounded artifacts continue catching species and/or destroying marine habitat. If made of plastic materials, ALDFG can remain in the marine environment “ghost fishing” for hundreds of years.

5. What is the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP)?

The Mediterranean Action Plan is a strategic initiative under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to reduce pollution and protect the Mediterranean Sea. The plan involves various projects and



collaborations to tackle issues such as marine litter, overfishing, and habitat destruction, contributing to the preservation of marine biodiversity.

6. What is the role of the LIFE Programme in marine conservation?

The LIFE Programme is a financial instrument of the European Union that supports environmental and climate action projects. It funds initiatives aimed at preserving biodiversity, reducing pollution, and promoting sustainable practices, such as LIFE OASIS, which targets the reduction of marine litter and the protection of sea turtles.

7. What is a pelagic driftnet?

A pelagic driftnet is a type of fishing net that floats in the water column, often used for catching large fish such as tuna and swordfish. These nets can be extremely harmful if left abandoned in the ocean, as they entangle marine life, contributing to the problem of ghost fishing.

8. What is marine litter?

Marine litter refers to any human-made waste that ends up in the oceans, including plastics, fishing gear, chemicals, and debris. This litter harms marine ecosystems, entangles animals, and damages habitats. Addressing marine litter is critical to preserving the health of marine environments.

9. What is the role of fishermen in marine conservation?

Fishermen play a crucial role in marine conservation by reporting incidents of ALDFG, rescuing entangled marine life, and adopting sustainable fishing practices. Collaborative efforts between fishers, scientists, and conservationists are key to mitigating the negative impacts of fishing on marine biodiversity.



10. How can technology help reduce the impact of fishing on marine life?

Technology can help by developing more sustainable fishing gear, improving tracking and reporting systems for ALDFG, and implementing electronic monitoring tools for fisheries. Solutions like "intelligent aFADs" integrate technology to reduce ghost fishing and enhance fishing practices that are safer for marine species.

11. NATURA 2000

NATURA 2000 is the EU network of protected areas under the framework of the EC Habitat Directive for the conservation of endangered species and habitat.

9. Contact Information

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