



Social Partners joint resolution on the SITUATION OF FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

2 February 2022

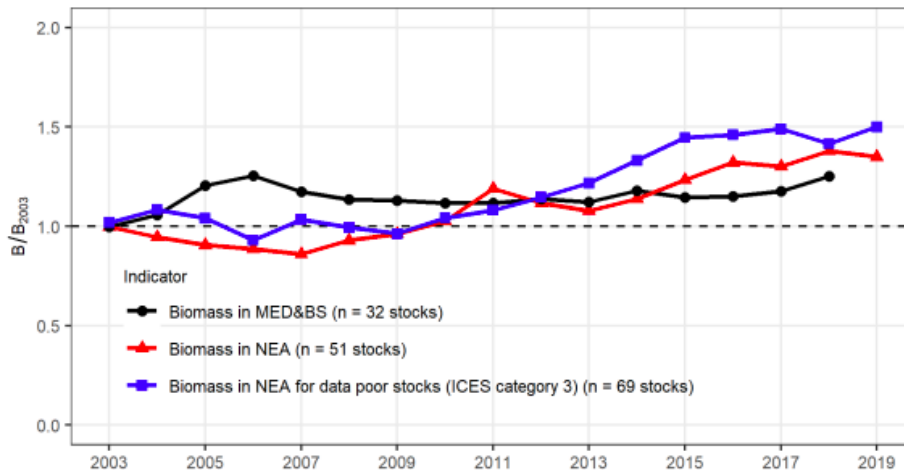
Whereas:

- The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) report on “The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2020” illustrates that the prevailing trend of overexploitation in the region has begun to reverse, with an increase of more than 10 percent in the share of stocks that are sustainably exploited and a reduction of more than 15 percent in exploitation ratios, along with a rise in overall stock biomass;
- The obstinate application of the multiannual management plan on the Western Mediterranean, which has already reduced trawler fishing activity by 17.5% over the past two years (actually exceeding 23.5% in 2022) accompanied by new technical measures, is driving most businesses below their breakeven point;
- STECF concludes that nearly all scenarios simulated indicate that Fmsy will not be achieved for all stocks by 2025¹;
- STECF emphasises the difficult trade-offs between real short-term costs for individual fishers and expected collective long-term gains in the future;
- STECF results from scenario runs revealed the possibility that some stocks may decrease even further in the future, due to effort displacement.

The European Social Partners of Sea Fisheries:

1. Acknowledge that the biomass in the Mediterranean Sea is still struggling although STECF data shows that since 2015 there has been an increase in fish populations. The Social Partners, therefore, agree that initiatives should be taken to continue improving the situation.

¹ STECF 21-15 - Stock assess MED Adriatic Ionian Aegean



2. Agree that the ultimate goal should be that of ensuring the preservation of fisheries activities, which will allow guaranteeing a future for all those engaged in the sector and the production of healthy food to European citizens.
3. Underline that in order to ensure a healthy status of the Mediterranean Sea, decision makers should take in due account all the factors that impact it, besides the fishing activity, in an ecosystem approach. Since regrettably, this has not been the case until now, it is hence imperative that under the integrated maritime policy, the European Commission takes action in order to collect data, assess the causes (anthropogenic activities, climate change, etc...) and propose initiatives aimed at restoring the best conditions for the spawning of fish stocks and apply the polluter pays principle. Fisheries should not pay entirely the price.
4. Remind that fisheries is a traditional economic activity embedded in the Treaties. It is an obligation incumbent on the European Institutions to support it in any areas where it is practised.
5. Stress that, unfortunately, in recent years, the Regulations proposed by the European Commission are putting at risk the continuation of this activity in the Mediterranean Sea, where most of the European small scale vessels operate, with a severe impact on the economy, local coastal communities and social cohesion, although no serious impact assessment on social aspects has surprisingly never been carried out.
6. Emphasize that the fishing operators in the Mediterranean Sea have shown their willingness to cooperate to restore healthy stocks because it is in their own interest. However, fishers rightly oppose initiatives that seem not to be calibrated to the real situation and do not assess all the consequences, taking into account environmental, economic and social aspects.

