ALL WRONG

Thirty years of public subsidies for the French fishing industry (1993–2023): a masterclass in the sabotage of an economic sector, jobs and the health of the ocean



BLOOM

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About BLOOM:

BLOOM is a non-profit scientific organisation founded in 2005, with a mission to protect the ocean, the climate, marine habitats and species, as well as fishing communities, from the causes of their destruction: unsustainable extractive activities including industrial fishing and hydrocarbon production in particular. Our vision is that all fishing activities at sea, which involve catching wild species in their natural environment, must strive to minimise environmental impacts and maximise social benefits. More than a third of BLOOM's team, which is based in Brussels and Paris, are scientists.

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Essential acronyms:

Acronyms for European Union financial instruments

FIFG 1 (1994–1999): Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance

FIFG 2 (2000–2006): Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance

EFF (2007–2013): European Fisheries Fund

EMFF (2014–2020): European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

EMFFA (2021–2027): European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

This report was compiled using non-public data on the public subsidies allocated by the European Union and France to the French fishing sector. The process of compiling this into a usable dataset was a particularly arduous task. The database we have compiled does not therefore exist anywhere else, not even within government agencies. **This feat, which was painstaking in its rigour and titanic in terms of the volume of data processed, has enabled us to produce, for the first time in French history, a comprehensive overview of public expenditure allocated to the fishing sector.**

In total, this report covers €2.6 billion in constant prices (base year 2024) allocated between 1993 and 2023 to the fishing sector in France, representing an annual average of €84 million. 57% of this sum comes from European Structural Funds and 43% from national contributions.

