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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

Background - The MEDAC analyzed the "COMMISSION SERVICES NON-PAPER on 23 November 2022 - Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION on fixing for 2023 the fishing opportunities for certain stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Mediterranean and Black Seas and amending Council Regulation (EU) 2022/110 as regards the fixing of fishing opportunities for 2022 applicable in the Mediterranean and the Black Seas" and the Annexes.

On the aforementioned proposal, the MEDAC reiterates its following advice:

- 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" LINK

- Ref. 318/2022 Rome, 03 November 2022 MEDAC advice on the selectivity improvement and compensation mechanism in the West Med. LINK Please, note that the conclusions of this advice should be taken into consideration also for the whole Mediterranean.

Moreover, the results of the STECF EWG for the Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet II (STECF EWG 22-06) highlighted that *"In 2020, the regional fishing fleet's economic performance worsened with decreased gross profit and net profit even if variation across Member States can be observed (France, Croatia and Slovenia showed an improving pattern in the net profit over the period). The overall negative trend was driven by the Italian, Greek, Maltese and Spanish fleet.*
Results for 2020 are driven by COVID-19 pandemic; apart from Slovenia, the outbreak has had a direct impact on:
- fishing effort: a marked overall reduction in effort in terms of days at sea has been observed in all fleet segments;
- first sale price: a reduction of the first sale price involved some of the main commercial species (European anchovy, European, pilchards, Deep-water rose shrimp, Atlantic bluefin tuna). The closure of fish markets and restaurants had seriously negatively affected the quantity demanded and, consequently, the prices;
- crew wages and salaries: the average crew (labour costs on total jobs) decreased by 3% in 2020 compared to 2019; the reduction can be linked to the negative trend in revenues as, in most countries, labour costs are directly related to revenues as the traditional based income sharing system between the ship-owner and the crew is the most prevalent.

Disclaimer - This advice reflects only the MEDAC's view and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information that it contains

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In addition, the implementation of management plans for DTS and PS segments in Western Mediterranean and Adriatic Sea lead to a further reduction in days at sea; the fishing effort regimes and the introduction of new spatio-temporal closures are a major source of concern for professional fishers for the period beyond 2020.[1]"

On spatio-temporal closures, MEDAC has supported their introduction which are considered a key tool of ecosystem-based approach to fisheries, to protect essential fish habitats (nursery and spawning grounds) in several occasions such as:

- MEDAC advice on the selectivity improvement and compensation mechanism in the West Med (Ref. 318/2022) LINK
- MEDAC contribution to GFCM Strategy 2021-2025 (ref.217/2020) LINK
- MEDAC opinion for a Multiannual Plan (map) for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean Sea (Ref.:270/2017) LINK

The Mediterranean fisheries sector already implemented management measures for sustainability on its own initiative, always seeking the collaboration and support of responsible administrations and scientific experts and wants to continue the collaboration towards the sustainability. It should be noted that the state of the resource is undergoing a favourable development which is strengthening over the most recent years[2].

Therefore, considering the impact of the Pandemic restrictions still affecting the fleet, the new crisis due to the increasing of fuel prices, and the catch limits as a new management tool just implemented in the Mediterranean, the MEDAC deems appropriate:

i) that the quantities not caught in total catch limit assigned in a year to a MS can be transferred to the following year provided that the stocks of species subject to maximum catch limits are not at low biomass level.

ii) that effort reduction measures and catch limits should be combined with spatial measures, such as those providing permanent protection of essential fish habitats (nursery and spawning grounds) supported also through fishing effort compensation mechanism.[3]

[1] Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) - The 2022 Annual Economic Report on the EU Fishing Fleet (STECF 22-06), Prellezo, R., Sabatella, E., Virtanen, J. and Guillen, J. editors, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, doi:10.2760/120462, JRC130578.

[2] Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Stock Assessments: demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea. (STECF-22-09). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, doi:XXXXXXXX, JRCXXXXXXX.

3 Legambiente, MedReAct, WWF *"In order to create a level playing field across the EU, MEDAC recommends that EU measures on the conservation of European eel are fully aligned with GFCM Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/1 on a multiannual management plan for European eel in the Mediterranean Sea".*

FOCUS ON THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN MAP

Significant efforts have been made by the professional fishery sector since the implementation of the management plan in 2020, including the reduction in the fishing effort of trawlers, the establishment of an effort quota for longliners, the implementation of spatio-temporal closures, selectivity tests and the establishment of a TAC for shrimps.

The constructive collaboration of the Mediterranean professional fishery sector is already producing its effects since 2020 and must be continued, notably by guaranteeing the conditions for progressive implementation of the MAP for the West Med.

Moreover, the last MAPs adopted by the 45th session of the GFCM foreseen a transitional period before the complete implementation of the management measures. This is the acknowledgement that it is necessary to have more time to be able to carry out the best application, guaranteeing the best result in the 3 pillars of the CFP: environmental, economic and social.

It is necessary to postpone the date for reaching the MSY of the WestMed MAP to 1 January 2030 to avoid the closure and irremediable loss of the productive sector of commercial fisheries.

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