



WWF

POSITION
PAPER

SEPTEMBER

2016

A vision for Healthy fisheries in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean fish stocks remain in crisis - 93% of assessed stocks are overfished. A transformation of fisheries governance is urgently required, principally by significantly reducing fishing pressure. Developing a culture of responsibility, accountability and compliance within the fishing sector is essential. Substantial improvements in data collection of fishing effort and scientific assessments of fisheries status are also crucial. WWF's vision is for a sustainable Mediterranean Sea by 2020. WWF engages with a network of partners at local, regional and international scales, including fishing industries, coastal communities, tourism operators, public agencies, scientists and broader civil society, to deliver this vision.

We call on the EU to lead on the transformation of fisheries governance to ensure sustainable fish stocks and a healthy and productive Mediterranean Sea for present and future generations.

Background

The Mediterranean Sea is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, home to 17,000 marine species and the largest enclosed sea on earth. WWF has been collaborating with regional authorities, marine and coastal industries and local communities in the region for 50 years with the vision of securing healthy and biodiverse ecosystems that produce benefits to maintain vibrant economies, and are recognized as essential for human well-being.

However, the Mediterranean is also known for the perilous state of its fish stocks. Ten years have passed since the adoption of a regulation (Mediterranean Regulation

EC 1967/2006) addressing the specific problems of fisheries management in this region, yet ineffective fisheries governance still poses a significant challenge.

Despite significant efforts undertaken both at EU and non-EU levels to establish an effective legal framework and ensure the implementation and compliance of the fishery sector, more than 93% of the assessed stocks in the Mediterranean are still considered to be overfished.

The Mediterranean remains a complex system of 21+ countries, and we must put in place a mechanism that can help us achieve sustainability at the regional scale. The only way to ensure that the Mediterranean Sea will continue to support our national economies and create jobs is shaping a new path of sustainability. This means that industries, governments, civil society and all stakeholders must build a vision that reconciles economic growth with ensuring marine ecological assets flourish.

It is clear that there is a need to shift the way fisheries are governed into a more open and participatory approach, aligning the management frameworks of both EU and non-EU countries, according to an Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) approach, which can provide productive ecosystems ensuring food security and thriving coastal livelihoods for the region.

WWF believes that to overcome the declining status of the Mediterranean and ensure the future of its fisheries, a number of governance and conservation priorities need to be urgently addressed.

1. Reduce fishing mortality

To reduce the pressure on fish stocks, the number of boats in Mediterranean waters was reduced. Unfortunately, this policy did not result in improved stock status and it significantly impacted small-scale fishers and coastal communities. Alternative management strategies, based on scientific evidence must be adopted to reach sustainability targets. These scenarios include a diversity of approaches to manage the fishing effort:

- **The number of vessels at sea per day;**
- **The number of days at sea per vessel (encouraging sustainable practices and gears);**
- **Spatial and temporal closures (particularly in nursery areas);**
- **Co-management of fish stocks;**
- **Catch limits.**

2. Regulate fishing effort to respect fish sexual maturity

One of the most effective measures to ensure the sustainable management of Mediterranean fish resources is to ensure that all fish are allowed to reproduce at least once. This requires technical measures to be adopted to avoid fish being caught below their minimum reproduction size/age. To avoid catching juveniles and ensure healthy stocks, **minimum conservation size based on sexual maturity** and according to the best scientific advice, **should be adopted at Mediterranean level for all commercial species. Existing spatial closures should be maintained** (i.e. Jabuka Pit in the Adriatic Sea) **and new ones put in place in**

areas of particular relevance (e.g. the Sicilian banks) for fish recruitment (e.g. spawning and nursery grounds).

3. **Landing obligation: avoid catching unwanted fish**

The landing obligation is focused on actions to avoid commercialization of undersized target species and will become a reality for fishers in the Mediterranean on January 1st, 2017.

Rather than focusing only on unwanted landed fish, **the challenge of discards must be addressed in the water by promoting measures that support fish selectivity at sea**, such as technical modifications of nets to include fish exclusion devices (eg. grids, panels, turtle exclusion devices) as well as avoidance of critical and sensitive areas, particularly during seasonal migrations. The **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)** provides an ideal opportunity to **facilitate the landing obligation and adaptation by the sector to the regulation**, avoiding any possible incentives for the commercialization of undersized fish.