€362m for scrapping vessels, €32m for protecting ecosystems

Cumulative figures by area, in constant 2024 euros

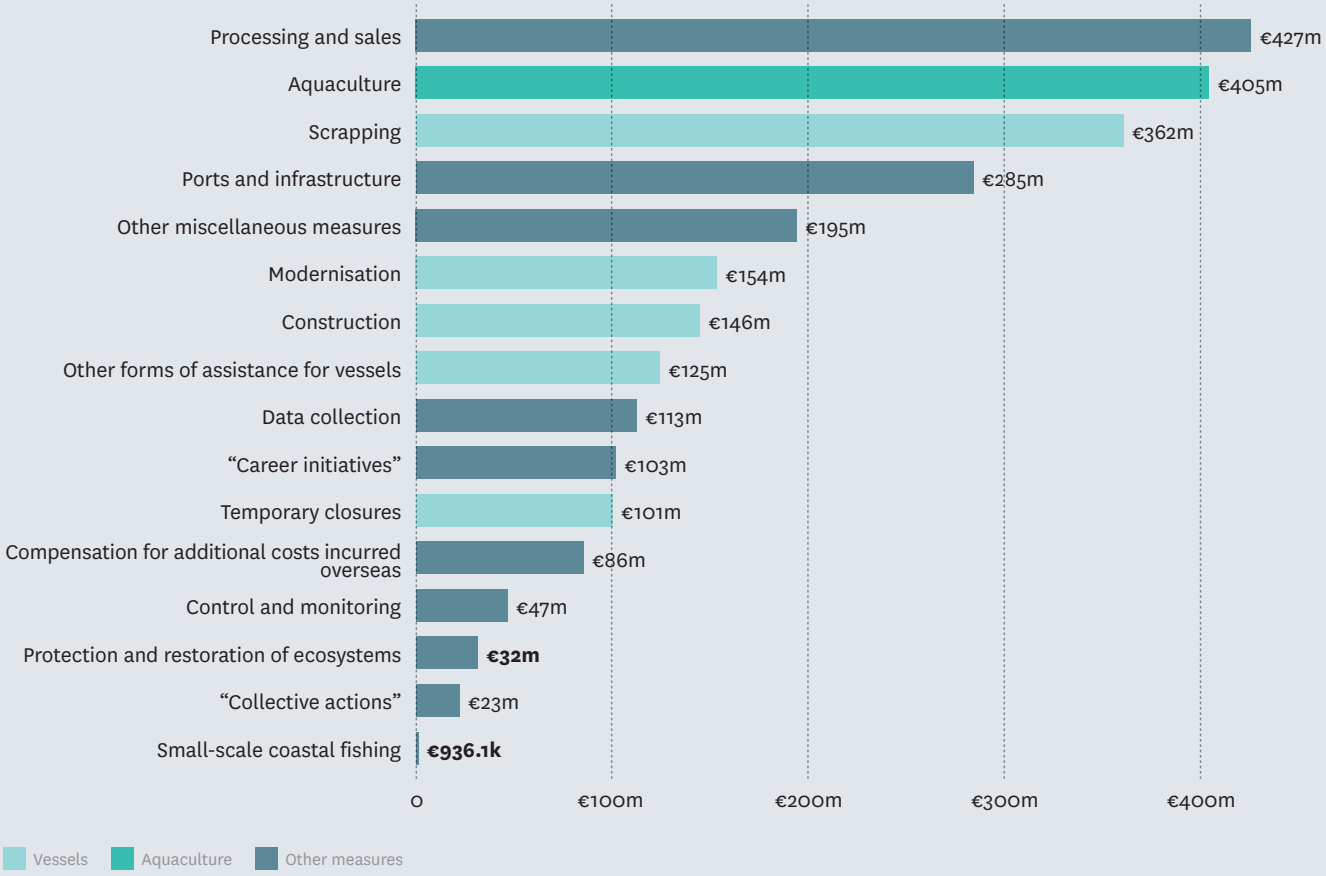


Figure 1: Breakdown of Structural Funds and their matching national contribution by expenditure category (1993–2023).
Source : Lists of beneficiaries under IFOP 1, IFOP 2, FEP and FEAMP (1993–2023), in 2024.

→ **At least €887 million – representing one-third of the total amount, for half of the projects funded – was allocated in the form of direct payments to the sector's core asset: its fishing vessels.** Four measures accounted for more than 86% of this amount: the scrapping of vessels (€362 million; 41% of the €887 million), modernisation (€154 million; 17%), the construction of new vessels (€146 million; 16%) and temporary fishing cessations (€101 million; 11%). These measures are contradictory, and not just on paper: public money has funded both the construction and the scrapping of vessels within the same period, without clear and ambitious social, economic and environmental objectives. **Seventeen vessels were even paid for twice: it cost €10.7 million to build them, then €22.7 million to scrap them, an average of 12 years later.**

→ **Two distinct phases can be clearly identified.** Until 2005, shipbuilding and modernisation were the dominant focus, as subsidies for vessel construction had been banned at European level in 2004. From the late 2000s onwards, temporary and permanent cessations accounted for the vast majority of subsidies: these were crisis management tools, deployed in response to external pressures such as the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to halt fishing activity in the face of collapsing stocks – such as sole, cod, anchovies, sardines and elvers (juvenile eels). This trend has continued ever since, with further substantial funding allocated to crises after 2023 (not covered in this study), including the war in Ukraine and subsequently in Iran, and winter closures of the Bay of Biscay designed to prevent dolphin by-catches.

→ **We do not know what a fifth of this money was used for.** The identity of the vessel, and therefore its characteristics (length and gear), is only known for 84% of cases and for 79% of the sums involved. For 12% of the cases and 18% of the sums involved, it is impossible to determine whether the vessel is a coastal longliner or a semi-industrial trawler. For the remaining proportion, either the length of the vessel is specified, or the fishing gear used, but never both. In other words, of the €190 million paid out to vessels (21%), the French authorities are currently unable to say what type of vessel they have funded.

→ **For the vessels identified, however, the picture is clear.** Of the four main types of subsidies allocated to vessels – for construction, modernisation, temporary cessations and permanent cessations – it was bottom trawlers and bottom seiners that were the primary beneficiaries, followed by pelagic trawlers and pelagic seiners. Small coastal vessels using passive gear, which are the most efficient according to all social, economic and environmental indicators,[1] lag far behind: the amounts allocated to the construction of new trawlers and seiners over 12 metres in length were five times higher than those allocated to the construction of small coastal vessels. Furthermore, the funding is highly concentrated: 10% of the vessels receiving support received 60% of the aid allocated to identified vessels, whilst the median aid per vessel amounts to just €33,600 over 30 years.

