

Recommendation GFCM/43/2019/1

on a set of management measures for the use of anchored fish aggregating devices in common dolphinfish fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

CONSIDERING that the objective of the Agreement for the establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM Agreement) is to ensure the conservation and sustainable use, at the biological, social, economic and environmental level, of marine living resources in the GFCM area of application;

RECALLING that it is the responsibility of a regional fisheries management organization to contribute to the objectives of the United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 59/25, 61/105 and 64/72 on the protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and to ensure management measures are established consistently with the precautionary approach;

RECALLING the mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, in particular Target 4 “Minimize and mitigate unwanted interactions between fisheries and marine ecosystems and environment” and the development of actions related to Output 4.2 “Healthier marine ecosystems and more productive fisheries”;

RECALLING that the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration requires, in the context of establishing an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework, to ensure adequate protection of vulnerable species and sensitive habitats;

CONSIDERING the impact of the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) on essential fish and marine habitats and vulnerable marine ecosystems, their possible interactions with other fisheries and the need to establish a minimum set of management measures, in particular for better monitoring and control;

CONSIDERING the advice expressed by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) at its twenty-first session (Egypt, June 2019) on measures to be implemented for the management of FADs, in particular in relation to the identification of fishing gear, fishing authorizations and improved information on catch and effort for the assessment of common dolphinfish, a GFCM priority species;

ADOPTS, in conformity with Articles 5 b), 8 b), and 13 of the GFCM Agreement, the following recommendation:

PART I

General objectives, scope and definitions

General objectives

1. This recommendation complements Recommendation GFCM/30/2006/2 on the establishment of a closed season for common dolphinfish fisheries using fish aggregating devices and establishes a set of management measures for the use of anchored FADs by the fishing vessels of contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) exploiting common dolphinfish in the GFCM area of application. These management measures contain transitional measures that shall apply until the adoption of permanent measures, based on the scientific advice provided by the SAC.

2. The management measures shall be consistent with the precautionary approach to fisheries management. Permanent measures shall be established within the framework of a future management plan designed to provide high long-term yields consistent with the maximum sustainable yield (MSY),

when established, and to guarantee a low risk of stock collapse while maintaining sustainable and relatively stable common dolphinfish fisheries.

3. A set of transitional management measures shall be developed in order to contribute, pending formal scientific advice by the SAC, to the sustainability of the common dolphinfish stock and fisheries.

4. CPCs whose vessels actively exploit common dolphinfish using FADs shall agree to implement such transitional management measures for the fisheries concerned, in accordance with the general and specific objectives set by this recommendation.

Scope

5. The management measures established by this recommendation shall apply to commercial fisheries targeting common dolphinfish using FADs throughout the Mediterranean Sea (geographical subareas [GSAs] 1 to 27).

Definitions

6. For the purpose of this recommendation, the following definitions shall apply:

- a) “fish aggregating device” or “FAD” means any anchored equipment floating on the sea surface with the objective of attracting fish;
- b) “common dolphinfish” means fish belonging to the species *Coryphaena hippurus*;
- c) “associated species” means secondary target species that are usually caught in fisheries targeting common dolphinfish such as greater amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*), pilotfish (*Naucrates ductor*) and grey triggerfish (*Balistes carolinensis*).

PART II Operational objectives

Management measures

7. The operational objectives of the management measures shall be to:

- a) improve knowledge on the characteristics of FADs, buoys, FAD fishing and their related impacts on common dolphinfish and on associated and non-targeted species;
- b) manage the deployment and recovery of FADs and their potential loss; and
- c) reduce and limit the impacts of FADs and FAD fishing on the ecosystem including, where appropriate, by acting on the different components of fishing mortality (e.g. by limiting the number of FADs deployed, including the number of FADs set per vessel).

Transitional management measures

8. The objective of the transitional management measures is to prepare for future management measures while reducing the risk that, in the absence of relevant scientific assessment, the biomass level of the common dolphinfish stock would drop below biologically sustainable levels, with negative consequences also on the socio-economic viability of the fisheries concerned. The transitional measures shall apply in international waters in 2020 and 2021.

