

“HIGH LEVEL SEMINAR ON THE STATUS OF STOCKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE CFP APPROACH” 9-10 FEBRUARY, CATANIA

MEDAC DOCUMENT

Foreword

Over the last three decades, the Common Fisheries Policy has developed a series of measures which, from the fleet structure programme (EAGGF, FIGF, EFF) has progressively improved the scope of the technical and management measures. During this process, which has involved all the European seas and fleets, a clear contradiction has emerged between the Mediterranean basin and other EU seas, following stock assessment activities which dealt primarily with the resources of the Atlantic and northern seas, only covering the Mediterranean in more recent years.

The industrial nature of non-Mediterranean fleets and the distinctly monospecific capture systems employed to target fishery resources have induced the CFP conservation policy to develop its strategy – for the Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic Sea - with two main focuses: the reduction of fleet capacity and the establishment of annual fishing opportunities for each stock. After years in which both the fleets and the TACs and quotas assigned were progressively reduced, this strategy has paid off, with fishing mortality (F) significantly closer to F_{msy} , a goal set in the framework of the recent reform of the CFP, as well as the recovery of many stock, albeit not in terms of biomass yet.

In the Mediterranean, the CFP conservation policy did not have the same effect and this is due to several factors, among which:

- a delay in the acquisition of data for stock assessments of every year;
- significant multi-specificity of capture systems, with both seasonal and spatial variability;
- fleet overlap in distribution ranges and shared stocks, involving both EU Member States and between EU and non-EU countries;
- the territorial waters of coastal countries only extend up to 12 nm, except in some specific cases;
- seasonal migration of stocks from coast to coast who are subjected to the action of different fleets;
- widespread illegality and difficult to carry out effective control;
- a greater number of fishing systems and a wide variety of capture tools;
- landing points scattered along the coast;
- a prevalence small-scale fishing fleets and artisanal fishery activities;
- different segmentation of the fleets of the different Member States;

- lack of management policy over coastal areas;
- lack of adequate consideration of recreational fishing and fisheries in policy making;
- not enough scientific advice due to the lack of investigation funding by MS (only 30 species assessed);
- limited reduction of fishing effort.

These and other factors have made quota system more difficult to be adopted in the Mediterranean; currently a quota system only applies to one species (Bluefin tuna). A Regulation (1626/94) was also introduced focusing on technical measures (minimum sizes, minimum mesh size, gear characteristics, etc.), that was later extended to management measures (Reg. 1967/2006: distance from the coast, etc.).

The only other regulation that, although not specifically developed for the Mediterranean, has produced effects in this sea in particular, is that relating to the ban on drift nets (1997).

These regulations, together with the reduction of the Member States' fishing capacity (which has been quite significant over the last two decades) have been the only tools regulating the EU fisheries in the Mediterranean, encountering obvious problems of coexistence with expanding non-EU fleets.

A fully operational GFCM, only achieved in recent years, is for practical purposes the only possible way to proceed towards harmonisation and for the application of sustainability criteria for fishing activities carried out in the basin by all Contracting Parties involved, provided that the adoption of the GFCM recommendations is mandatory for EU and non-EU countries.

The development of data collection and stock assessment activities according to the system established by Reg. 199/2008 has however, in recent years (and in 2015 this is still the case) demonstrated a clear continuation of the severe depletion (93%) of almost all of the 30 stocks assessed to date, which raises obvious doubts about the effectiveness of the application of the actual management measures in the Mediterranean.

These doubts are affecting the state of the stocks and the whole fishery sector – from the scientific knowledge and models with which the stock assessments are elaborated, to the fishery systems employed, the control activities and illegal fishing, market structure, consumer eating habits, other sources of impact on the marine ecosystem and on fish stocks. To start to get answers, across-the-board contemplation is necessary on the management models that make up the complex reality of Mediterranean fisheries, rethinking the strategies adopted so far.

The MEDAC, which brings together the main organizations of the various stakeholder types from all the European Mediterranean Member States, is directly affected by the problems mentioned. In full compliance with the tasks assigned by the recent reform to the CFP, after having called for the organisation of a specific seminar, received with due consideration by the Commission, the

MEDAC intends to make its contribution by indicating possible factors and proposals to be considered in the formulation of a new strategy to recover EU stocks in the Mediterranean to sustainable levels in line with the CFP obligations, and in general for the whole fishery policy, to be submitted to the national and EU institutions for evaluation.

This is in the belief that, in order to deal with and find answers to the grave state of fishery stocks in the Mediterranean, it is essential to apply participatory processes with great attention to the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability, which must be reinstated in the basin, while avoiding the unilateral adoption of measures that would be applied through the revival of a command and control system.

The MEDAC believes that full compliance must be one of the key elements of a new strategy for the CFP in the Mediterranean, which can only be achieved with the full involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process. Following this it will be necessary to achieve high levels of responsibility and awareness among sector operators, this will be a strategic factor in providing a future for Mediterranean fisheries.

THE CFP IN THE MEDITERRANEAN – TIMING AND PROCEDURES

As stated in the foreword, it is clear that the strategy pursued to date by the CFP in the Mediterranean has not produced significant results, even though it is amply justified, and that the objectives set by the reform to the CFP can only entrust the definition of new models and solutions to the new generation Multi-Annual management Plans (MAP), which will have to respond effectively to the obligation to recover stocks to sustainable levels by 2020 as well as achieving socio-economic sustainability, bearing in mind the distinctive characteristics of the different capture systems in the Member States.

