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SEAL
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FISHING FOR WELL-BEING: THE HEALING POWER OF THE SEA

Mental Health Benefits of Fishing and the Sea

 **A FISHER'S
LIFE
FOR
INCLUSION**

2023-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000151602

PURPOSE

- Explore how fishing can boost mental health
- Learn basic fishing skills
- Promote sustainable fishing practices
- Encourage participants to reflect on their connection to the sea



WHY FISHING AND THE SEA MATTER



Fishing has been a part of Cypriot culture for generations.



Traditional fishing methods, such as net and handline fishing, were passed down through families.



Fishing was not only a means of survival but also a social and community-building activity.



Recreational fishing today provides an opportunity to reconnect with these traditions while improving mental health.

What are your memories of family fishing traditions?

THE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF BEING BY THE SEA



Being Near Water Reduces Stress and Lowers Cortisol Levels

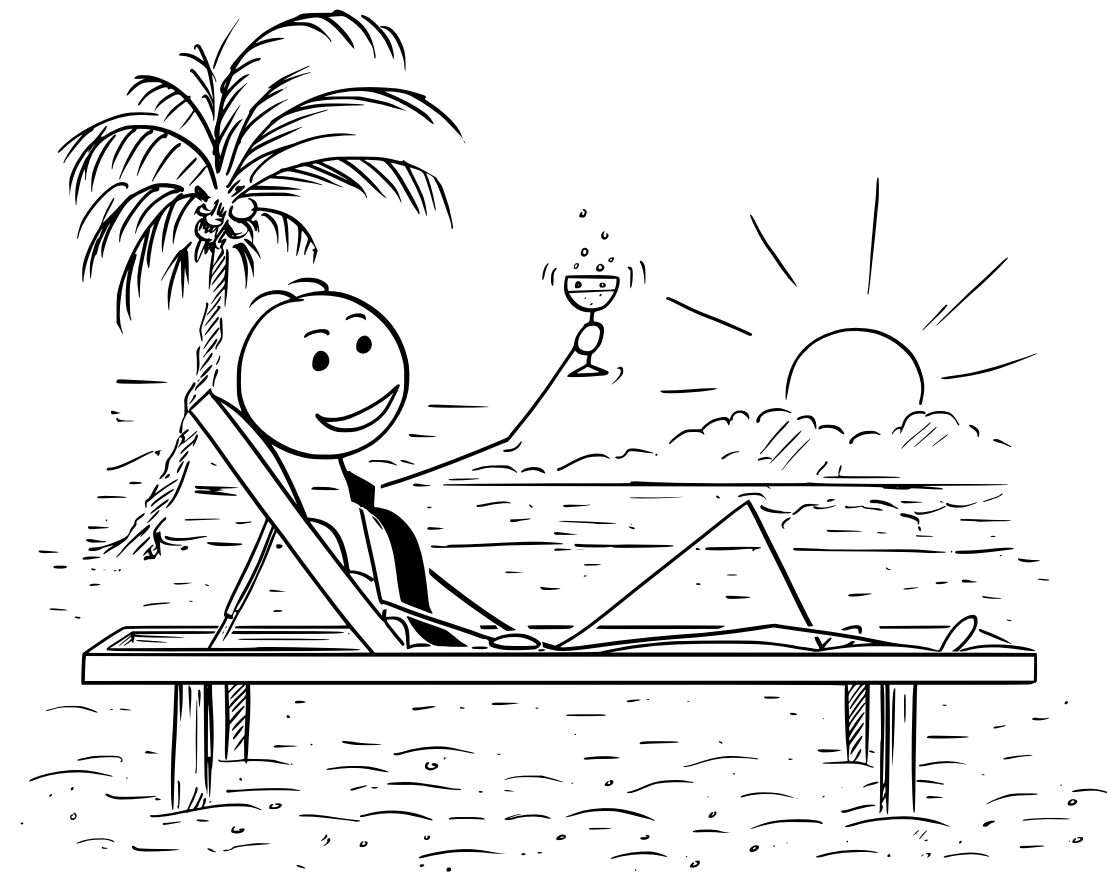
Cortisol is the body's primary stress hormone: It is released by the adrenal glands in response to stress and is part of the body's "fight or flight" response. Chronically high cortisol levels are linked to anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and weakened immune function.

