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MEDAC Advice on Marine Spatial Planning and the Role of OECMs in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC), in line with its mission to provide advice on fisheries management and socio-economic aspects of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), welcomes the increasing attention of the European institutions and Mediterranean European Member States towards Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and the recognition of Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), as potential tools to contribute to fisheries management.

MEDAC acknowledges the dual necessity to ensure the economic viability of Mediterranean fisheries and the health of the stocks, the conservation of marine ecosystems and of the overall biodiversity.

MEDAC has already debated in length and already expressed and communicated clear opinions on the fact that MSP should be implemented in the Mediterranean with a participatory and cross-sectoral approach, ensuring that the fisheries sector, including both industrial and small-scale operators, is fully involved from the early stages.

MEDAC has also recalled to authorities (EC and MSs) and stakeholders (fishing sectors and NGOs), both in EU and GFCM fora, that MEDAC have already contributed significantly to the debate on spatial measures in the Mediterranean (e.g. on Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs), trawl bans, seasonal closures), and Medac advice must be duly considered in MSP¹.

MEDAC, during the WG3 ("Green Deal" working group) investigated and debated MSP and OECM interaction and mapping. MEDAC has recognized that OECMs can provide important outcomes to support stock rebuilding and overall environment protection, as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), but OECM criteria, requests of monitoring, and in particular governance need further clarification at EU and Mediterranean levels.

Therefore, MEDAC suggests to:

- Ensure structured consultation of stakeholders, particularly fisheries representatives, within MSP processes at national and regional level.
- Ensure consideration of existing fisheries management measures (e.g. GFCM Recommendations, EU regulations) and new designations under MSP/OECM frameworks.

¹ MEDAC letter [Ref.113/2024](#)

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- Guarantee transparency and accessibility of data used to designate OECMs, including socio-economic impacts.
- Develop common approach at EU and GFCM level to define and establish OECMs in the Mediterranean context, ensuring consistency across Member States.
- Promote joint research initiatives to assess the ecological and socio-economic effectiveness of OECMs, particularly in relation to fisheries economic and ecological sustainability.
- Recognize the value of traditional and local ecological knowledge in identifying and managing MSP and OECMs.
- Assess the cumulative impact of spatial restrictions on fisheries before introducing new MSP or OECM measures.
- Provide financial and technical support mechanisms (e.g. EMFAF funds) to mitigate possible negative effects on fishing sector.
- Consider opportunities for co-management approaches where fishers directly participate in the management of OECMs.

MEDAC reiterates that effective MSP and the integration of OECMs into EU and Mediterranean fisheries management frameworks must respect the balance between environmental objectives and socio-economic sustainability, be based on sound scientific evidence and stakeholder participation, ensuring coherence with existing fisheries management and conservation measures in the region.

A two steps approach is needed:

1. the actual compliance of the procedure provided for by the EU legislation on MSP with the activities carried out by Member States in spatial planning must be verified, particularly in relation to the actual involvement of stakeholders, which varies from country to country. Moreover, considering that the financial allocation will be drastically reduced, MEDAC believes it is appropriate to address this issue as soon as possible, so that the EU funds currently available can be used.
2. To extend the MSP process to GFCM and the rest of the Mediterranean, thus including the Southern CPCs and addressing the OECM.

The MEDAC supports the EU Ocean Pact, where it is stated: *“Based on a consultation of the relevant stakeholders, the Commission will propose by 2027 an “Ocean Act” that will build on revision of the MSP Directive. It will aim at strengthening and modernising maritime spatial planning as a strategic tool that will serve the priorities of the Ocean Pact and their implementation, notably through increased cross-sectoral coordination at national level and through a better organised sea basin approach”*. Indeed, the MEDAC reiterates the need to involve the ACs in this process.

MEDAC remains committed to further dialogue with the European Commission, Member States, to ensure that MSP and OECMs contribute to both the protection of marine ecosystems and the future of Mediterranean fisheries.