→ **Alongside this inconsistent funding, at least €405 million has been allocated to the development and support of aquaculture,** with 45% of this coming from the EMFF alone. Over the course of the various funds, the share allocated to aquaculture has steadily increased: 11% for FIFG 1, 11% for FIFG 2, 14% for the EFF and 23% for the EMFF. As with maritime fishing, a growing proportion of this aid appears to be directed towards crisis management, whether in response to external crises (COVID-19) or high mortality rates in aquaculture farms. However, the largest share is used to fund increases in production capacity, mainly for mussel and oyster farming – France's two traditional aquaculture sectors – and, increasingly, the development of carnivorous fish farming (such as trout). Recent developments, such as the approval of the salmon farming project in south-west France by the investment fund Pure Salmon, suggest that this funding will surge in the coming years, as is already the case elsewhere in Europe.

1 Quemper *et al.* (2025) Évaluation des performances environnementales, économiques et sociales des flottilles de pêche : Bilan France. Rapport du programme TransiPêche : scénarios de transition écologique et sociale des pêches françaises. https://halieutique.institut-agro.fr/sites/halieutique.institut-agro.fr/files/fichiers/pdf/TransiP%C3%AAche%20Bilan%20France.pdf. See also BLOOM (2023) Time for a U-turn: For a social-ecological transition of fisheries. https://bloomassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Time-for-a-U-Turn.pdf

→ **The remaining €1.3 billion** consists largely of measures relating to processing and sales (€427 million; equivalent to 33% of the remaining €1.3 billion), port infrastructure (€285 million; 22%), data collection (€113 million; 8.6%) and control and monitoring (€47 million; 3.6%). Conversely, there are virtually no funds allocated to measures that are nonetheless crucial, i.e. the protection and restoration of ecosystems (€32 million; 2.4%) and support for small-scale coastal fisheries (€<1 million; <0.1%). The remainder is allocated to a myriad of projects of which the overall objective is impossible to identify, such as "professional initiatives" (€103 million; 8%) or "collective actions" (€23 million; 1.7%).

These figures show that, over the past 30 years, public funds have been used without any sort of planning to bring about the necessary transition in the fisheries sector; a transition which would, by now, have made it possible to significantly rebuild jobs and ecosystems, whilst putting public finances on a sound footing. In the absence of such planning, the French fishing industry is now in a more dire state than it was in the 1990s.

And those who are now appearing on television programmes to demand emergency fuel aid are precisely the very people whom 30 years of public money have helped to establish, modernise and then reward. There has been no shortage of public support: it has served to entrench the segment of the fleet most dependent on diesel, and then, crisis after crisis, to cushion the consequences of that dependence.

No company embodies these 30 years better than Scapêche, the Intermarché Group's fishing fleet. As France's leading fresh fish fishing company, it is also the top recipient of public aid for vessels, with €27.2 million in European funds and national contributions between 1993 and 2023, for 52 vessels, ahead of Euronor (€23.1 million). Public money has funded the construction of its trawlers, their modernisation, and subsequently their removal, amounting to €13.5 million in scrapping premiums. Its semi-industrial fleet is, in all likelihood, one of the main beneficiaries of the fuel tax exemption: as early as 2013, an analysis of its accounts showed that without this exemption, diesel would have accounted for half of its turnover, rather than a quarter.[2] In addition, it was once again Scapêche that secured the lion's share of the post-Brexit fleet exit scheme: €10.9 million for 7 of its 22 vessels, representing 18.9% of the total subsidies.[3] The vessel that benefitted most from this scheme, the Jean-Claude Coulon II, a 46-metre bottom trawler, was itself built in 2001 with €1.59 million in public funding.

Even with all that money, the company has continued to make losses. As early as 2013, BLOOM revealed that Scapêche had accumulated losses of more than €19 million between 2002 and 2011, which were covered by nearly €20 million from Intermarché. Nothing has changed since then: it has lost money every year since 2018, totalling €54 million over eight years, plus a further €11 million for its subsidiary Scapêche Bretagne Ouest.[4] In 2025, Agromousquetaires had to recapitalise it to the tune of around €15 million and is now seeking to bring new investors on board. Chronically loss-making, kept afloat by taxpayers' money and funds from its parent company, Scapêche is no exception: it is the model that 30 years of public policy have brought about.

