

**Draft Regional Input of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the
FAO into the Concept Paper of the Secretary-General of the Conference for the Partnership
Dialogues in relation to themes 1 and 2**

a) Status and trends

Fishing has a tremendous cultural, social and economic importance in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, providing an important source of food and livelihood for riparian countries and sustaining the traditions and the way of life of many coastal communities. However, Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries are currently facing serious challenges, with roughly 90 percent of the scientifically assessed stocks considered to be fished outside safe biological limits, decreasing catches and shrinking fleets at the regional scale.

The GFCM recently released assessment “*The state of Mediterranean and the Black Sea fisheries*” (SoMFi 2016) highlights the impact of fisheries, and in particular the small-scale fisheries sector, within the region. Indeed, 80 percent of the region’s fisheries are small-scale fisheries, underlining the role of fisheries in sustaining the coastal communities of the region. Although the value generated from the first sale of fish products from Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries may seem relatively small compared with other sectors (representing less than 1 percent of regional gross domestic product [GDP]), the ability of the sector to target some of the most economically vulnerable coastal communities in the region makes it a key player in any sustainable development strategy. In fact, the value at first sale as a percentage of GDP is six times greater in the developing countries of the southern Mediterranean than in the wealthier northern Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, exports of fish products from this region represent over 10 percent of total global exports, indicating significant secondary impacts of this sector on the wider economy.

Likewise, around a quarter of a million people are directly employed onboard fishing vessels in this region; yet the number of people dependent on the fishing sector for their livelihoods increases exponentially when considering the families supported by the fishers of the region and those employed in related sectors, such as fish processing, vessel maintenance and tourism. Furthermore, around 60 percent of fishing employment is found in the developing countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, meaning that the majority of the jobs provided by this sector are located precisely where jobs are needed.

Taken together, these factors endorse the potential of the fishing sector to play an instrumental role in the sustainable development of the Mediterranean and Black Sea region and, in particular, its most vulnerable coastal communities. To this end, reliable data on the status and trends on stocks and fisheries is needed, so that management plans embracing the ecological, economic and social aspects are adopted to ensure the sustainability of fisheries. Building on the success of the SDGs in drawing the attention of the international community to the role of fisheries in sustainable development, a regional strategy which adapts such principles to the Mediterranean and Black Sea context is of paramount importance to address current challenges in this area.

b) Challenges and opportunities

At the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015 (New York, 25–27 September), world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. The SDG 14 – entitled “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” – builds upon the provisions of numerous legal instruments that have been adopted to

ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment and its resources – e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement – and advocates for healthy and resilient marine ecosystems based on multiple elements. The SDG 14 can therefore be regarded as embodying comprehensive strategy calling for phased action at all levels of governance, including at the regional level. The SDG 14 in particular offers substantial guidance as to how challenges to the sustainability of fisheries should be tackled, including the following, which are particularly relevant to the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries

Against the backdrop of international commitments towards the sustainability of fisheries as a means to support the livelihood of coastal communities in a Blue Growth perspective, existing challenges in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea bring about the need to develop tailor-made actions, taking into account the specificities of the region and the capacities of all actors involved.

The GFCM has consequently adopted in June 2016 the “Mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries”. This document is fully consistent with the spirit and the letter of the SDG 14 and purports to define a course of instrumental action to further progress in the development of sustainable fisheries at the regional level. It is programmatic and multiannual in nature and provides guidance for the strategic priorities in the 2017–2020 period, identifying key activities to address existing challenges. The overall objective of the mid-term strategy is to improve, by 2020, the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, by achieving the following five targets and related outputs and activities:

TARGET 1: Reverse the declining trend of fish stocks through strengthened scientific advice in support of management

Output 1.1: Enhanced knowledge and expertise on Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries

- creation of a GFCM Forum on fisheries science
- realization of regional surveys at sea
- compilation of catalogues of fishing activities

Output 1.2: Socio-economic information and analysis incorporated into scientific and management advice

- definition of socio-economic indicators and completion of a comprehensive regional survey on the socio-economic characteristics of fisheries
- incorporation of socio-economic information into the assessment of the state of the main commercial fisheries and the provision of advice on the comparative impacts of alternative management scenarios