9. Pending the scientific advice of the SAC and in view of a future management plan, fishing effort shall be maintained at the current level, expressed in number of vessels targeting common dolphinfish. Such measure shall be without prejudice to discussions in the context of the working group referred to under paragraph 13 of this recommendation.

10. Notwithstanding paragraph 9, CPCs considering starting to target common dolphinfish using FADs shall submit to the GFCM their national measures adopted in this respect. The SAC shall examine these measures and formulate appropriate advice should they not comply with the objectives of this recommendation.

11. Notwithstanding paragraph 9, competent national authorities may authorize scientific surveys or pilot programmes with a view to assessing new common dolphinfish fisheries using FADs. In cases where new fisheries are authorized by a CPC after scientific assessment, the number of new FADs authorized shall be limited under the national management measures adopted.

12. Each CPC shall establish a code of conduct prior to the start of the fishing season in order to ensure the implementation of the provisions of this recommendation. Where applicable, the concerned CPCs could communicate to the GFCM Secretariat the measures contained in such code of conduct. If necessary, the concerned CPCs could organize meetings with a view to ensuring proper coordination and full implementation of the provisions of this recommendation. The GFCM Secretariat shall be informed by the relevant CPCs about such initiatives.

13. A GFCM working group shall be established in 2020 in order to develop a multiannual management plan for common dolphinfish fisheries that comprises measures for the management of FADs, taking into consideration socio-economic elements as well as efforts made by CPCs in managing relevant fisheries and in applying, in some cases, stricter rules than those defined in this recommendation.

14. Within the framework of a research programme, the SAC shall, upon the availability of updated data, assess the state of common dolphinfish stock and define any other FAD fisheries management measure that would contribute to the sustainability of the common dolphinfish stock.

15. On the basis of SAC advice and research programme, the GFCM shall, at its forty-sixth session at the latest, adopt a long-term multiannual management plan to allow for the achievement of the objectives set out in paragraph 1, in complement to or in replacement of the measures referred to in this recommendation.

PART III

Scientific monitoring, adaptation and revision of management measures

16. CPCs shall ensure adequate monitoring of the biological and environmental impacts of FADs used by vessels flying their flag and exploiting common dolphinfish.

17. As from 2020, the SAC shall assess on an annual basis the impact of FADs on restoring and maintaining the common dolphinfish stock above levels that can produce MSY.

18. Based on SAC advice, the GFCM may review the content of the management measures.

19. In cases where SAC advice indicates that the general or specific objectives of the management measures have not been met, the GFCM shall decide on additional and/or alternative management measures to contribute to achieving those objectives.

20. Should the SAC, for any reason (e.g. lack of appropriate data), not be in a position to provide an accurate advice on the impact of FADs on the common dolphinfish stock and on their suitable number, the GFCM shall decide on the most appropriate management measures to ensure the sustainability of the fisheries. Such measures shall be based on SAC advice, in accordance with the precautionary approach to fisheries management, and take into consideration environmental and socio-economic elements in a way that guarantees the sustainability of the fisheries.

21. With a view to providing advice towards the revision/adaptation of the management measures, the CPCs and the SAC shall facilitate the collation of existing relevant data and the collection of additional relevant data (including research survey data) and organize workshops to this end. For this purpose, the SAC shall promote scientific cooperation and a harmonised approach amongst all CPCs.

22. The research programme on common dolphinfish shall be finalized by 2022 at the latest and include the assessment of the stock and of the fishing effort exerted by the fisheries concerned. Such programme shall also aim at developing conservation measures, including the minimum depth of deployment of FADs and their number, taking into account the characteristics of different areas.

PART IV **FAD management measures**

23. Vessels of CPCs shall be allowed to use FADs for the exploitation of common dolphinfish only if they hold a valid fishing authorization issued by the competent authorities. Each CPC shall maintain a register of these authorizations and communicate the list of authorized vessels to the GFCM Secretariat each year by 31 July.

24. The GFCM Secretariat shall maintain and update the list of authorized vessels and publish it on the GFCM website in a manner that is consistent with GFCM data confidentiality policy and procedures.

