

Reclaiming the Wealth of Our Waters

Fisheries & the blue economy

A fisherman watches an unlicensed trawler working the inshore waters reserved for people like him — waters his community depends on for its next meal and its livelihood — and knows there's no patrol boat close enough to stop it.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Sierra Leone loses an estimated US\$50–100 million a year to illegal fishing. The bitter irony is that a nation with such rich waters now imports nearly as much fish as it sells abroad — not because the fish aren't there, but because so much of what's caught leaves unseen and unaccounted for, and because a growing artisanal fleet is itself placing more pressure on stocks than the sea can renew.

WHAT WE'RE PROMISING

The wealth of our waters staying increasingly in Sierra Leonean hands.

FLAGSHIP — Eyes on the Water

Our most powerful enforcement tool was never going to be a navy — it's our own fishing communities, who see illegal trawlers long before any patrol boat does. In the Sherbro River area, coastal communities given simple cameras, satellite locators and radios documented hundreds of cases of illegal fishing, drove pirate trawlers out of their inshore waters, and generated hundreds of thousands of dollars in real fines, at a fraction of what a navy patrol would cost. We'll build that proven, home-grown idea into a national community surveillance network along the entire coast — tens of thousands of fishers, connected by the phones already in their hands, sharing a portion of the resulting fines back with the communities that report them, so that watching the water becomes a livelihood in itself.

HOW WE'LL MAKE IT REAL

- We'll properly fund sea patrols and finally put to use the satellite vessel-tracking system the law already provides for but has left underused, alongside joint regional naval patrols with our neighbours.
- On our own artisanal fleet, whose growth is also straining the stock it depends on, the answer isn't policing poor fishermen — it's protecting the resource with them rather than against them: managing stocks by evidence instead of guesswork, protecting the mangroves and estuaries where fish are born, and using tools like the seasonal closures already piloted, paired with alternative support during the lean season so conservation doesn't come at the price of hunger.
- We'll build landing sites, ice, cold storage and processing where the fish is actually landed, so the value stays home instead of leaving with the catch — with particular support, including cleaner smoking technology and fair finance, for the women who dominate the fish trade — and put simple mobile tools for prices, weather and payments directly into fishers' hands, just as we intend for farmers on land.
- We do need real investment — the harbours, cold chains and processing plants a modern blue economy requires — and a major processor already operating here shows what's possible. We'll welcome that kind of investment on clear terms: transparency about what's caught and exported, a fair share of value kept in Sierra Leone, genuine local jobs rather than near-empty mechanised operations, and protection of our coastline. We'll be especially wary of the fishmeal model that has scarred neighbouring countries, where food-grade fish is ground into feed for export while local waters are stripped bare.
- We haven't stopped at the sea. Our rivers, lakes and swamps, and practical fish farming, are a largely

untapped source of protein and income we can control far more directly than the ocean — we'll support inland fisheries and appropriately scaled aquaculture as another front in the same campaign, integrated with our wider food strategy.

- And we'll govern the whole sector in the open, with a public digital register of who is licensed to fish and on what terms, and honest published reporting of what's actually caught and landed.

“So much is taken from our waters unseen that we cannot say what we keep. A fishing nation now imports its own fish. This was never poverty. It was plunder we failed to stop.”