How the sea environment can help reduce cortisol levels?

Studies have shown that just being near water can reduce cortisol levels significantly.

The rhythmic sound of waves, the feeling of a sea breeze, and the sight of water trigger the relaxation response, the opposite of the stress response.

When the body senses safety and calm, the production of cortisol decreases, allowing heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure to return to normal levels.



THE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF BEING BY THE SEA

Did you know:

Even short exposure to the ocean environment, such as sitting near the shore for 10 minutes, can lead to measurable reductions in cortisol levels.

The relaxation effect is enhanced by actively engaging with the sea, like fishing, swimming, and walking.



THE SOUND OF WAVES ACTIVATES THE PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



The human nervous system has two main components:

 **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):** Activates the "fight or flight" response

 **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):** Controls the "rest and digest" state, promoting relaxation and recovery

Why the Sound of Waves Matters:

The repetitive, low-frequency sound of waves is classified as white noise — a type of sound that has been shown to induce calmness and sleep.

The brain interprets the rhythmic sound of waves as a non-threatening signal.

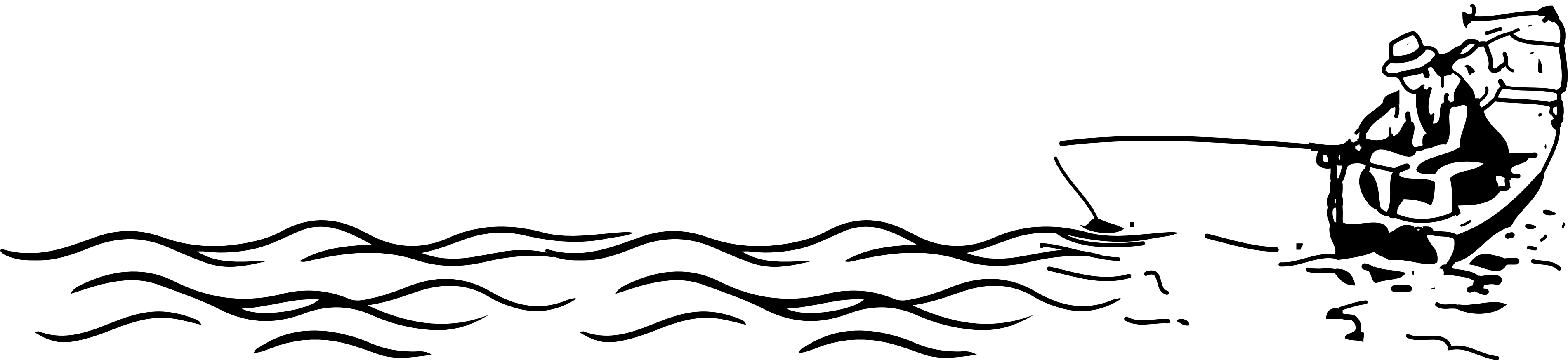
The brainstem's response to the sound of waves includes increased activity in the vagus nerve, which stimulates the PNS: **Slows heart rate - Reduces muscle tension - Lowers blood pressure - Enhances digestion and immune response**

THE SOUND OF WAVES ACTIVATES THE PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Did you know:

Even listening to recorded ocean sounds can stimulate the PNS and reduce stress.

Combining active fishing with the natural sound of waves enhances the relaxation effect.



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF THE COLOR BLUE



Humans are biologically wired to respond positively to the colour blue.

Blue is associated with Calmness, Trust and security and Openness and clarity.

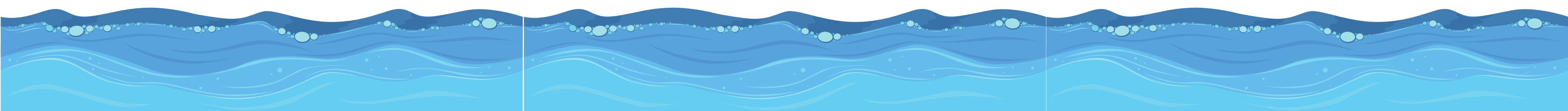
Evolutionary theory suggests that because early human survival depended on locating sources of water, humans developed a positive emotional response to blue environments.

Why Blue Has a Calming Effect

Blue light exposure is linked to increased production of serotonin, the "feel-good" hormone.