In preparation for the implementation of the Landing Obligation in 2017, WWF Mediterranean offices are currently working with stakeholders on the H2020 MINOUW¹ project to deliver solutions from the region to solve the discard challenge and deliver solutions in partnership with fishers.

4. **Recreational fisheries need to be evaluated for fishery exploitation**

Recreational fishing is a popular and fast-growing activity in the Mediterranean for both tourists and local communities. Recreational fishing is an important component of coastal culture and, in some countries the fish caught are a significant source of protein. Despite the lack of systematically collected data, a WWF analysis of 15 coastal marine protected areas in Spain, France, Italy and Turkey showed that total recreational fishing catches in some areas can represent between 10% and 50% of the total catches of small-scale fishing².

As a largely unregulated and unevaluated activity in the Mediterranean Sea, little data is available on the number of recreational fishers, their catch volume and the value they bring to coastal communities. The impacts of recreational fishing on fish stocks (e.g. blue fin tuna), marine resources and the socio-economic potential in the Mediterranean have been largely unquantified and underestimated.

WWF considers that **it is critical to evaluate the fishing effort of recreational fisheries and to collect catch data regularly at a sea-basin and Mediterranean level.**

In addition, **recreational fisheries must also be included in management plans, and technical measures that apply to professional fishers** (e.g. spatial and temporal close areas, reduction of days at sea, number of vessels, etc.) **should also apply to recreational fisheries** and be enforced effectively.

¹ <http://minouw.icm.csic.es/>

² Piante C., Ody D., 2015. Blue Growth in the Mediterranean Sea: the Challenge of Good Environmental Status. MedTrends Project – Summary. WWF-France. 64 pages.

Recreational fishing is a rapidly growing sector which should be monitored regularly and included in data collection protocols to better understand the impacts of this sector on the marine environment and is regulated appropriately.

5. More knowledge of fish stocks is essential

The Mediterranean lacks a comprehensive picture of how many vessels are fishing, what fish species are targeted and how many fish are caught. There is a paucity of data for important stocks, which has implications for their effective management. Reliable fisheries data are essential to deliver sustainably managed fisheries for both fishers and society.

WWF calls on the EU and Member States to significantly increase their resources and investment in fisheries data collection and assessment. Rapid recovery of Mediterranean fish stocks cannot occur without scientific evidence and analysis on the fishing effort applied to all stocks.

Within the framework of shared stocks between EU and non-EU member states, WWF believes that it is of paramount importance to **strengthen scientific cooperation between STECF (the official scientific advisory body of the European Commission) and GFCM (the regulatory body for the Mediterranean Sea)**, avoiding overlaps or gaps defining fishing pressure and stock assessments.

6. Implement effective enforcement and control operations

The poor implementation of the Mediterranean regulation and slow progress implementing the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has contributed to the failed management and unsustainable exploitation of marine resources. The EU and other Mediterranean countries need to deliver effective mechanisms for enforcement and create a culture of compliance to deliver effective implementation of fishing regulation.

In order to address this challenge, a level playing field is essential. Unless all fleet segments are equally monitored, i.e. using measures and tools with equal effectiveness, fisheries with higher levels of monitoring feel discriminated against. This has become evident through stakeholder discussion with industry representatives in the Advisory Councils. WWF recommends **all fleets and vessels are treated equally, using balanced monitoring and control methods according to their fisheries operations and characteristics.** The EU and Member States need to alter their attitude towards chronic non-compliance and **restrict EMFF funds to Member States with poor compliance records.**

Effective integration of existing international legal instruments is critical to gain the same commitment from both EU and non-EU countries to achieve global SDG priorities. These SDG priorities include: avoiding over-exploitation of resources; rebuilding stocks of endangered species; and preventing illegal catches entering the market. The primary challenges contributing to low levels of compliance include a lack of basic infrastructure; resources; and, political will, in addition to insufficient knowledge of international fisheries governance structures in many non-EU states.