FAD composition, location, maintenance and replacement

25. In cases where the surface structure of the FAD is covered with material, CPCs shall ensure that it is either not covered or covered only with material that involve minimal risk of entangling non-target species, especially vulnerable species, or affecting other vessels.

26. FAD subsurface components shall be exclusively composed of materials that do not entangle non-target species.

27. When designing FADs, biodegradable materials shall be prioritized

28. FADs shall be constructed so that they can be reliably located at their place of deployment. The design of FADs shall include an appropriate number of counterweights along the rope to ensure that the rope sinks to the sea bottom in the event that the raft section is detached and drifts away.

29. CPCs shall ensure that FADs are regularly maintained, replaced as necessary and removed when not in use. The replacement FADs shall be of the same type, design, construction, materials and identification as the FAD being replaced. Replacement anchored FADs shall be in the same position as the FADs being replaced.

30. In the event of loss or impossibility to haul in a FAD, CPCs shall ensure the recording of the last known position and its date.

31. CPCs shall adopt all necessary measures to ensure obsolete and unused FADs are retrieved.

32. It shall be prohibited for a CPC vessel to catch fish attracted by a FAD that has not been set by this CPC vessel.

FAD identification and marking

33. CPCs shall ensure that each FAD is marked in such a way that it can be readily identified.

34. Each FAD shall be marked externally with the registration number of the fishing vessel(s) using it. Such marking shall be visible without dismounting the beacon, seawater-proof and legible throughout the entire lifespan of the beacon. Visibility distance must be the shortest possible.

PART V
Recording of FAD activities

35. CPCs shall ensure that all fishing vessels flying their flag and exploiting common dolphinfish record their fishing activities with FADs.

36. In the event of FAD loss, CPCs shall ensure that the vessels flying their flag collect and report the last registered position of the lost FAD as well as the date of its last registered position, its identification number and any information allowing the identification of the FAD owner.

PART VI
National management measures

37. CPCs shall communicate to the GFCM Secretariat, not later than 1 April 2020, national management measures that are already in force in relation to the use of FADs in common dolphinfish fisheries.

38. CPCs that do not have national management measures in force shall adopt, by 30 June 2020, a set of measures containing at least the elements listed in the annex of this recommendation and communicate them to the GFCM Secretariat by 31 January 2021 at the latest.

39. CPCs may adopt voluntary measures. Such voluntary measures may take into account, *inter alia*, the conservation state of common dolphinfish and the impact of fishing activities exploiting common dolphinfish in their waters.

40. The above measures shall be communicated to the GFCM Secretariat within one month of their entry into force.

Guidelines for the elaboration of fish aggregating devices management measures

FAD management measures for CPC vessels must include the following:

- 1) description:
 - a) type of FAD/beacon/buoy;
 - b) maximum number of FADs to be deployed per vessel;
 - c) minimum distance between each FAD;
 - d) incidental catch reduction and utilisation policy;
 - e) potential interactions with other gear types;
 - f) statement or policy on FAD ownership;
- 2) institutional arrangements:
 - a) institutional responsibilities for FAD management measures;
 - b) application processes for the approval of FAD deployment;
 - c) obligations for vessel owners and masters regarding FAD deployment and use;
 - d) FAD replacement policy;
 - e) additional reporting obligations beyond this recommendation;
 - f) conflict resolution policy in respect of FADs;
 - g) details on any closed area or period (e.g. territorial waters, shipping lanes, proximity of small-scale fisheries, etc.);
- 3) FAD construction specifications and requirements:
 - a) FAD design characteristics (description);
 - b) lighting requirements;
 - c) radar reflectors;
 - d) visible distance;
 - e) FAD marking and identifier;
 - f) radio buoy marking and identifier (requirement for serial numbers);
 - g) echosounder buoy marking and identifier (requirement for serial numbers);
 - h) research undertaken on biodegradable FADs;
 - i) prevention of loss or abandonment of FADs;
 - j) management of FAD recovery;
- 4) applicable period for the FAD management measures; and
- 5) means for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of FAD management measures.