The colour blue reduces the production of cortisol and increases the production of dopamine, enhancing feelings of contentment.

A study from the University of Sussex (2017) found that people feel calmer, more creative, and more open to social interaction when exposed to blue natural environments (e.g., the sea).



MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF FISHING AND THE SEA



Reduces Anxiety and Depression

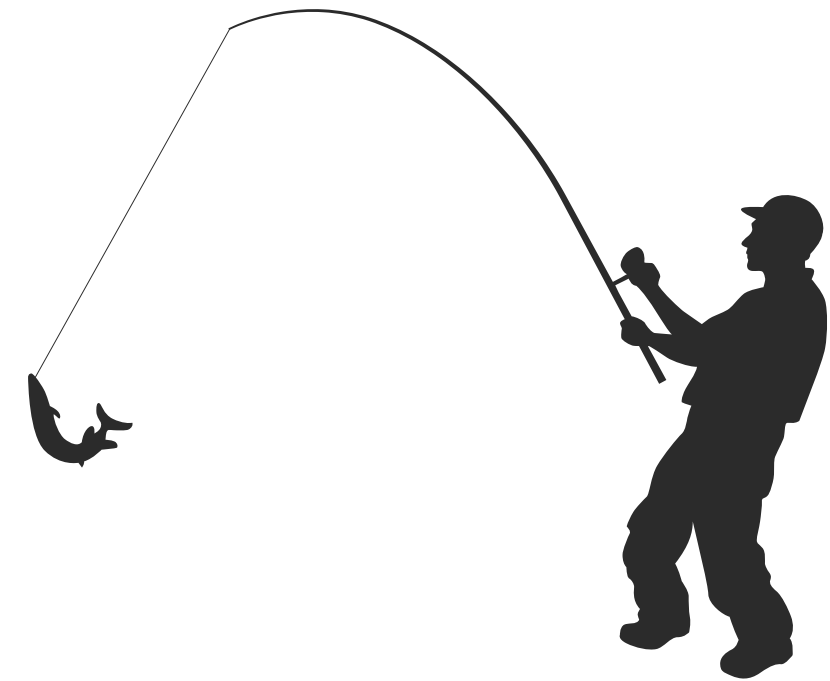
Lower cortisol levels and increased serotonin levels reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Fishing promotes a sense of achievement and control. Catching a fish provides a feeling of accomplishment.

The combination of physical activity, mindfulness, and social connection combats depressive symptoms.

A 2017 study in Environmental Research found that people who engaged in recreational fishing at least once a month had 30% lower rates of anxiety and 25% lower rates of depression compared to non-fishers.

Fishing provides a structured, goal-oriented activity, which helps people feel more focused and mentally grounded.



MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF FISHING AND THE SEA



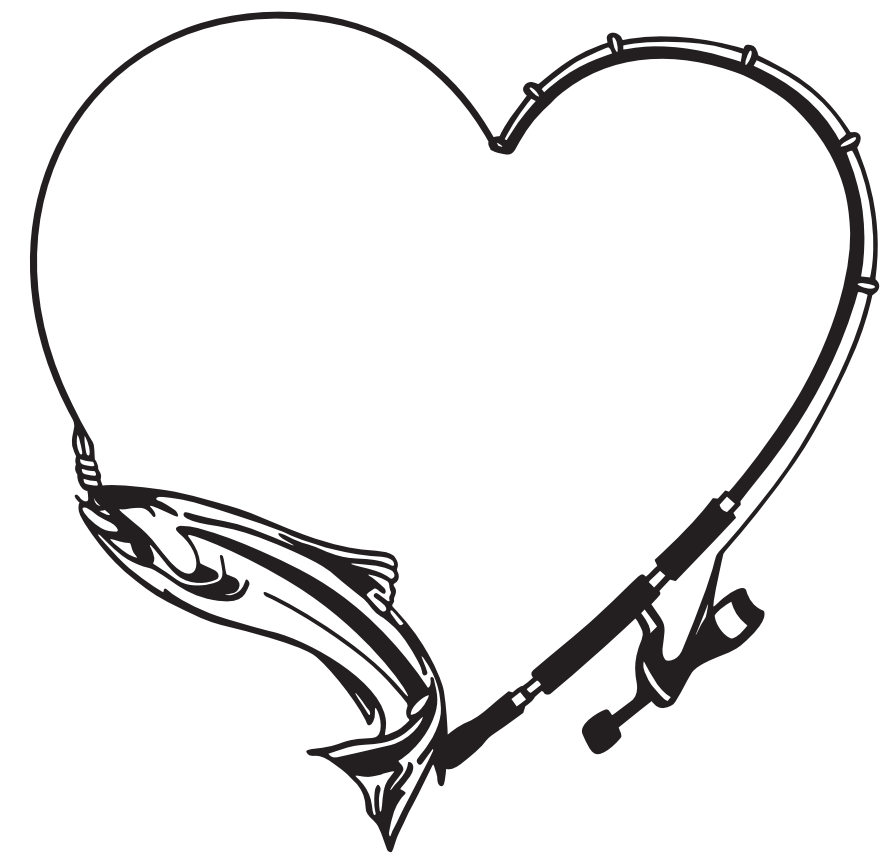
Boosts Feelings of Happiness and Well-Being

