

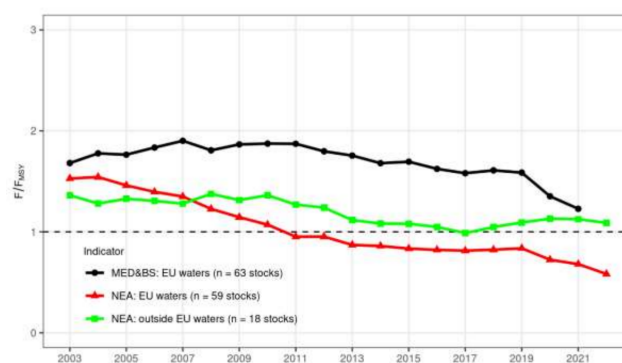
European Union Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Sea-Fisheries

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

Brussels, 13 November 2024

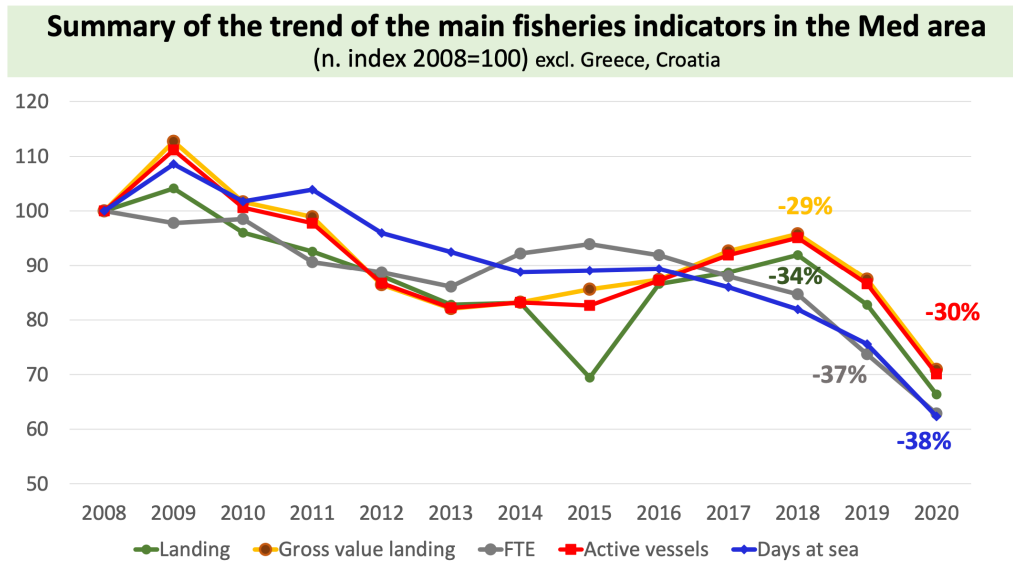
Whereas:

- The GFCM report *“The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023”* illustrates that the percentage of overexploited fish stocks in the region has fallen from 73% in 2020 to 58% in 2021, representing the lowest rate observed since the trend in overexploitation was first reversed a decade ago;
- The Communication *“Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2025”* highlights that, in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, over the last three years, the F/FMSY fell from 1.59 to 1.20 in 2022 reaching the lowest level since 2003. This trend is consistent in all sub-regions.
- The STECF report *“Monitoring the Performance of the Common Fisheries Policy (STECF-Adhoc-24-01)”* shows a decrease of F/FMSY since 2011 and a sharp decrease in the effort values in the Mediterranean and Black Sea in the last two years.



- The harsh implementation of the multiannual management plan in the Western Mediterranean has already reduced fishing effort by 40% in the past few years. This reduction was supported by additional measures, including TACs (total allowable catches) for species such as giant red shrimp and blue and red shrimp, spatial and temporal closures, seasonal restrictions, regulated mesh sizes and gear innovations.

- All socio-economic indicators in the Mediterranean area evidence an extremely negative trend as described in the chart below¹.



