

# TO SERVE TO PROTECT

*Rory Moore points out that overfishing, unsustainable fishing gear and lack of management of marine resources has lead to the Aeolian waters being disconcertingly absent of sea life*

The Aeolians have nautical form. Sailors and fishers have graced these waters for centuries. Islanders hold annual regattas in honour of Saint Bartholomew, protector of Stromboli Island. Colourful wooden boats race in the waters surrounding the smoking volcano. Visiting sailors flock to the islands in the summer months to enjoy all that this breath-taking archipelago has to offer. Isolated communities rely on the rich waters that upwell around the seven volcanic islands. The biodiversity of these waters is quite remarkable. The inshore reefs are home to groupers, lobster and octopus. The submerged seamounts provide sanctuary for amberjacks, barracuda and seabream. In deeper water, giant swordfish and tunas form great schools as they migrate through the Mediterranean Sea

Local fishermen and researchers speak excitedly about fin whales, pilot whales, dolphins, killer whales, hammerhead sharks, mobula rays, blue sharks, sailfish, and sunfish. Even the illusive Mediterranean Monk seal once bred in Aeolian caves.

Seagrass meadows sway in the crystal clear waters. This is a crucial habitat for juvenile fish and traps 35 times more carbon than rainforests. In summer, sperm whales bring their calves to the warm, sheltered Aeolian waters and endangered loggerhead turtles return from the southern Mediterranean to feed.

However, it is the lack of abundance of this marine life, especially fish in recent years that causes much concern. Overfishing, unsustainable fishing gear and lack of management of marine resources has lead to a sea, disconcertingly absent of the aforementioned sea life. Artisanal fishers despair as commercial fleets with huge nets take the remaining fish and increasing tourism puts extra pressure on delicate marine habitats.

The Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE), in partnership with the Aeolian Island Preservation Fund decisively intervened and urged the Italian government to commit to the creation of an Aeolian Marine Protected Area (MPA), an MPA that should be the largest and most effective of its kind. The process towards designation is well underway in 2017. To support and influence the

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efficacy of the MPA, Blue is applying a conservation model developed in Lyme Bay, UK, in order to improve the livelihoods of local fishers as management measures are introduced and the marine environment is restored to its former glory.

Local fishermen are coming together to create a 'code of conduct', a voluntary way of fishing sustainably, guided by Blue biologists and implemented by Aeolian fishing cooperatives. State of the art chiller units and insulated fish boxes will boost the quality of fish, allowing fishermen to achieve a higher price for their catch. Vessel monitoring systems will promote traceability and provenance of Aeolian branded fish, adding further value and reducing fishing pressure.

As the Aeolian MPA is implemented, the goal is to have a supportive community of local fishermen who will have a voice, be directly involved with the management of their waters and lead by example, discouraging destructive and unsustainable fishing around the islands.

The Aeolian MPA will be a shining example of an effective MPA - an exemplary model, which can be rolled-out across the Mediterranean to create a cohesive network of marine reserves that have the capacity to restore the marine environment and support responsible, small-scale fisheries.

A sustainable future for the islands is also dependent on visiting boats. BLUE encourages a 'code of conduct' for recreational seafarers to promote responsible tourism. Join us at the Blue Marine Foundation and the Blue Marine Yacht Club to support the movement towards a healthy Mediterranean for future generations.

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