Exposure to natural environments (especially near water) increases levels of dopamine, the brain's reward chemical.

Fishing offers a sense of purpose and anticipation. The excitement of waiting for a catch releases small bursts of dopamine, reinforcing positive feelings.

The physical and emotional effort of fishing triggers the release of endorphins, which improve mood.

Even if a person doesn't catch a fish, the act of fishing itself boosts mood through the sense of engagement with nature and the sea.



MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF FISHING AND THE SEA



Improves Sleep Patterns Due to Increased Melatonin Levels

Exposure to sunlight while fishing increases the production of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep-wake cycles.

The sound of waves acts as white noise, which helps to induce deeper, more restorative sleep.

Lowered stress levels from time spent near water allow the body to produce more melatonin naturally.

20-minute sessions of sitting by the sea can improve sleep quality.



FISHING AS SOCIAL THERAPY



Fishing can be enjoyed alone, but it is also a powerful way to build relationships

Fishing trips with friends or family create shared memories.

In Cyprus, fishing is often a multigenerational activity: grandmothers teaching granddaughters.

Social connection reduces loneliness and increases feelings of belonging.

Physical and Emotional Health Benefits

Vitamin D Boost: Exposure to sunlight increases serotonin levels and boosts immune function.

Physical Activity: Casting and reeling involve muscle coordination. Walking along the shore or standing on a boat strengthens core muscles.

Deep Breathing: The sea air contains negative ions, which increase oxygen absorption and promote relaxation.