2 BLOOM (2013) Analyse des comptes de la Scapêche – Flotte de pêche d'Intermarché. https://www.bloomassociation.org/download/Comptes_Scapeche_FR.pdf

3 BLOOM (2025) Brittany's Brexit Bounty. https://www.bloomassociation.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Rapport-Brittanys-Brexit-Bounty.pdf

4 Annual accounts for 2017–2024 filed, accessed at https://www.pappers.fr; figures for 2025: Gaëlle Lucas (2026) In difficulty, the Intermarché group's Scapêche fishing company is in talks to open up its capital to new partners. Le marin, 30 September 2026. https://lemarin.ouest-france.fr/peche/en-difficulte-larmement-scapeche-du-groupe-intermarche-en-discussion-pour-ouvrir-son-capital-a-de-nouveaux-partenaires-71a24ed2-bcb1-11f1-81a4-4fea3020cab7

Scapêche has been making a loss every year since 2018: €65m over eight years

Annual net profit, current euros (2025: figures published by Le Marin)

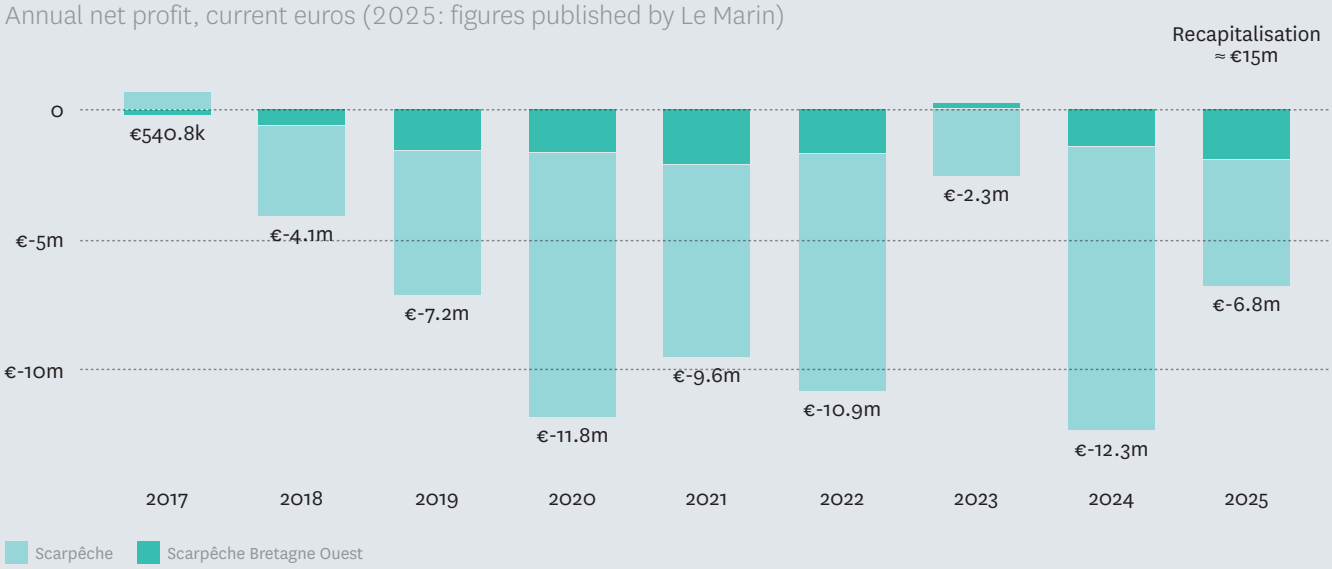


Figure 2: Net results of Scapêche and its subsidiary Scapêche Bretagne Ouest (2017–2025).
Source : Annual accounts (Pappers), Le Marin (2026).

Yet the story does not end there. The 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is currently being negotiated, and with it the next generation of European funds dedicated to fisheries. Depending on the outcome, the thirty-year period described in this report may either be extended or brought to an end.

