

Raise up the Anchors

Women community ambassadors foster leadership, resilience and collective action in the UK's fishing communities

By **Stephanie Lucas**
(stephanie@women-fisheries.com), Chief Executive Officer, UK Women in Fisheries, United Kingdom

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The UK Women in Fisheries network exists for every woman in any part of the UK fisheries and seafood space. Members include vessel owners, women in catching, processors, fleet managers, scientists, fishmongers, conservationists, trainers and the partners of commercial fishermen too. Most of the UK fishing fleet is made up of small-scale, family-owned businesses. Since its founding, UK Women in Fisheries has sought to connect, support, and amplify the voices of women across the UK through networking events (both online and in-person), training opportunities, mentorship programmes and signposting vital resources and fresh opportunities.

As an organization, UK Women in Fisheries has been operating with a small, paid team and strategic leadership for just 18 months and our proudest and most impactful achievements for members include an all-women 'Seas Survival' course with Seafood Cornwall Training, a Women's F-REP (Fisheries Resource Education Programme) delivered with Fishing Into the Future, and a series of important webinars and online training opportunities – from learning about risk assessments, to understanding gender dynamics.

Now, as a more established organization and voice of authority, the leadership team at UK WIF participate in a multitude of forums surrounding the wellbeing and welfare of women working in fisheries. Our incredibly engaged members are now able to deliver the best support for their local communities – from within the community. In April 2026, we launched the Community Ambassador scheme. This opportunity allows for Women in Fisheries members to utilise funding so that the most effective support for women in any community comes from within that same local area.

The problem

The UK fishing industry spans remote and diverse geographies from the Shetland Islands to the comparably tropical southwest of England. Many of the sector's most important communities are remote, rural and isolated. Coastal villages and small islands are not merely remote in terms of distance, but research has shown that they can feel far removed from decision-making, funding streams, media attention, and from the broader conversations

about the future of fishing. For women in these places, that sense of isolation is often compounded, with recent research showing women are experiencing high levels of stress, depression and anxiety.

Women working in fisheries have long been the backbone of their communities, not only contributing economically, but holding together the social fabric of fishing families. They have advocated, organized, supported and spoken out, and have done this entirely unpaid – in addition to taking on a higher share of domestic labour. For too long, women have taken on work within fishing communities without having a financial stake in the family business or receiving any payment. Family businesses often lack the professionalisation and process that would protect women's rights to fair pay, and ensure that everybody's work is fairly compensated and recognised.

Another problem is that the Women in Fisheries team is made up of just one full-time, and two part time, staff, and supported by directors who volunteer their time to give direction and accountability. There simply aren't enough people, nor hours, to reach every community, let alone offer time and build rapport in order to cultivate trusting relationships with each other in-person.

How the Community Ambassador Scheme works

The principle at the heart of the Community Ambassador scheme is straightforward: communities are best served by the people within them. Many of the women in the Women in Fisheries network are already well-connected, highly-respected and embedded members of their communities. They are trusted by peers, acutely familiar with the fishing landscape, and fully understanding of the nuances and complexities of the relationships within the industry.

Ambassadors self-select into the role, applying via a simple online form and engaging in a brainstorming call with myself. Together, we think strategically about how their ideas for engaging in existing events, or creating a new local event, work towards achieving the UK Women in Fisheries mission and align with our values. The application process is intentionally accessible, designed to welcome women who may not have formal qualifications in advocacy or community development, but who bring



Women in Fisheries Resource Education Programme (WIF-REP) took place in London from November 17–20, 2025

the equally important lived experience, local knowledge, and the trust of the community around them. We are open to discussions on any type of activity and have already heard from women wanting to set up coffee mornings, mental health services, networking events, parties for socialising and even training activities.

Once approved, Community Ambassadors gain access to a simple Google Drive full of digital assets and receive some Women in Fisheries branded resources – from stickers and pin badges, to posters and branded lanyards. Community Ambassadors could be representing Women in Fisheries at existing events – common in the summertime across the UK – like Seafood festivals, or Harbour celebrations, or create brand new events to reach their community, attract more Women in Fisheries members, or support the recruitment and retention of staff in the industry.

Most importantly, Community Ambassadors are paid. For the 18 months we have already been operational, we have consistently protected women from requests from organizations (journalists, producers, researchers etc.) for women to contribute their knowledge and expertise with no compensation offered, and we are no different! We will never ask WIF members to work for free because we recognise that women do enough of this already. The skills that women bring to the fishing industry, and the time that they dedicate to it, are worthy of being compensated and we are hugely proud to be able to offer an hourly rate of pay.

Whilst the role of Community Ambassador is not a job, it is the first step in harnessing the

power of women in the seafood space. Many of the Community Ambassadors who have already signed up have worked 3-4 hours a month alongside other jobs, both within and outside of the seafood sector. By utilising the enthusiasm of local Women in Fisheries, we are also reaching women who might never have encountered UK Women in Fisheries through digital channels alone, and we have already seen an increase in membership from these regions.

Early days and early successes

The scheme launched in April 2026, and we are currently in a pilot phase with a small number of founding Community Ambassadors. It would be premature to claim it is fully formed as we are still in the early stages, and learning as we go. But the foundational shape is clear, and the early signs are encouraging.

What we have already seen is the power of self-selection: the women who have come forward are exactly the women we hoped would be and we are still receiving applications and interest. They are passionate, knowledgeable, already connected within their communities, and ready to step into a more formalised version of the convening and supporting roles they have often been playing informally for years. For many of them, the Community Ambassador role represents a recognition of work they have always done, but now with backing, resources, and a platform.

One woman from Cornwall, southwest England, who previously struggled with public speaking has attended a women's networking event and supported new young women

entrants at a local Sea Survival course (the first step of training required to work on commercial fishing vessels).

Another woman from Scotland has used her connections with other local businesses to set up coffee mornings for partners of commercial fishermen. This is becoming a great social resource and opportunity to signpost appropriate organizations offering a variety of support to fishing families.

What comes next

Our ambition is to build a genuinely national network of Community Ambassadors across all four nations of the UK – Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland – ensuring that no fishing community is without a local point of contact, a local champion, and a local link to the wider network.

Alongside that geographic expansion, we are committed to securing the dedicated funding needed to pay Community Ambassadors properly and sustainably. Whilst the hourly rate is competitive, and very welcome, there is a finite

amount of money in the budget for each region, and we aim to secure more funding to continue Community Ambassador activity all year.

Beyond outreach and events, we also see Community Ambassadors becoming a vital pipeline for intelligence and insight. Women on the ground in fishing communities, and at sea, see things that national organizations may miss. They understand the nuances of local industry structures, of seasonal pressures, of relationships between vessel owners and crew and processors and buyers. We need Community Ambassador insights to feed directly into policy and decision-making to ensure that the women closest to the water have a real voice in the rooms where decisions are made. **W**

For more information: <https://www.women-fisheries.com/community-ambassadors>

Read more about the research influencing UK Women in Fisheries: <https://www.women-fisheries.com/research>

To contact Women in Fisheries about Community Ambassadors, please email hello@women-fisheries.com