SUSTAINABLE FISHING PRACTICES



Respect fishing seasons to
protect breeding populations

Follow size and catch limits

Protect young fish

Use biodegradable gear to
prevent plastic pollution

Clean up after fishing

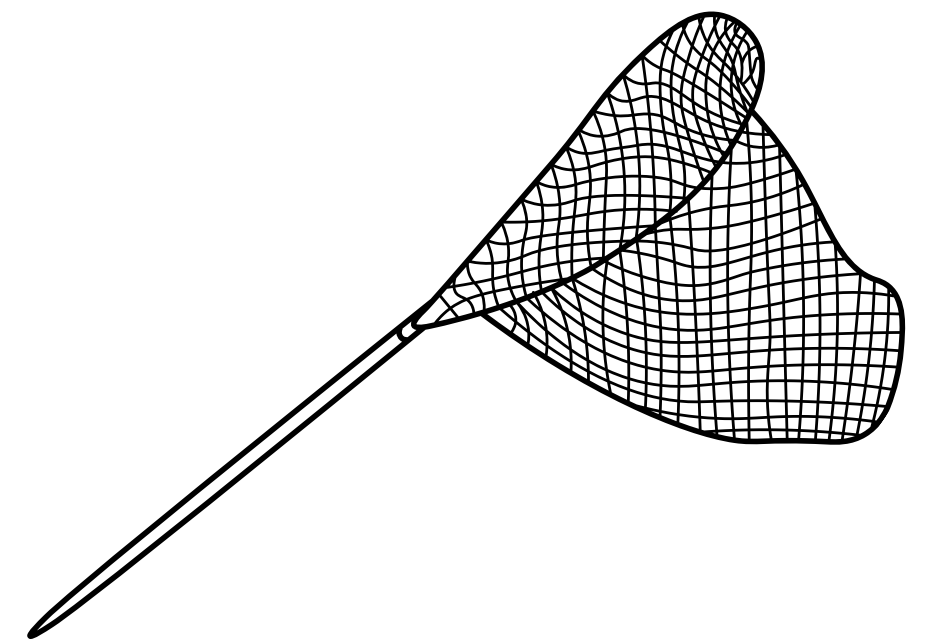
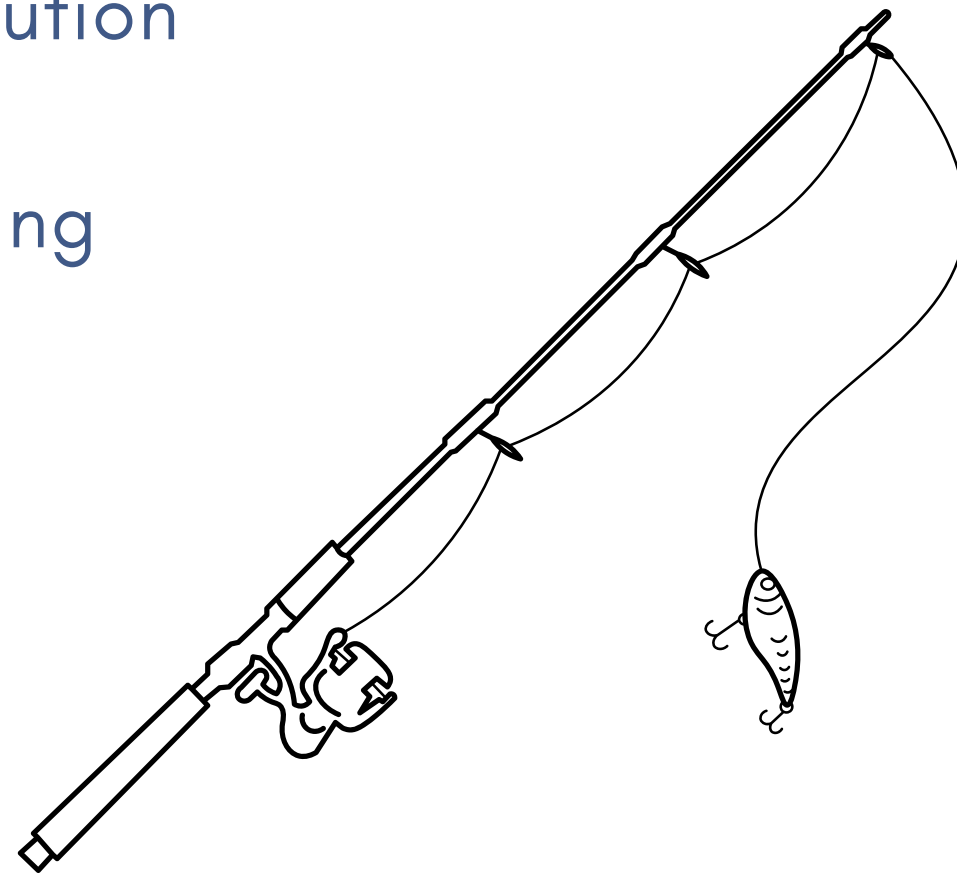
Leave no trace

Avoid anchoring on coral reefs

Respect no-fishing zones

Report illegal fishing

Participate in beach clean-ups



INTERGENERATIONAL FISHING TRADITIONS



Fishing is not only a practical activity in Cyprus: it is deeply woven into the fabric of Cypriot culture and family life.

For centuries, fishing has been a source of food, income, and social bonding in coastal villages. Women have played a crucial but often overlooked role in preserving and passing down these fishing traditions through generations.

HISTORICAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN CYPRIOT FISHING



Although men were often the ones setting out to sea, women played an essential role in the fishing community by:

- Preparing fishing gear (e.g., mending nets, making lures)
- Cleaning, preserving, and selling the catch
- Managing the household while men were at sea
- Teaching fishing techniques to younger family members
- Supporting the social structure of fishing villages

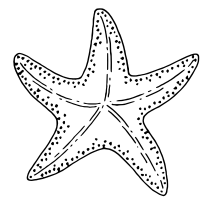
In small Cypriot fishing villages like Larnaca, Paphos, and Ayia Napa, it was common to see women sitting on the docks or in courtyards repairing fishing nets and preparing bait while men were at sea.