- According to the Commission's Communication, in the Mediterranean, the central and eastern areas are considered more vulnerable to climate change due to increased pressure from invasive species of tropical origin (such as Lessepsian species and other species), higher water temperatures and less ocean circulation, which leads to lower levels of dissolved oxygen.
- The Commission's proposal indicates that the multiannual for demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean will enter its permanent phase on 1 January 2025, after the end of the five-year transitional period. From 2025 onwards, the MAP enters its long-term and permanent phase where MSY ranges apply.
- The Social partners have adopted and disseminated in 2022 a joint resolution raising concerns on the serious situation of the fisheries sector in the Mediterranean²

The European Social Partners in the Fisheries Sector:

1. Welcome the good progress on the sustainable management of fish stocks in the Mediterranean evidencing the lowest overexploitation rates in the decade.
2. Appreciate the commitment of fishing operators in the Mediterranean Sea to collaborate in restoring healthy fish stocks, despite challenging geopolitical conditions and ever-increasing operational costs (e.g., energy prices, inflation,...).

¹ https://en.med-ac.eu/files/documentazione_pareri_lettere/2023/01/13_annex_to_medac_advice_indicators_available_assessing_socioeconomic_impact_med_maps.pdf

² <https://www.etf-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Social-Partners-Resolution-on-the-Mediterranean-.pdf>

3. Call to strike a balance between maintaining healthy fish stocks, supporting a robust fishing industry and ensuring seafood self-sufficiency. Ultimately, the goal should be to preserve fishing activities, securing a sustainable future for everyone involved in the sector while providing healthy food for Europeans.
4. Emphasize that, unfortunately, recent regulations harshly implemented by the European Commission are jeopardizing the future of fishing activities in the Mediterranean Sea, where most of the European small-scale vessels operate. This poses a significant threat to the economy, local coastal communities and social cohesion.
5. Underline that, despite the recovery of the stocks, socio-economic indicators highlighted in the section above are alarming and point to the breakdown of the EU supply chain in the Mediterranean, which will be progressively replaced by seafood imports.
6. Demand EU authorities to:
 - Await the results of the fishing effort limitation policies implemented across all Mediterranean GSAs, which will not be fully assessed until 2027.
 - Freeze the fishing effort at 2024 levels for each segment and GSA, allowing new elected EU leaders the necessary time to assume full responsibilities and evaluate scientific assessments.
 - To apply a completely new approach when determining fishing opportunities and technical measures in the Mediterranean Sea. A new strategy that meaningfully integrates economic and social factors alongside environmental considerations such as climate change. This approach should reflect a proper ecosystem strategy that has been consistently advocated.
 - Extend the timeline for achieving environmental targets, such as the MSY for all stocks, to allow companies adequate time to adapt and reach those goals.
 - Implement support measures to compensate fishers for reduced activity, provide upskilling and reskilling for affected workers, and secure a sustainable future for local coastal communities.
7. Criticize the artificially constructed 'transitional' and 'permanent' phases, which are not addressed in the current European regulation of the multiannual plan for the WestMed. Urge the European Commission to provide clarification on these phases and their implications for fisheries management.

8. Call on the European Commission to adhere to established procedures, conduct thorough socio-economic impact assessments, and propose resource conservation measures that do not unfairly penalize fishers while tackling larger ecological concerns. This approach is essential to ensuring the viability and sustainability of fishing activities in the Mediterranean Sea.
9. Express concern regarding the Adriatic, Ionian, and Strait of Sicily regions, where additional measures to reduce fishing effort and set maximum annual catch levels for quota-limited stocks.
10. Underline that the impression is that the European Commission uses the GFCM to circumvent the EU ordinary legislative procedures, by-passing the PECH Committee, avoiding duly consulting the EU Member States' representatives at the Council's committees and the stakeholders.
11. Call for policies that promote a thriving Mediterranean fishing sector that is environmentally sustainable, provides quality jobs for Europeans, and offers long-term economic prospects for businesses. Our common goal is to avoid a reliance on imported seafood products of dubious environmental and social sustainability, ensuring instead that the EU's seafood consumption is met through responsible and locally-sourced fisheries.