

# Eco-social Synergies: Legal Challenges at the Intersection of the Environmental and Employment Realms

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## PANEL 1. The Environmental and Labour Encounters from a Legal Perspective

### ABSTRACT

#### **‘There just can’t be green without blue’: Social sustainability and fishers in the EU’s blue economy**

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In May 2021, the European Commission announced its new approach for a sustainable blue economy. Framed as part of the European Green Deal, the Commission emphasised the centrality of the marine economy to meeting Europe’s climate goals, proclaiming ‘there just can’t be green without blue’. Fisheries are a key marine resource and overfishing and the push for sustainability have been prominent drivers of legislation to regulate the activities of fishers. The EU’s Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has an objective of long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability, and recognises the need to support those whose livelihoods depend on the sea, including fishers. This paper examines what social sustainability and more broadly, the European Green Deal, means for fishers. It first traces the legislative evolution of the CFP from the 1980s onwards to examine the emergence of sustainability priorities. Secondly, it examines what social and labour rights exist for fishers in EU law and how these interact with the CFP. Lastly, the paper examines recent efforts to improve the regulation of employment conditions for fishers, as seen in the Work in Fishing Directive 2017/159, an instrument that emerged from a social dialogue agreement and is based on the ILO’s Work in Fishing Convention. The paper shows that while such efforts indicate an improvement in fishers’ employment protections, they remain delinked from environmental sustainability initiatives. Situated within broader legal scholarship on the just transition and the labour-nature nexus, this paper highlights how the EU’s approach to fishing is emblematic of broader issues in linking environmental and social issues in the pursuit of a just transition to a greener society.