



**MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON MEDITERRANEAN FISHERIES
MALTA 2017**

**ROUNDTABLE MEETING WITH COMMISSIONER VELLA
Empowering small-scale fishermen in the Mediterranean as actors of ecological, social and
economic sustainability
29 March 2017, 10:00-13:00
Verdala Palace**

MEDAC DOCUMENT

First of all, the MEDAC would like to express sincere appreciation of the Mediterranean stakeholders for their firm commitment and also the Commission for the attention that is being given to the basin in order to make the fishing activities of the fleets operating there sustainable and to meet the goals set by the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

In Catania last year, 13 years after the Venice Conference, new light was placed on the complex issues of fisheries management in the Mediterranean and all interested parties were called on to take responsibility in seeking a solution to the serious state of over-exploitation faced by the stocks which constitute the main target for fisheries activities by coastal countries. The Ministerial Conference held in Brussels last April strengthened the process, expanding the dialogue to all coastal states and calling for a joint effort to achieve the common goal of full environmental, social and economic sustainability of the sector.

In both Catania and Brussels, the MEDAC provided its contribution, indicating some points considered crucial for the definition of a new strategy, starting from the shared view that the measures and management models adopted so far had proved insufficient. Some of these points reiterated the key concepts of several protocols and institutional conferences, from Crete (1994) onwards, which still require decisive action in order to be put into effect.

In this scenario, it is clearly necessary to **intensify research activities and the evaluation of the state of stocks**, improving coordination between the scientific institutes and the cooperation between the scientific community and the fishers themselves, **extending this collaboration to recreational fisheries**, which is becoming a no longer negligible component of overall fishing effort.

It will be necessary on the one hand to adopt a clear strategy to simplify the system, initially **just concentrating on the main target species**. At the same time, it is important to envisage broadening the scope of analysis, according to the ecosystem approach, to include the various features of the marine environment and **sources of impact, other than fisheries activities, which could affect the state of fishery resources**.



Monitoring and control activities to combat illegal fisheries all around the basin is an area in which much can still be done through increased coordination of the different maritime authorities in the coastal states as well as the intensification of EFCA activities, with a different, more proactive approach in those parts of the supply chain where the inspection and repression of illegality may prove more effective and cost-effective (such as in distribution and markets). The non-marketability of illegal fish products and the inevitability of controls, rather than the magnitude of the penalties applied and the obstinate use of the "command and control" system, could trigger an adjustment process within the system, leading to greater compliance with the rules, suitable **consumer awareness campaigns** would also be required in parallel with the other measures, as consumer eating habits drive what happens at sea.

Among the various strategic factors, **spatial planning** is proving to be the most promising method, as permanently or temporarily regulating access to resources will assure a rapid reversal of the trend, a tool that so far has only been partially employed (MPA). The compulsory implementation of spatial planning, a key element of the **Blue Economy** to simplify the coexistence of the different economies of the sea, through the creation of areas protected from fisheries and the establishment of additional marine protected areas, would now appear to represent the best strategy to ensure the recovery of stocks, as long as an effective system of control, monitoring and management of areas under protection is guaranteed.

The **time factor** still needs to be worked out, as this is crucial to achieve the desired turnaround in the state of stocks. **Accelerating the procedures is the real problem to be addressed today**, this has partly been solved through regionalisation and the delegated acts but only regarding the **discards management plans** (to which the MEDAC has given and will continue to provide its contribution), where time is not the main critical factor, but the **flexibility** in the application of the regulation in the various regions and the need to prevent the formation of supply chains for undersized fish products, which would be difficult to control and dangerous for the resources.

In addition, in the light more in-depth analysis of the evolution of the situation, it is the trend shown by the **socio-economic aspects of the sector** that is increasingly worrying.

The reduction in catches, incentives for decommissioning of fishing vessels, low profitability that has remained unchanged for years, the increase in operating expenses and in imported products, have together negatively affected employment levels throughout the Mediterranean basin.

The negative trend can be observed both in employment levels and in the number of vessels (-14% and -8%, respectively from 2008 to 2014), notably involving small-scale fisheries where in the same period the decrease in vessels was -16% and -13% in employment. These numbers are significant if you consider that a large part of the vessels present in our seas are involved in small-scale fisheries activities. It is important to take this into account in the future management plans when assessing



what measures to put in place to support fishing enterprises and workers, in the overall framework linking the protection of resources, the survival of coastal communities and the economic and social sustainability of the sector.

The Mediterranean Advisory Council hopes that, with the commitment of the Governments to achieve common goals, the Malta Conference will represent a decisive step towards the end of the emergency in the basin, with the recovery of stocks and the rehabilitation a sector hit by economic crisis and struggling with severe social repercussions. Above all, the MEDAC hopes that the choice to proceed according to a **participatory process** in the adoption of measures and strategies will remain unchanged and that stakeholders can continue to contribute to the identification of shared measures that are manageable and feasible, as this is the only way to ensure widespread compliance with the regulations.

In this regard, the MEDAC guarantees its commitment to carry out its role to the best of its ability and to exercise the responsibility assigned to it within the reform to the CFP.