Output 1.3: Enhanced science-based GFCM regulations on fisheries management

- implementation of a dedicated approach for the provision of advice to the GFCM by its subsidiary bodies
- revision of existing management plans / development of new management plans

TARGET 2: Support livelihoods for coastal communities through sustainable small-scale fisheries

Output 2.1: Robust and timely information on the impacts of small-scale fisheries and recreational fisheries on living marine resources and on their interactions with other human activities in coastal communities

- implementation of a regional survey on small-scale fisheries
- establishment of a permanent working group on small-scale and recreational fisheries

- assessment of the impacts of recreational fisheries

Output 2.2: FAO Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines tailored to the specificities of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea

- development of national plans of action for the implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines (SSF Guidelines)
- establishment of a regional platform to engage and promote dialogue among small-scale fishing associations
- endorsement of the principle of decent work
- organization of a high-level meeting to generate political will in small-scale fisheries

TARGET 3: Curb illegal unreported and unregulated fishing, through a regional plan of action

Output 3.1: Regular quantification of illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and harmonization of existing measures to fight against IUU fishing

- assessment of the quantity, magnitude and characteristics of IUU fishing in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
- evaluation of the adequateness of national legislations relating to IUU fishing

Output 3.2: Reinforced inspection procedures in the framework of port state control

- promotion of training of national inspectors
- establishment of a mutual assistance system to facilitate information exchange and of a regional information system to exchange port state measures related data

Output 3.3: Enhanced monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) at the regional level

- operationalization of a regional vessel monitoring system (VMS) and control system

TARGET 4: Minimize and mitigate unwanted interactions between fisheries and marine ecosystems and environment

Output 4.1: Reduced bycatch rates in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries

- implementation of a bycatch monitoring programme
- launch of a communication mechanism to educate on the negative impacts of bycatch
- implementation of effective management measures to improve the selectivity of fisheries
- proposal of measures to reduce catches of vulnerable species
- identification and implementation of mitigation measures to address the interaction between cetaceans and fishing gear

Output 4.2: Healthier marine ecosystems and more productive fisheries

- identification and promotion of the establishment of new fisheries restricted areas (FRAs)
- adoption of a comprehensive regional management plan for red coral
- creation of an adaptation strategy to cope with potential effects of invasive species and climate change on fisheries
- creation of an adaptation strategy to cope with the potential effect of marine litter on fisheries

TARGET 5: Enhance capacity-building and cooperation

Output 5.1: Improved national capacity for the management of fisheries resources

- provision of capacity building for GFCM contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs)
- implementation of a technical assistance mechanism
- launch of a regional programme for education and training

Output 5.2: Strengthened fisheries governance in the Black Sea

- organization of a high-level conference on fisheries governance
- launch of a regional, scientific and technical cooperation project for the Black Sea

Output 5.3: Increased cooperation with relevant actors

- operationalization of existing memoranda of understanding (MoU)
- strengthened coordination with the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department and FAO regional projects

Consistent with Article 17 of the GFCM constitutive agreement, the capacity of developing CPCs will be duly taken into account in implementing the mid-term strategy, in order to level the playing field and bridge existing gaps.

c) Existing partnerships

Because SDG 14 sets 2020 as the deadline to restore fish stocks to levels that can at least produce maximum sustainable yield and, more generally speaking, sets several other targets which are relevant to the work of the GFCM, it was determined that cross-sectoral cooperation would be needed to achieve these objectives. Informal consultations were held with those organizations that have a memorandum of understanding (hereafter, “MoU”) in place with the GFCM, including regional seas conventions, neighbouring regional fisheries bodies, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, with a view to finding a practical manner to move beyond a sectoral approach and meet the targets in SDG 14, while also taking stock of existing roles and different mandates. Thirteen MoU have been concluded thus far by the GFCM and the list includes (in alphabetical order of acronym):

- The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (hereafter, “ACCOBAMS”);
- The Ministerial Conference on Fisheries Cooperation Among African States Bordering the Atlantic (hereafter, “ATLAFCO”);
- The Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (hereafter “BSC”);
- The International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza (hereafter, “CIHEAM-IAMZ”);
- The International Organization for the Development of Fisheries in Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter, “Eurofish”);
- The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (hereafter, “ICES”);
- The Centre for Marketing Information and Advisory Services for Fishery Products in the Arab Region (hereafter, “Infosamak”),
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature – Center for Mediterranean Cooperation (hereafter, “IUCN-Med”);
- The Mediterranean Advisory Council (hereafter, “MED-AC”);
- The Network of Mediterranean marine protected area managers (hereafter, “MedPAN”);
- OceanCare;
- The Mediterranean Action Plan of UNEP (hereafter, “UNEP-MAP”); and
- The World Wildlife Fund-Mediterranean (hereafter, “WWF-Med”).