Mothers and grandmothers taught their daughters how to clean and cook fish, handle nets, and even cast lines from the shore.

The role of women in fishing was often less visible but equally important for the success and sustainability of local fishing practices.

PASSING DOWN KNOWLEDGE THROUGH GENERATIONS

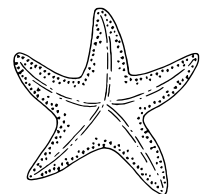
Fishing in Cyprus has always been an intergenerational activity: knowledge and skills were passed down from older generations to younger ones through direct teaching and hands-on practice.



How Knowledge Was Transferred:

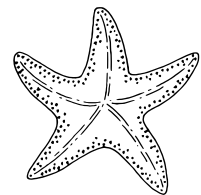
Grandmothers taught their grandchildren how to

Choose the right bait for specific fish



Handle fish without injuring them

Cast nets and lines from the shore



Respect the sea and follow natural rhythms (e.g., knowing the best fishing times based on tides)

Traditional fishing songs and stories were often shared during these lessons, reinforcing the connection between fishing and cultural identity.

FISHING AS A SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING ACTIVITY



Fishing was not just about survival, it was a community-building practice

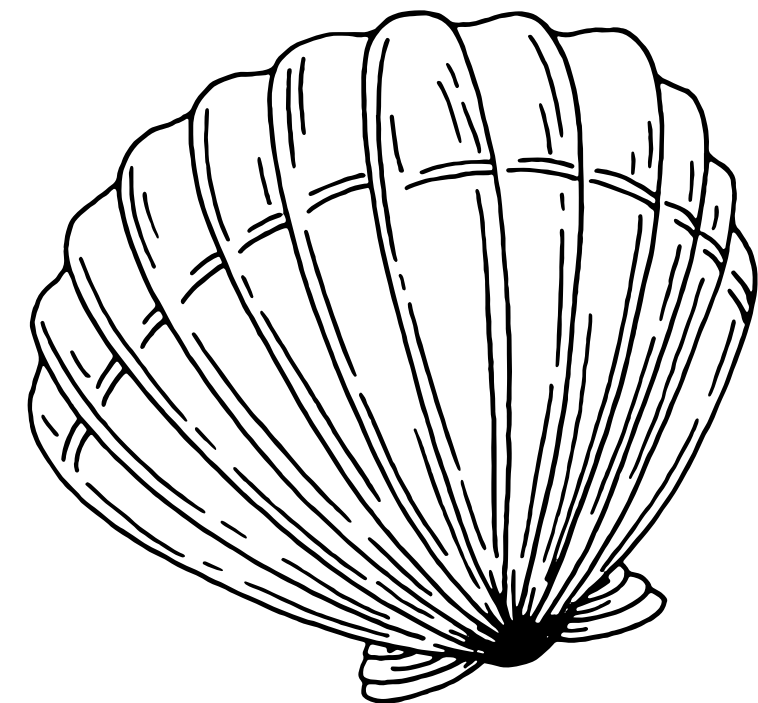
Fishing trips were often a family event where multiple generations participated together.

The catch was shared among families or within the village, reinforcing communal ties.

Fish markets and processing stations became social hubs where women exchanged recipes and techniques.

Role of Women

Women organised and prepared food for post-fishing gatherings (e.g., grilled fish, salted fish). They participated in local fishing festivals and religious celebrations tied to the sea (e.g., Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of sailors). Fishing became a way for women to connect with each other and strengthen community ties.



FISHING AND THE CONNECTION TO CULTURAL IDENTITY

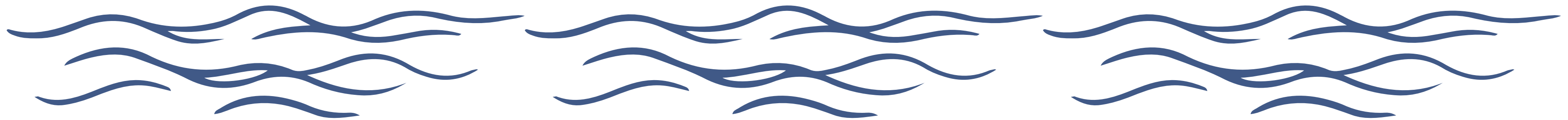


Fishing has always been tied to Cypriot identity. It represents more than just a means of survival. it is a symbol of resilience and adaptability.