7. Insist that the real impact of measures taken in the multiannual plan to adjust fishing capacity should be evaluated scientifically before taking further measures that would make the sector suffer even more. Scientific modelling shall always be supported by actual data.
8. The combination of fishing days limits and TACs penalise the Mediterranean fishers as they have a double limit that jeopardise their catches and income. Financial sustainability of Mediterranean fleets is at risk, considering factors like the limitation of fishing days, the weather conditions, the Covid pandemic, the biological rest periods and the impact of fuel price.
9. Stress that the social and economic impact of the measures reducing fishing capacity should not be overlooked. Whenever decisions cutting drastically the fishing effort are adopted, accompanying measures are needed from the Commission and Member States (and possibly guidance from Commission to MS) to compensate, upskill and reskill workers impacted by the measures and guarantee a future to local coastal communities.
10. Are concerned about the ongoing demonization and attacks against bottom-contacting fishing gears. Some actors push for an immediate ban of these traditional fishing methods, without taking into account the progress made to sustainably use these gears and their contribution to achieve the sustainable development goals, namely food security and sovereignty, employment and social cohesion. In this respect we insist that evidence shows that trawl fishing does not impact negatively all kinds of sea beds and only takes place in limited and high-resilient marine grounds, minimizing impact on the marine ecosystems and resources. Efforts should be made to establish better statistical correlations between trawling activities, their impacts, the state of the ecosystem and the seabed, including the spatial distribution of trawling intensity. The latter would require much higher resolution (0.01 °, equivalent to 1.23 km²), closer to the actual movements of a fishing boat, providing the real footprint of bottom-contacting gears.
11. Note with concern that a high number of non-EU vessels are fishing in the Mediterranean. In this respect, the Social Partners cannot avoid mentioning some flaws in the role the European Commission is playing within the GFCM. The extraordinary voting rights bestowed upon it, together with its financial support, should enable the European Commission to secure that every fishing vessel complies with the rules, taking also into account the introduction of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). To be honoured with a “compliant award” by the GFCM², as stated in a press release, is of little use to EU fishers when competitors can fish with no similar constraints. The Social Partners call for an increased monitoring of imports from

² https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/news/new-strategy-sustainable-fisheries-and-aquaculture-mediterranean-and-black-sea-2021-11-08_it

non-EU southern Mediterranean countries and an adequate support, through the external dimension of the CFP, to meet social, economic and environmental targets to increase the sustainability of their fishing fleets.

12. Underline that the impression is that the European Commission uses the GFCM mainly to circumvent the EU ordinary legislative procedures, by-passing the consultations with the Member states and stakeholders. The production of a European Commission's document amending Commission Proposal COM (2021) 548 on a Council Regulation fixing for 2022 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, officially transmitted to the Member States by the Council Secretariat as a non-paper, is only but another blatant example of disrespect of legal formalities.
13. Stress that by neglecting the social dimension of fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea, the European Commission not only ignores its own rules and values but contradicts its own goals to promote coastal communities development, to nourish the population with healthy food caught in compliance with environmental and ethical principles, to support the fishermen.
14. Remind that, despite some recovery signs, the fishing sector as a whole is fully aware of the unsatisfactory situation of most of the stocks in the Mediterranean Sea and is already taking its responsibilities. But legislation that conceives only reduction of activity of such magnitude that will lead inevitably to the closure of the enterprises is useful only to fleets that are not bound by the EU rules.
15. Require the European Commission's services to respect procedures, to carry out proper impact assessments, to propose measures that conserve fisheries resources that do not only penalises fishermen so that the continuation of viable and sustainable fishing activity in the Mediterranean Sea are ensured.
16. Want a thriving Mediterranean fishing sector that is sustainable from an environmental point of view but that can also offer quality jobs to Europeans and economic long-term perspective to companies. We do not want to end up in a situation where the consumption of fishing products in the EU is delegated to imports of products of doubtful origin, both from an environmental and social sustainability perspective.