

Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to jane@rufford.org.

Your Details	
Full Name	Manuela Funes
Project Title	Characterization of the interaction of elasmobranchs and a small-scale fishery of Mar del Plata.
Application ID	43082-2
Date of this Report	August 2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
<p>A detailed description of fishers, including: primary sources of income, income diversification strategies, and temporal fishing patterns. Additionally, fishing gears used, vessel specifications, ownership status, and average travel times will be documented.</p>		x		<p>We have partially fulfilled this objective. We obtained very detailed quantitative and qualitative information for the small-scale fishery using kayaks. However, for the inflatable boat fishery, further work is needed to deepen its characterization. Nonetheless, this is the group with which the strongest engagement has been established throughout the project. See section 10.</p>
<p>Characterization of elasmobranch capture: species composition, catch volumes, capture methods, sales channels, and consumption patterns. Factors influencing capture, seasonal variations, bait types, incentives, or counterincentives</p>		x		<p>The characterization of elasmobranch captures was partially achieved. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, efforts in this phase prioritized understanding fishers' concerns and consolidating group identity. Progress was made, but completing this</p>

of capture.				objective will require further work in future stages.
Identification of conflicts, needs, and other concerns expressed by fishers through stakeholder engagement.			x	This objective was fulfilled entirely through the semi-structured interviews. However, these aspects in a socio-ecological systems are dynamic and will require long-term monitoring. Understanding the problems and conflicts faced by the sector helps us refine the proposals developed by the research team, ensuring that the fishery under study moves towards genuine long-term sustainability
Foster group identity, connection, and a sense of belonging among fishermen			x	Fostering group identity, connection, and a sense of belonging among fishermen was one of the project's significant achievements. The strong sense of identity built during this process provides a solid foundation for future stages of the project, enabling us to take on new challenges collaboratively. Achieving this

				objective significantly increases the feasibility of future project phases, as it strengthens trust, cooperation, and shared commitment among participants.
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

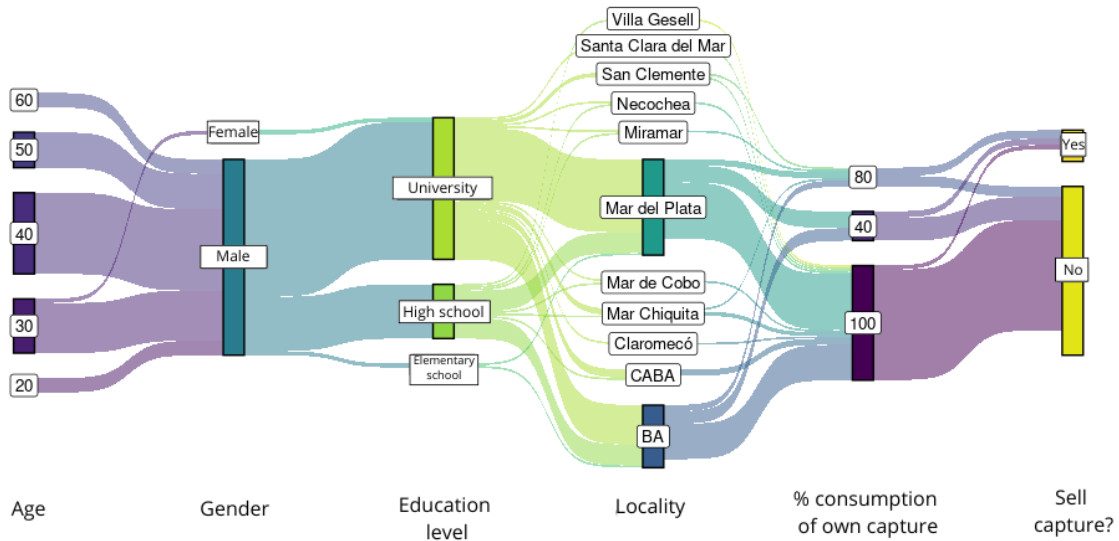
a) Comprehensive characterization of Mar del Plata's kayak fishers

As part of this project, we conducted the first detailed socio-ecological study of fishers along the Buenos Aires coast. We conducted a total of 15 interviews with key actors involved in artisanal and recreational coastal fisheries. These included six kayak fishers (including four who own restaurants that sell their catch and one who relies entirely on fishing as a source of income), six inflatable boat fishers, one intermediary fish vendor, one recreational kayak fisher who also acts as a social media influencer of kayak fishing, and one cook who works with artisanal fishers preparing and promoting their products. From the semi-structured interviews, we designed a structured online questionnaire and collected 96 valid responses. Individuals over 18 years of age were contacted through a virtual snowball sampling strategy. The survey was distributed through multiple channels, including WhatsApp groups, local radio and streaming services, social media (with accounts on Instagram and Facebook), and fishing equipment shops.

