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MEDAC advice on preparations of the decisions on the fishing opportunities for next year for fish stocks in the EU Mediterranean Waters

Background - The MEDAC analyzed the "COMMISSION SERVICES NON-PAPER on 24 November 2023 – Updates to Commission Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION fixing the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Mediterranean and Black Seas for 2024 (COM(2023)578 final)".

On the aforementioned proposal, the MEDAC reiterates its following advice (among others):

- **Ref. 270/2017** Rome, 7 November 2017 MEDAC opinion for a Multiannual Plan (MAP) for the Fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean Sea.
- **Ref. 217/2020** Rome, MEDAC contribution to GFCM Strategy 2021-2025.
- **Ref. 182/2022** Rome, 26 July 2022 MEDAC recommendation on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Towards more sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2023".
- **Ref. 318/2022** Rome, 03 November 2022 MEDAC advice on the Selectivity improvement and Compensation Mechanism in the West Med. *Please, note that the conclusions of this advice should be taken into consideration for the whole Mediterranean*.
- **Ref. 338/2022** Rome, 02 December 2022 MEDAC advice on preparations of the decisions on the fishing opportunities for next year for fish stocks in the EU Mediterranean waters.
- **Ref. 122/2023** Rome, 24 July 2023 MEDAC advice on Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2024.

Moreover, at the roundtable with the Advisory Councils ahead of the decisions on the FOs for 2024 held last 7 December, MEDAC explained to the Commissioner that the first socioeconomic analysis is being carried now, after 4 years of the West Med MAP although MEDAC clearly warned in its Advice Ref. 270/2017 that "*before the implementation of management measures a socio-economic analysis must be carried out in order to evaluate the impacts and ensure the stability for different activities and interests both commercial and recreational fisheries*".

The scenarios contemplated by EWG 23-11 foresee negative socio-economic impacts in the short and medium term, depending on the management scenarios tested. Some of which involve a reduction in gross added value, gross profits, employment and average salaries. Besides, the analysis over the period 2015 and 2022 showed that the application of the management plan led to a reduction in the value of landings of certain fleets, in particular bottom trawlers (for example a quarter of the French fleet has been phased out by 2022). A reduction that the STECF considers necessary to be monitored. It should be remembered that.

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A deep impact is evident at the socioeconomic level that affects all the value chain (from the extractive phase to the sale), such as in the case of the West Med MAP, where the fishing days reduction and the additional management measures are affecting the entire sector from the crews to the processing and markets.

Considering the above-mentioned concerns, MEDAC is asking to postpone the date for reaching the MSY of the West Med MAP to 1st January 2030 to avoid the closure and irremediable loss of the productive sector of commercial fisheries and related activities.

The MEDAC acknowledges the fact that the fisheries sector needs to be steered towards the criteria which would ensure achievement of full sustainability, without delay. An ecosystem-based approach shall allow managers to take into account multiple factors, including those independent from fisheries, and provide tools to mitigate the impact that management measures adopted for target species have on other stocks, especially when considering mixed fisheries (Ref. 115/2021). The Food Fish value chain not only provides food but also it has a traction effect on other activities and on the socioeconomic processing sector of the territories where it is located. This Food Fish value chain is one of the main assets of the Food Sovereignty and Security for the EU.

The Mediterranean fisheries sector already implemented management measures for sustainability on its own initiative and from years ago, always seeking the collaboration and support of responsible administrations and scientific experts.

The collaboration of the fishery sector towards sustainability is demonstrated by the results obtained so far through the last SomFi 2023 (*The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023*; https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc8888en). The report highlights the reduction of 15% in overfishing in the last year. Moreover, in these years the fishing pressure has been reduced by 31% since 2012.

The continuous and constructive collaboration of the MEDAC is reaffirmed by the meeting with the co-chairs of the STECF EWG 23-11, with the attendance of DG MARE. It was the first STECF – MEDAC exchange on the fishing effort regime in the Western Mediterranean, in relation to the socio-economic analysis being carried out with the intention of starting a dialogue with the MEDAC stakeholders, to have a feedback on the real situation at a social and economic level compared to the results of simulations presented by the STECF scientific experts.

MEDAC deems appropriate:

- Management measures can no longer be limited to being restrictive as systematic reduction of the number of working days and of the Shrimp catch limit.
- It is necessary to compensate for the significant losses that may occur, and, in this sense, the Compensation Mechanism should provide for a higher percentage (10%) in order to be enough attractive:
    - Promote the Selectivity projects.

- Effort reduction measures and catch limits should be combined with spatial measures, such as those providing permanent protection of essential fish habitats[1] (nursery and spawning grounds) supported also through fishing effort Compensation Mechanism.
- A wider use of no-take zones as a complementary measure to improve selectivity and protect essential fish habitats[1] (Ref. 318/2022). The use of trawl doors lighter and less impacting should be promoted, reducing the impact on the benthos and fuel consumption.

- Any decision on spatial measures for fisheries management in West Med MAP be in alignment with MSP plans. Quantities not caught in total catch limit assigned in a year to a MS can be transferred to the following year and unexploited fishing days in a year should be recovered in the following one by each fishing vessel, both when it is provided that the stocks of species subject to maximum catch limits are not below safe biological limits. This prevision could be done by publication of a EU Delegated Act. The definition of "fishing day" should be revisited according to the "*MEDAC opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation of the EP and of the Council establishing a MAP for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea (Ref. 189/2018)*" so "[…] *In the Med. The great variety of fishing activities timing doesn't allow the enforcement of this article* [on the fishing day definition]. *Furthermore, the time needed to reach the fishing area and the marine weather conditions should be duly taken into consideration. MEDAC could suggest a different effort unit, more specific for the fishing activities in the Med aimed to the effort reduction.*"

[1] The French sector is opposed to the establishment of additional and permanent zone closures in view of the demonstrated effectiveness of the spatio-temporal closures currently implemented in GSA7.