



Where I work Laura Aiudi

Photographed for *Nature*
by Elisabetta Zavoli.

I'm from a fishing family. My grandfather was a fisherman when he was a young man, working out of Fano, the Italian town where I grew up and still live. I'm used to the smell of fish.

I'm pictured during an overnight shift on the fishing boat *RIMAS*. I work from 5 p.m. until 9 a.m. with fishermen from nearby Cesenatico on the north Adriatic Sea. It's a small boat: there's only six or so of us on board. At night, the fish are most active and we can avoid other vessels.

The nets scrape the sea bed for the catch but sometimes they also catch turtles who often die in the nets or on board. That's where I come in. The net I'm holding is designed to allow turtles to escape: it has a hole at the top they can swim out of. We call it TED – short for 'turtle excluder device'. The TED is made from a high-strength plastic, and is based on decades of work and research aimed at reducing the bycatch of turtles from trawling. Turtles and some larger fish can leave through the escape hatch, but the current holds most of the catch in the net.

I ensure that the net is working, and that

the fishermen we're collaborating with can still catch enough for their livelihoods while protecting turtles. The work is part of research by the Cetacea Foundation in Riccione, Italy, where I'm a field researcher, in collaboration with the University of Pisa. It is financed by the LIFE programme, the European Union's funding instrument for the environment and climate action.

I love this work. It means I'm not stuck in an office all day and instead can enjoy the ocean and work closely with people who live by the sea. I get to be a researcher who works outside, rather than being hunched over a microscope.

When my grandfather was fishing in the 1970s, there were more fish and more turtles around. At the foundation, we save 50–60 turtles a year, most of them harmed because of fishing. If we can protect turtles by rolling out this device to fishermen all across the Adriatic, I'd see this work as a success.

Laura Aiudi is a field researcher at the Cetacea Foundation, Riccione, Italy. **Interview by Jack Leeming.**

Correction

This article erroneously affiliated Laura Aiudi with the University of Pisa. In fact, she is a field researcher at the Cetacea Foundation.