In this framework, it cannot be overlooked that the Mediterranean MAPs are in discontinuity with the measures applied in the past, replacing the management plans of the former Mediterranean Regulation which were introduced according to the capture systems, with management plans for stocks (and therefore with the addition of a spatial reference), which encompass more than one capture system.

This important change requires significant reformulation of management plans, applying a very different approach to the one used to date and it should also incorporate GFCM recommendations (binding for GFCM Contracting Parties), which have already been issued for some stocks (small pelagic species in the Adriatic) and being developed for others (Strait of Sicily).

Within this scenario, which is already complex, the Discard Management Plans must be added, which represent one of the main innovations of the reform, together with the objective of achieving MSY for all stocks by 2020 and Regionalisation. This latter aims to streamline some procedural steps for the Discard Management Plans, but not for the Multi-Annual management Plans, which must be proposed by the EC to the co-legislators and be approved following the dialogue.

In the light of the initial post-reform experiences where management plans are concerned in both the Mediterranean (Adriatic) and in other seas (Baltic), some clear procedural weaknesses emerge. It is clear that in this context the emergency announced by the Commission in relation to stocks in the Mediterranean will not be resolved in appropriate terms and with a suitable time-scale, if not in the medium term, which is in striking contrast to the severity of the scientific data describing the situation and the urgency to find a rapid solution.

Without a change of pace it is inevitable that in the coming annual seminars on the state of stocks, the Mediterranean will win the "wooden spoon" among European seas, and that the Commission cannot remain inactive.

It is above all due to the time factor that we need to begin serious reflection on a new strategy for the Mediterranean, a strategy that will avoid a future in which stocks near collapse and unilateral emergency plans that in addition to exasperating the command and control system as a whole, would contribute to the breakdown of the institutions but also of the entire Mediterranean fishery system.

TOWARDS A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE CFP IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Overcoming the factors which have so far prevented proper and timely diagnosis is indispensable in a new strategy for Mediterranean fisheries, lessons learnt from past experience (both negative and positive) must be taken into consideration and innovative elements must be introduced that are able to enhance the tools available for the conservation and management policy, which is still inadequate.

Some of these factors will be taken into account in the MAPs, but it is clear that without acceleration upstream in the decision-making process, the time factor will become the main bottleneck in the process.

In brief, MEDAC considers the following as priority actions to achieve the objectives set in the CFP also in the Mediterranean for EU stocks:

- A) The intensification of research efforts and stock assessments, extending them to as many stocks as possible while attempting to shorten the time between data collection and final evaluation. Data collection should also be extended to recreational fisheries landings for relevant stocks.
- B) In the framework of the Marine Strategy, consider and evaluate other sources of impact play on the environment and on fishery resources (drilling and other offshore activities, pollution from coastal wastewater, offshore regasification units, etc.), with appropriate research and investigation activities necessary to define Good Environmental Status (GES).
- C) Intensification of control activities, on land in particular, along the supply chain (markets), with the help of digital technology and other tools to monitor the quality and quantity of

landings and avoid seafood fraud. Control activities should also be intensified at sea in areas in which fishery activities are banned (temporarily or permanently).

- D) Subject to the contents of the MAP in terms of limiting or reducing fishing effort of the fishery activities with the highest impact, carefully consider, at the GFCM level, the possibility of applying TACs and quotas for some target species in monospecific capture systems (or less multi-specific systems), such as small pelagics. Furthermore, an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management needs to be introduced with a strong component on Spatial Planning as a binding element to all MAPs (also in the framework of the Marine Strategy) both for the definition of permanent "no-fishing areas" (Essential Fish Habitats, reproduction areas and where there is a high concentration of juveniles), and to limit the range of fisheries activities, implementing the division of areas and subjecting them to rotation of total or partial closures per fishing system. Improve Monitoring and Control System as GIS (Geographical Information System) tools would be particularly relevant for this, as satellite images allow for awareness and evaluation of the effective range of fleet operations, whichever port they are based for all commercial fishing fleet.
- E) A strategic factor which should be reinstated with great emphasis is the empowerment and education of all fishers (commercial and recreational), both through their involvement in decision-making and through specific actions for the dissemination of good practices (inter-professional agreements, voluntary suspension of fishery activities, partnerships with research institutes and with NGOs, forms of self-management and control, etc.), which should also be considered an integral part of the MAPs.
- F) Addressing the emergency of overfishing in the Mediterranean: the EMFF will provide valuable tools and opportunities, to be organised in the different Member States according to their respective national programmes. Several measures contemplated within the EMFF could significantly contribute to the rationalisation of fishing effort and to initiatives consistent with the MAPs.
- G) Intensification of dialogue with third countries through the GFCM, both for shared stocks and to harmonise the approach of the coastal states, both EU and non-EU, towards fisheries policy in the Mediterranean.
- H) Addressing the complex matter of the jurisdiction of Mediterranean waters. In a scenario fraught with unresolved disputes, over time countless unilateral declarations and statements have been made, intensifying the complications related to the areas of political instability with frequent incidents and general uncertainty for European fleets in vast areas of the Mediterranean.

- I) Coastal systems are the key habitat of many species, both for commercial and recreational fisheries. They are also important nursery habitats. Management measures established until now, focused on technical measures and effort reduction have proved ineffective. Establishing management plans for coastal systems as a whole, including both commercial and recreational sectors is paramount for the future of the Mediterranean Sea.