The survey contained eight thematic sections:

1. Demographic data – age, gender, residence, education level, family composition. Results in Figure 1.
2. Fishing practices – experience in kayak fishing, percentage of catch for self-consumption, share of monthly income derived from fishing, and processing methods.
3. Fishing logistics – entry sites, time spent fishing, frequency, and average catch size.
4. Sales and costs – commercialization strategies and related expenses.
5. Local ecological knowledge – emphasis on shark and ray capture and perception.
6. Difficulties in the activity – including access, competition, and infrastructure.
7. Social participation and communication – association membership, meeting points, information sources.
8. Environmental values and recognition – perceived social recognition, willingness to adopt sustainable practices, perceived environmental impact.

Figure 1: Diagram of the demographic profile of the surveyed population. The columns show data on age, gender, education level, fishing area, percentage of catch used for self-consumption, and percentage sold.



b) First documentation of kayak fishers' perspectives and motivations regarding elasmobranch capture

One of the project's most relevant contributions was the first systematic collection of local knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes regarding the capture of elasmobranchs (sharks and rays) among small-scale fishers, mainly those operating from kayaks, along the Buenos Aires coast.

The survey revealed that (Figure 2):

1. Fifty-seven percent of respondents rarely catch sharks or rays, and 12% reported not capturing them.
2. Among those who reported catching sharks or rays, 91% stated that these captures are incidental and not a target of their fishing activity.
3. Sixty-one percent responded that elasmobranchs are consumed less frequently in their households compared to bony fish such as croaker or weakfish.
4. Sixty-four percent affirmed being aware of levels of extinction risk between bony fishes and elasmobranchs.

These results highlight the limited awareness of the conservation status of elasmobranchs, but also indicate a relatively low dependency or cultural preference for these species, which could facilitate future conservation strategies.

Figure 2: Perception of ray and shark fishing. The figure shows the proportion of responses to the following questions: a) In your household, are rays and/or sharks consumed?; b) Is catching rays and/or sharks one of your fishing targets?; c) How often do you catch rays and/or sharks?; and d) Do you believe there are differences between the conservation status of rays and sharks compared to bony fish such as croakers and weakfish?



c) Formal working relationship with the fishers

Most fishers (particularly from inflatable boats) demonstrated a strong commitment to the project throughout the workshops. They engaged with the tasks, respected the agreed-upon schedules, and attended consistently. Most participants honored the invitation and actively contributed to the collaborative activities.

Communication remained fluid between and after workshops, with fishers reaching out to share doubts, news, and feedback on reports. They also inquired about future meetings, showing a sustained interest in maintaining the dialogue. This ongoing interaction strengthened the working relationship and fostered a sense of mutual trust and collaboration.

A total of 13 participants attended the first workshop and 16 attended the second. The social mapping exercise was conducted during the first workshop, while infographics were used as an alternative participatory tool in the second. Furthermore, an institutional programme has been approved to deliver expert talks from the university to different sectors of artisanal fishers. We are currently coordinating this initiative by training the invited experts in social communication skills and arranging participation with the fishing community.

First Workshop: Social mapping.



Second workshop: Infographic construction.



d) A practical product from the collaborative work with the fishers: Infographics.

Argentina is traditionally a livestock-oriented country and has one of the lowest per capita fish consumption rates in the region. Hake is the most consumed and well-known fish species in restaurants and markets, primarily harvested by industrial fisheries. Therefore, the infographics aim to raise awareness of other species caught by artisanal fisheries. By highlighting their biological traits and culinary value, these materials seek to promote consumption of these lesser-known species and, in turn, support the visibility and sustainability of artisanal fisheries.

