By Dr Ruth Brennan

"Our first day of meetings was truly devoted to creating opportunities. Our meetings began with introductions around the room – we, and in all of us, a new experience. However, the impromptu and organic transitions that happened throughout the whole day as we communicated with each other in our own space briefly and informally, found in the fishing industry was an equally stimulating and engaging environment that made a strong impact on me. While I walked with the representatives of women from Malta and Cyprus. Their family fishing businesses are also based on small islands, so it was natural for them to spend time comparing our roles and experiences. Though there are differences between the countries as different climates, fish species, and local customs, they also noted that the similarities between us outweighed the differences.

The strength and resilience with which the Spanish leaders spoke on the second day were truly inspiring. They have been speaking out and advocating for their peers in the fishing industry for a long time and had a great deal of experiences and advice to pass along to us.

Keara Osborne, Iasc Inis Oírr, Women in fisheries fly their flags in Brussels

The Skipper

News

Women in Fisheries

Women in fisheries fly their flags in Brussels

All photos courtesy of Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE)

"I was delighted when Keara Osborne of Iasc Inis Oírr (its incisiveness) agreed to join me, and hugely grateful when MEP Luke "Ming" Flanagan and MEP Grace O’Sullivan kindly agreed to sponsor Keara’s participation in the event in Brussels. Set up in May 2018, Iasc Inis Oírr represents small-scale fishers and processors, including many women, from the Azorean archipelago.

The first day was very informal and relaxed as we gathered in a circle in the Institute for Cultural Affairs in Brussels for initial introductions. I quickly became aware that we had official interpreters in the room. As a fisherwoman I was introduced myself in her language of choice, her words were followed by a soft hum of conversation throughout the room as the unofficial interpreters translated her words to her neighbours. These continuous translation into English was not required due to the rhythm right down, and really allowed a sense of connection and solidarity to build between us, as we listened to stories in unfamiliar languages, repeated in languages we could understand.

The introductions were started by Maria Bekendam, a fishwoman from the Netherlands, currently the Chairperson of AKTEA since 2006. "Together with my partner, I run a fishing enterprise. I don’t say ‘I am a fisherwoman’. It’s an important distinction.

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"Why are they not seeing all of the women in fisheries?"

A telling visual was offered by AKTEA, when she remarked that the changing colour of her hair was an indicator of how long she has been telling this story. ‘We are experts in many different areas, but we are not experts in this field.” She pointed out that part of the legislation deals with written fish companies rather than for the small-scale sector, and that part of her job involves translating that down to what a woman fisherwoman would understand.

"While I found professional studies are only counting women in fisheries, and that part of her job involves translating that down to what a woman fisherwoman would understand.

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Flag governance and place of women

Correlation:

% women in decision making boards

% budget devoted to projects supportive of women in fisheries

\textbf{Flag governance and place of women} in boats. The conversations the previous day provided ample evidence that women's work in fisheries extends far beyond women in boats.

From Malta, we heard from Matres and Lily. Matres works with her husband on small boats, she was responsible for the business side of the business. Matres is from fishing as a fishmonger. Her father passed away at 23 from a heart attack.

She sells her fish in the market a.m., returns home to quickly cook some food, then goes to help her husband prepare the nets for fishing. Somehow, she also manages to find time to take care of all the paperwork and go to the police to sell her fish to tourists.

Keara Osborne of Iasc Inis Oírr explained how she cooks, cleans, processes and packages the catch caught by her partner, her father. She is responsible for all of the business paperwork and works with local banks and finance companies. She has worked out that much of the legislation she deals with is written for large fish companies rather than for the small-scale sector, and that part of her job involves translating that down to what a woman fisherwoman would understand.

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