

Resolution GFCM/41/2017/5
on a network of essential fish habitats in the GFCM area of application

RECALLING the Agreement for the establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM Agreement), which foresees that the GFCM shall adopt multiannual management plans based on an ecosystem approach to fisheries to guarantee the maintenance of stocks above levels which can produce maximum sustainable yield, and establish fisheries restricted areas (FRAs) for the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems, including nursery and spawning areas, also to complement measures included in the multiannual management plans;

RECALLING the mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, Target 1 “Reverse the declining trend of fish stocks through strengthened scientific advice in support of management” and the related Output 1.3 “Enhanced science-based GFCM regulations on fisheries management”;

RECALLING the commitment made by the Mediterranean ministries for fisheries of the signatory countries of the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration, which calls upon the contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) as well as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) to present in 2018, at the forty-second session of the GFCM, proposals for the establishment of new FRAs in order to create a consistent network of essential fish habitats;

CONSIDERING that the SAC has reported that over 80 percent of the fish stocks assessed in 2017 are in overexploitation and that more than 40 percent of these have a low biomass;

CONSIDERING that, for key commercial stocks like European hake (*Merluccius merluccius*), the SAC recommended to take immediate management actions to reduce fishing mortality through multiannual management plans and to identify new nursery areas;

AWARE of the need to implement the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in the Mediterranean Sea;

ADOPTS, in conformity with Articles 5 and 8 of the GFCM Agreement, the following resolution:

1. Taking into account the existing FRAs, the SAC should present in 2018, at the forty-second session of the GFCM, elements for the establishment of new FRAs, without prejudice to the sovereign rights of the states and in accordance with applicable international law, in particular to establish a consistent network of essential fish habitats¹, following a thorough consultation process.
2. The Commission, during its forty-second session should agree upon a progressive calendar with quantified objectives to establish this network.
3. To achieve this, the SAC is invited to:
 - review the existing information on the distribution of essential fish habitats in the Mediterranean;
 - review the existing information on the distribution of sensitive habitats² in the Mediterranean;

¹ Essential fish habitat are defined as habitats identified as essential to the ecological and biological requirements for critical life history stages of exploited fish species, and which may require special protection to improve the status of the stocks and long-term sustainability

² Sensitive habitats are fragile habitats that are recognized internationally as ecologically important, which support important assemblages of commercial and non-commercial fish species and which may require special protection

- identify possible knowledge gaps and provide advice on measures to overcome these, including through predictive modelling and mapping of habitat suitability, showing the likelihood of their presence;
 - define a consistent network of essential fish habitats which would also consider sensitive habitats, to be presented at the forty-second session of the GFCM; and
 - provide advice on how to implement the protection of this network, and enhance it from 2018, in order to effectively contribute to achieve the maximum sustainable yield and implement the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in line with the GFCM objectives.
-