To this end, we urge the EU to promote the **enforcement and compliance of recommendations by the two Mediterranean RFMOs, GFCM and ICCAT** and take a leadership role within these fora. The provisions of Port State Measures Agreement should also be pursued, prioritising the ratification process by all Mediterranean coastal states. WWF believes that **strengthening international policies**, namely harmonisation of current measures across borders underpinned by close cooperation between different jurisdictions, and **mandatory reporting should be strongly promoted under the GFCM**. Moreover, deterrence tools, especially financial sanctions, should be re-discussed at the GFCM level to prompt compliance with established recommendations.

7. **Implement ecosystem-based multiannual management plans**

Multiannual plans (MAPs) are the most effective mechanism to deliver the objectives of the CFP i.e. achieving maximum sustainable yield (MSY) by 2020 and guaranteeing that measures are in place to achieve good environmental status, including discard elimination, balancing fleet capacity with fishing opportunities, and minimising the impact of fisheries on the marine environment.

WWF strongly supports the establishment of **ecosystem-based multiannual plans to guarantee that we can sustainably harvest resources over the long term**. This strategy has to be implemented at the Mediterranean scale in addition to the EU regional seas to ensure MSY for EU and non-EU shared stocks.

8. **Co-management: Involving stakeholders in the decision making**

Fishers, in collaboration with other important society stakeholders, are essential to engage directly in the fisheries management process. Broad consensus amongst different fishery stakeholders is critical to drive regulation compliance and improved status of fish stocks and marine ecosystems. WWF's vision for effective fisheries governance and sustainably managed stocks are based on scientific assessment and wide consensus amongst fishing, coastal and marine stakeholders. This will radically improve compliance to regulation and provide a comprehensive understanding of fisheries characteristics and identify the measures needed to deliver the fisheries management plan. WWF pioneered the co-management approach and demonstrated its social, ecological and economic value^{3,4}. Currently, we are working in critical areas such as the Sicilian channel and the Adriatic Sea with this type of cooperation.

Small scale fisheries predominate in the Mediterranean sea, accounting for 80% of the fisheries. WWF has been a key player **empowering small scale fishermen**, bringing them together and integrating them in a series of research and management programs, and co-management committees (*eg* Sandeel co-management committee in Catalunya⁵, marine protected area of Torre Guaceto, Southern Adriatic Sea⁶). WWF is promoting the active participation of small scale fishers to fisheries management processes and we call on the EU and all decision makers in the region to support this approach.


³ WWF's presentation on successes and challenges of the Catalan sand-eel fishery co-management committee at GFCM Symposium in Algeri: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/GFCM/Fisheries/Ssfconference2016/ThematicSessions/Panel2_WWF_Sandeel_Fishery.pdf

⁴ First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea-<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4861e.pdf>

⁵ Leonart J., Demestre M., Martín P., Rodón J., Sainz-Trápaga S., Sánchez P., Segarra I., Tudela S. 2014. The co-management of the sand eel fishery of Catalonia (NW Mediterranean): the story of a process. In: Leonart J., Maynou F. (eds), *The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Seas*. Sci. Mar. 78S1: 87-93. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3989/scimar.04027.25A>

⁶ Guidetti, P., Bussotti, S., Pizzolante, F., & Ciccolella, A. (2010). Assessing the potential of an artisanal fishing co-management in the Marine Protected Area of Torre Guaceto (southern Adriatic Sea, SE Italy). *Fisheries Research*, 101(3), 180-187. Guidetti, Paolo, and Joachim Claudet. "Comanagement practices enhance fisheries in marine protected areas." *Conservation Biology* 24.1 (2010): 312-318

WWF will continue to engage with networks of partners to secure the sustainability of Mediterranean fishing industries, coastal communities, tourism operators and public agencies. We encourage decision makers to lead this change to deliver a productive and healthy Mediterranean Sea by 2020.

	<p>Why we are here To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.</p> <hr/> <p>www.wwf.eu</p>
---	--

© 1986 Panda Symbol WWF - World Wide Fund For Nature (Formerly World Wildlife Fund)
® "WWF" is a WWF Registered Trademark.
EU Transparency Register Nr: 1414929419-24
Printed on recycled paper.

For more information:

Alessandro Buzzi

Fishery Policy Manager
WWF MMI
Rome
abuzzi@wwfmedpo.org

Rita Santos

Senior Policy Officer
WWF European Policy Office
Brussels
rsantos@wwf.eu