As a result of the second meeting, we co-created with fishers a series of informative sheets (infographics) about seven fish species from the coast of Mar del Plata. These materials aimed to raise awareness about lesser-known species to consumers by highlighting their biology and culinary value, thereby promoting their consumption

and supporting the visibility and sustainability of artisanal fisheries. The collaborative process also strengthened mutual trust, fostered cooperation and dialogue among fishers, integrated scientific knowledge, and reinforced the relationship between the fishing community and society through the joint creation of outreach materials. The focus on fish biology, in particular, provided an organic platform to examine the contrasting traits of Teleosts and Elasmobranchs, prompting reflections on their respective vulnerabilities.

The resulting sheets seek to valorize empirical fisher knowledge and enhance the connection between the fishing community and wider society. This work forms part of a broader effort to democratize scientific knowledge and promote participatory governance processes in coastal territories.

This experience highlighted the value of collaborative methodologies for generating situated knowledge, identifying information gaps, and raising new research questions.

This sample includes four of the seven infographics. The material is currently under revision and will be released soon.



3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

We faced challenges in securing the commitment of kayak fishers to attend and participate in the meetings. To address this, during the second meeting, we emphasized the importance of their involvement and the resources invested in organizing the sessions. We also established direct contact with all participants to improve communication and adapted the catering arrangements to allow for last-minute changes in attendance, minimizing financial losses.

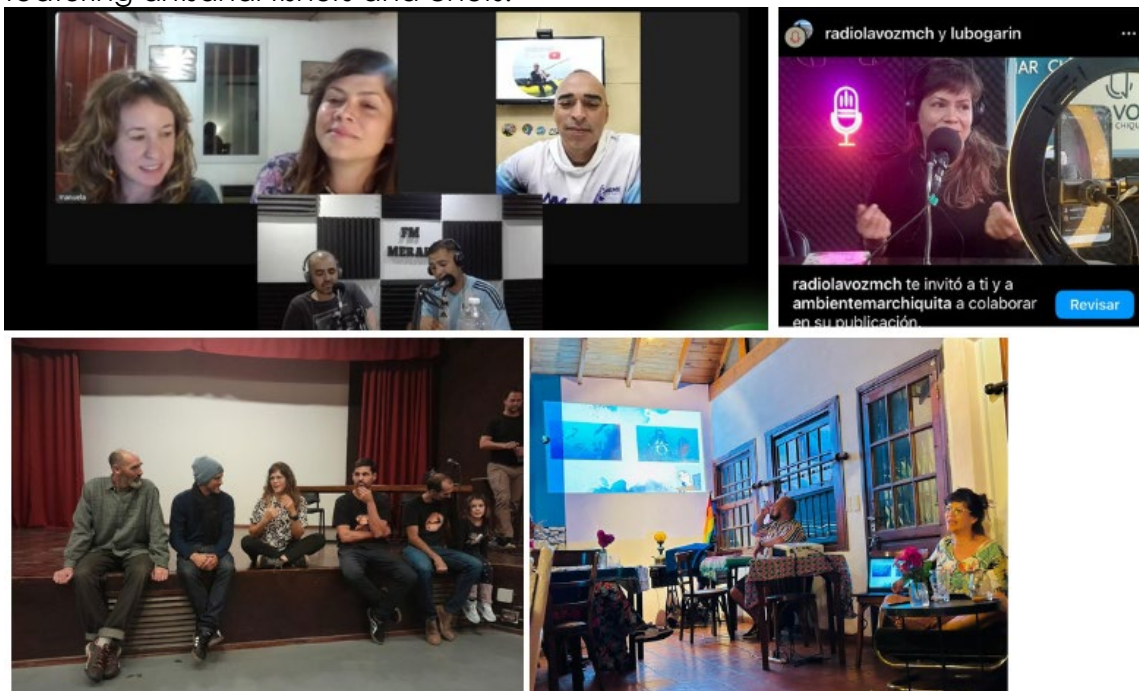
4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.

Local communities showed strong interest in the project, actively participating in the survey and recommending it to their peers. The number of fishers attending the meetings increased progressively. Following the first meeting, the hosting community organized an event featuring dishes made from artisanal fishing products and invited us to participate and present our project.