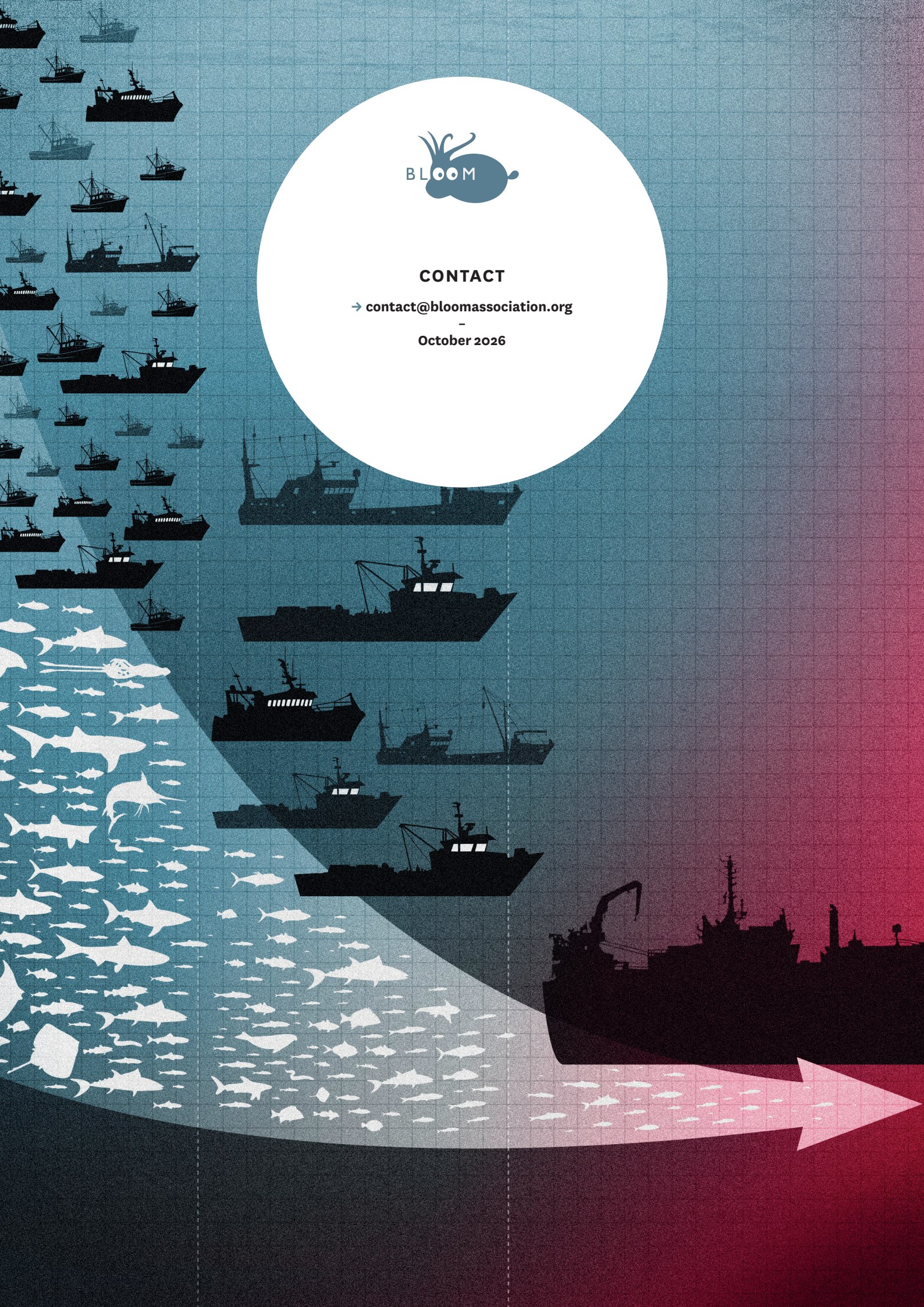
This report may already be too late, given the state of degradation of marine ecosystems, the loss of traditional knowledge and global warming, the severe effects of which are already being felt. While its content is unprecedented, its findings come as no surprise: the major trends and broad patterns highlighted here have been known for years…

…not least by the key stakeholders themselves. One of the three authors of the 2006 Poseidon report, Éric Banel, has headed the French fisheries administration since December 2020, initially at the Directorate of Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture, and subsequently the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture (DGAMPA), established in March 2022.[5] This is the very agency responsible for the lack of transparency and the absence of effective governance detailed in the following pages.

Important methodological note

⚠ In the report you are about to read, this symbol indicates instances where the analysis is hampered by a lack of transparency, incomplete data or poor-quality data on public funding for the fishing sector. All amounts are expressed in constant euros (base year 2024).

5 Éric Banel is one of the three rapporteurs for the Poséidon group: https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/28733-une-ambition-maritime-pour-la-france-rapport-du-groupe-poseidon-politi. He has headed the French Directorate for Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture (DPMA) since December 2020, and subsequently the French Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture (DGAMPA), established on 1 March 2022, of which he was appointed the first Director-General on 2 March 2022: https://www.mer.gouv.fr/direction-generale-des-affaires-maritimes-de-la-peche-et-de-laquaculture-dgampa



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