Fishing traditions reflect the close relationship between Cypriots and the sea.

Stories of successful fishing trips, dangerous storms, and big catches are part of family history. Traditional recipes, such as grilled octopus or salted fish, preserve fishing heritage through cuisine.

During the annual Kataklysmos Festival (Festival of the Flood) in Cyprus, families gather along the coast to celebrate the sea with traditional songs, dances, and fishing competitions. Many women prepare salted fish and grilled seafood for the festival, a tradition passed down through generations.



MODERN CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR PRESERVATION



While traditional fishing practices have declined due to modernisation, tourism, and overfishing, women remain central to preserving these customs.

Younger generations are becoming less involved in fishing due to urbanisation and career shifts.

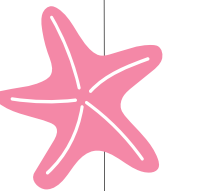
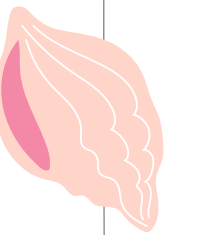
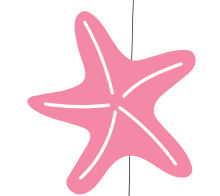
Overfishing and pollution threaten marine ecosystems and fishing stocks.

Programmes encouraging youth to reconnect with traditional fishing methods are emerging to preserve these skills.

Role of Women in Preservation

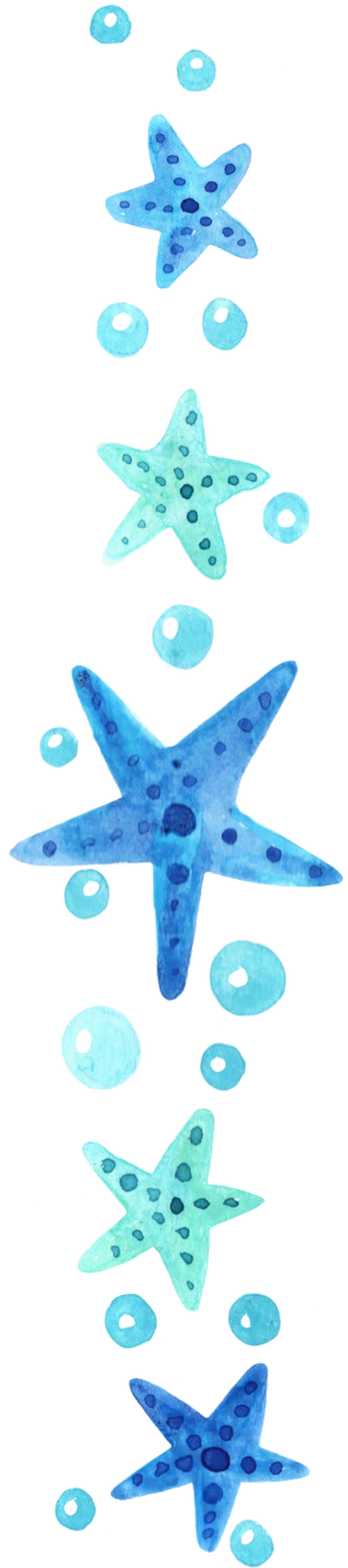
Women are leading initiatives to teach traditional fishing techniques to younger generations.

Storytelling, food preparation, and practical demonstrations are key to keeping these traditions alive.



REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Why preserving these traditions matter?
- Have you ever learned fishing techniques from an older family member?
- How do you think fishing traditions can be preserved and adapted for younger generations?
- What role do you see for women in shaping the future of fishing in Cyprus?
- What personal connections do you have with the sea or fishing?
- How do you feel when you are near the sea?
- Do you know of any fishing traditions in your village or family?
- How has modern life changed the way people in Cyprus engage with fishing and the sea?
- How do you feel when you sit or walk by the sea?
- How could fishing be used to strengthen relationships between friends and family?
- How does being active outdoors affect your mood?



THANK YOU



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Project Number: 2023-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000151602