In addition, the National University of Mar del Plata, together with the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), through the Institute of Marine and Coastal Research, presented the project *“Promotion of Sustainable Fishing Practices in the Province of Buenos Aires: Training for Small-Scale Fishers”* to a call launched by the Federal Fisheries Council under the program *Support for the Training and Capacity Building of Fishing Personnel*. Our team was invited to participate, with one of our members serving as the project’s co-director. The proposal was selected for funding, and training activities will be developed during this year. This initiative is particularly encouraging, as it will allow continued work on the ecosystem-based approach to artisanal fisheries along the Buenos Aires coast.

We also successfully published the first official report on the emerging kayak fishery. The report, titled *“Emerging Fisheries on the Buenos Aires Coast: The Case of Fishers Using Kayaks as a Means of Vessel,”* was officially released by the Institute of Marine and Coastal Research.

Public presentations of our project include appearances on local radios, fishers’ streaming, a University talk at a documentary presentation, and a culinary event featuring artisanal fishers and chefs.



5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, absolutely. This project has created an incredible working group and laid the foundation for further advancing our understanding of the fisheries under study. We plan to continue collaborating closely with the fishers’ group that was consolidated throughout the project’s development.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

As mentioned in section 4, we have already published a report for our institute. I presented a talk at the National Fish Symposium in November 2024 titled *“Kayak Fisheries of Southeast Buenos Aires and Elasmobranch Capture from a Socio-*

Ecological Approach.” Additionally, we scheduled to present two talks at the National Conference of Marine Science in December 2025: “*Socio-Environmental Vulnerabilities of Artisanal Fisheries in Mar del Plata: The Case of the Challwakat Ltda Cooperative (2024-2025),*” and “*Collaborative Booklets on Coastal Fishes: A Co-Construction Experience with Artisanal Fishers and Chefs in Southeast Buenos Aires.*”

A special dissemination of the collaboratively created infographics will be carried out with the fishers and chefs who work specifically with fish, providing significant local visibility to the project.

We are currently preparing two manuscripts: one on Local Ecological Knowledge and elasmobranch capture, and another on Local communication of environmental issues and citizen participation, both of which we plan to submit later this year.

Talk at the National Ictiology Symposium.



7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

We are currently assessing the extent of kayak fisheries with seasonality, type of day (weekday vs. non-working day), and catch volume. We are also exploring future funding opportunities to expand this work, aiming to include a detailed analysis of the catch to determine the proportion and species composition of elasmobranchs captured.

We plan to facilitate a third meeting to present infographics to fishers and provide printed copies for distribution among them. Chefs who contributed recipes to the booklets will also be invited to strengthen the ties between fishers and those operating restaurants and fish sales businesses.

We will also carry out activities within the framework of the CONICET–Federal Fisheries Council project, providing our expertise. Additionally, we will seek to involve the fishers so they can participate in the training sessions offered.

More importantly, we need to deepen our understanding of the interactions between the fishery and elasmobranchs. This objective remains incomplete because further dialogue is necessary. Fishers face increasing challenges in carrying out their activities, and we considered that other priorities required more immediate attention before addressing sensitive issues such as restrictions on their fishing practices.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes. The logo is being used in the infographic, in the conference presentations and will be mentioned in the manuscript acknowledgments.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Dr. Manuela Funes,
Ms. Ariadna Golostegui Valenti,
Dr. Germán O. García

10. Any other comments?

We would like to clarify that, although the project addressed both kayak and inflatable boat fisheries, the online survey was conducted only with kayak fishers for two main reasons:

1-From the insights gathered during the semi-structured interviews, we found that in the kayak fishery, the boundary between recreational and artisanal fishing is dynamic. The degree of economic dependence on the activity varies among fishers: some perceive it as their primary occupation, while others do not consider it a job but still sell their catch when the opportunity arises (e.g., landing fish on the beach and selling it to interested tourists). In the inflatable boat fishery, the group was entirely composed of commercial fishers. This heterogeneity led us to treat each fishery as a separate "universe" and to describe them independently.

2-Inflatable boat fishers tend to be older, with less familiarity and access to digital technologies, which makes online surveys less effective. And they proved to work better in person. Additionally, in Mar del Plata, this group operates as a brotherhood under the strong leadership of one individual, who, unfortunately, experienced serious health and personal issues during the project period. This situation, combined with the need for a more tailored data collection strategy for this sector, delayed our capacity to advance surveys with inflatable boat fishers.

ANNEX – Financial Report
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