In terms of policy coherence, the mid-term strategy is expected to contribute to the alignment of priorities among the regional organizations committed to meeting the relevant targets therein. This will, in turn, imply efforts to pursue complementary policies, which will vary in relation to the targets in the mid-term strategy. The below grid groups those organizations that are concerned by the five targets set, according to the MoU in place with GFCM, whose priorities are expected to be aligned throughout the implementation of the mid-term strategy.

Mid-term Strategy Target	Organizations concerned
<i>Reverse the declining trend of fish stocks through strengthened scientific advice in support of management</i>	ICES, IUCN-Med, MED-AC, WWF-Med
<i>Support livelihoods for coastal communities through sustainable small-scale fisheries</i>	IUCN-Med, MED-AC, MedPAN, WWF-Med
<i>Curb IUU fishing, through a regional plan of action</i>	ATALFCO, MED-AC, WWF-Med
<i>Minimize and mitigate unwanted interactions between fisheries and marine ecosystems and environment</i>	ACCOBAMS, BCS, IUCN-Med, MedPAN, OceanCare, UNEP-MAP, WWF-Med
<i>Enhance capacity-building and cooperation</i>	CIHEAM-IAMZ, Eurofish, Infosamak

The main challenge facing enhanced cooperation remains the sectoral approach. Although this is understandable, in that a sectoral approach is based on thematic expertise of each organization, there has been a shift towards a holistic vision in recent years, as corroborated by the adoption of SDG 14. Targets set therein are interlinked and, unlike in the past, there is a unique opportunity to now promote commonalities in a transversal fashion. Despite SDG 14's enabling of a cross-sectoral cooperation, political support by countries will remain crucial. Ultimately, the responsibility to harmonize positions in the context of regional organizations in place rests with them. Instruments such as the mid-term strategy are vehicles to improve coordination at the national level and foster internal consultations among different administrations concerned (e.g. fisheries vs. environment). Such instruments represent promising solutions to fill gaps in the implementation of a cooperative framework because in areas like the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, where all relevant institutions have already been established, the priority becomes finding ways to work as a cohesive unit.

d) Possible areas for new partnerships

- Ensure that a regional approach to the implementation of SDG 14 is promoted, building upon ongoing cooperation arrangements and bearing in mind common priorities and the need for targets which are responsive to the specificities of each marine area;
- Liaising constantly so that cooperating organizations can act as a bridge between the different national administrations concerned with the implementation of SDG 14, primarily, the national administrations in charge of fisheries, aquaculture and environment as well as shipping, marine renewable resources and coastal tourism;
- Raising awareness on developments in relevant international fora to ensure that progress towards the implementation of SDG 14 is reported in a timely fashion and possible new areas of partnership are identified;

- Assess whether existing organizations operating in the same region and having shared/similar goals are on the same level in terms of capacity, geographical scope, participating countries, etc. (e.g. a given Regional Fisheries Management Organization and the correspondent Regional Sea Convention);
- Depending on the existence of comparable regional organizations, identify potential areas where cooperation could be promoted in a feasible and practical manner. This will depend on political willingness of participating countries to support formal cooperation at an intra-governmental level;
- Draw the attention of participating countries to synergies that could be fostered through enhanced cooperation while reminding them of international commitments to which they have agreed in the context of SDG 14, as well as the importance of a regional approach to ensure progress accordingly;
- Look at existing best practices on intra-governmental cooperation and seek the support of participating countries to champion any institutional arrangements that could be adopted by existing organizations operating in the same region;
- Make sure that any form of cooperation is formalized. Informal cooperation is useful for existing organizations, as a first step to better understand their respective roles and identify commonalities, however, insofar as cooperation does not stem from an institutional arrangement (e.g. MoU), little progress might be expected in tackling common issues and priorities.

More information at: <http://www.fao.org/gfcm/en/>