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Advice on the indicators available for the purpose of assessing the socioeconomic impact of the Mediterranean management plans

Foreword: during the meeting held in Rome on 23rd November, WG5 informed the MEDAC on the outcome of the study carried out on the socioeconomic state of the Mediterranean fisheries sector. Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia and Spain were covered by the study and official data validated by the STECF were used. The graphs reporting the indicator trends are reported in the annex.

It is the MEDAC's view that:

- On the basis of the data provided by the member states and by processing information on the number of vessels, days at sea, turnover and the quantity of product landed, an overall decline could be observed in socioeconomic terms:
  - In the years between 2008 and 2021, the fishing fleet declined considerably with a noticeable decrease in fishing effort.
  - There was a 22% decrease in the number of small-scale fishing vessels and a 29% decrease in the number of industrial fishing vessels active in the Mediterranean.
  - There was a significant decrease in the number of days at sea in the Mediterranean area, with a 36% reduction for small-scale fisheries and a 40% reduction for industrial fisheries.
- A consequence of the decrease in fishing activity was a reduction in catches:
  - overall quantities of landed product declined by 34%, however there was no consequent increase in profitability for the companies and workers on board.
  - The value of the product caught decreased by 30% for small-scale fisheries and 26% for industrial fisheries. It is worth noting that while the volume of landings decreased, for most countries there was not a corresponding increase in prices to ensure the economic sustainability of fishing enterprises, especially for small-scale fisheries.

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- The number of workers employed fell by 29% in small-scale fisheries and 18% in industrial fisheries.
- A significant drop in full-time employment (FTE) was observed: 41% in small-scale fisheries and 22% in industrial fisheries. This accentuated the problem of unemployment and depopulation in coastal communities.
- The issue of ageing vessels was noted, resulting in poor technical and economic performance as well as contributing to a clear lack confidence in the future prospects of the sector.

- It is emphasised that both fish stocks and employment in the sector are struggling to regain levels of overall sustainability in the way that the EU has sought to achieve in recent years with the various regulations passed to this effect.

- Costs related to running fishing enterprises and those related to vessel crews have increased considerably, while there has been a significant drop in remuneration and profits for these same enterprises, meaning that fishing activities are no longer profitable. This results in fishing enterprises and workers abandoning the sector, which could threaten the future survival of fishing communities.

- The attached graphs largely correspond to the 2022 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet. This year could see the entire European fleet closing at a loss, with landed product having declined in both weight and value. Moreover, consumer prices are stagnating which stands in contrast with operating costs which are rising. Revenues in 2019/2020 fell by 17%, value by 16%, gross profit by 26% and net profit by 45%, while overall employment fell by 3%.

- Given the situation faced by the EU fleet and specifically by the Mediterranean fleet, urgent action is needed to reverse this dramatic trend.

- The main objective is to establish a balance between employment and fish stocks, which is also in the sector's interest.

- It is necessary that any initiative introduced to protect one of the two factors in question: employment and resources, be preceded by specific studies highlighting all the possible negative effects and considering possible remedies.

- It is essential to adopt an ecosystem approach in which the impact on resources stemming from climate change, pollution, alien species, offshore wind farms, maritime traffic, as well as other sources, is properly evaluated.

Lastly, in the light of the above and the available data, the MEDAC believes it is important to establish effective dialogue with DG Environment and DG Employment, as well as with any entity which can provide answers to the problems highlighted in order to safeguard a sector that is strategic for the economy of the Mediterranean region (MEDAC, 2017[1]).

[1] MEDAC OPINION ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE FISHERIES SECTOR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Ref. 191/2017) LINK