

Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/9

on management measures for the sustainable exploitation of sprat in the Black Sea (geographical subarea 29)

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, in giving effect to the objective of the GFCM Agreement, the GFCM shall adopt recommendations on conservation and management measures aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of fishing activities, in order to preserve marine living resources and the economic and social viability of fisheries and that, in adopting such recommendations, the GFCM shall give particular attention to measures to prevent overfishing and minimize discards as well as to the potential impacts on small-scale fisheries and local communities;

RECALLING that in giving effect to the objective of the GFCM Agreement, the GFCM shall foster, as appropriate, a subregional approach to fisheries management and aquaculture development in order to better address the specificities of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;

CONSIDERING that the GFCM shall adopt management measures based on an ecosystem approach to fisheries to guarantee the maintenance of stocks above levels which can produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY);

CONSIDERING that all measures formulated by the GFCM shall be based on the best scientific advice available, taking into account relevant environmental, economic and social factors;

CONSIDERING that the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) provides that states “should apply a precautionary approach widely to conservation, management and exploitation of living aquatic resources in order to protect them and preserve the aquatic environment. The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures”;

RECALLING that the 2016 Bucharest Declaration towards enhanced cooperation on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture and the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture provide a concrete set of actions for the riparian countries to implement, particularly with regard to existing management measures that will be complemented and expanded to progressively achieve exploitation at MSY;

NOTING that, for European sprat in geographical subarea (GSA) 29, the Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS) concluded, at its eighth session (Turkey, September 2019) that the status of the stock was uncertain and fishing mortality should not be increased and noted the lack of scientifically robust advice, as the benchmark was not conclusive;

CONSIDERING that the WGBS, at its eight session, based on the conclusions of the benchmark session on European sprat of the Subregional Group on Stock Assessment for the Black Sea (Romania, December 2018), recommended a precautionary approach for European sprat in GSA 29 given the uncertain status of the stock;

FURTHER CONSIDERING that the WGBS, at its ninth session (online, July 2021), based on scientific advice, suggested not to increase fishing mortality for European sprat in GSA 29 and agreed upon a roadmap towards the finalization of the benchmark;

CONSIDERING the socio-economic importance of fisheries and the need to ensure their sustainability;

CONSIDERING that certain fisheries management measures need to be revised and adapted to the evolution of both the status of exploited stocks and scientific knowledge, and that an appropriate method shall be established to this end;

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

PART I

General objectives, geographical scope and definitions

General objectives

1. This recommendation, pending robust scientific advice by the WGBS, establishes transitional management measures for the sustainable exploitation of European sprat in the Black Sea (GSA 29) consistent with the precautionary approach.
2. The transitional management measures for fisheries exploiting European sprat shall prepare the ground for future management measures, which shall be designed to provide high long-term yields consistent with MSY while guaranteeing a low risk of stock collapse and maintaining sustainable and relatively stable fisheries.
3. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) whose vessels are actively fishing in GSA 29 agree to implement such transitional management measures for the fisheries concerned and in accordance with the objectives set by this recommendation.
4. The transitional management measures shall also pursue the reduction of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities in GSA 29.

Geographical scope

5. The transitional management measures established by the present recommendation shall apply to GSA 29.

Definitions

6. For the purpose of this recommendation:
 - a) “Black Sea” means GSA 29 as defined in Resolution GFCM/33/2009/2 on the establishment of geographical subareas in the GFCM area of application, amending Resolution GFCM/31/2007/2;
 - b) “European sprat” means fish pertaining to the species *Sprattus sprattus*.
 - c) “Vessel actively fishing” means any vessel targeting European sprat in the Black Sea and in possession of a valid fishing authorization for European sprat.
 - d) “Authorized vessel” means any fishing vessel in possession of a fishing authorization entitling it to carry out fishing activities for the exploitation of European sprat during a specific period, in a given area or for a given fishery under specific conditions.

- e) “Fishing authorization” means an authorization entitling a vessel to engage in fishing activities for European sprat during a specified period in the given area.
- f) “Fishing day” means any continuous period of 24 hours, or part thereof, during which a vessel is present in GSA 29 and is searching for fish, shooting, setting, towing, hauling a fishing gear, taking catch on board, transshipping, retaining on board, processing on board, transferring and landing fish and fishery products.
- g) “Designated landing point” means ports, or places close to the shore, designated by CPCs in order to combat IUU fishing activities in the GFCM area of application, including offshore terminals and other installations for landing, transshipping, packaging, processing, refuelling or resupplying of fishing vessels, where landings, transshipments, packaging and/or processing operations of fishery products are permitted.

PART II

Scientific monitoring, adaptation and revision

- 7. The CPCs shall ensure on an annual basis an adequate scientific monitoring of the status of European sprat in the Black Sea.
- 8. The WGBS shall provide, on an annual basis as from 2022, advice on the status of European sprat in the Black Sea, including specific objectives to maintain fishing mortality within agreed precautionary fishing mortality reference points and to maintain or restore the stock at levels that can produce MSY. In addition, at its 2022 session, the WGBS may provide advice on establishing temporal closures for European sprat fisheries and on defining a minimum reference conservation size for European sprat.
- 9. The WGBS shall organize in 2022 a dedicated working group to examine, analyse and report on possible climatic effects on European sprat in the Black Sea. This report shall also include advice on how to incorporate any likely climatic impact within the advice on stock status and potential management measures for European sprat.
- 10. The WGBS shall assess, in 2023, via the dedicated Working Group on Management Strategy Evaluation (WGMSE), the biological, economic and social implications of implementing several management scenarios, including, the introduction of catch limits, with the objective of restoring and maintaining the species population above levels that can produce MSY.
- 11. In 2023, upon receiving the suggestions of the WGMSE, the WGBS shall assess the effectiveness of the transitional management measures established by this recommendation and provide scientific advice in order to enable the GFCM to establish management measures for the long-term sustainable management of European sprat in the Black Sea, including a multiannual management plan.

PART III

Fleet management measures

- 12. Vessels authorized to fish for European sprat in the Black Sea shall be listed by the CPC whose flag they are flying. Vessels not listed by the CPC whose flag they are flying shall not catch, retain on board, tranship, land, store or sell European sprat.
- 13. The CPCs shall communicate to the GFCM Secretariat, not later than 31 January each year, the list of the vessels flying their flag and actively fishing for European sprat for the current year or for the forthcoming years. This list shall include, for each vessel, the information referred to in the annex to this recommendation.

14. The vessels actively fishing for sprat shall provide national authorities with a detailed report of their fishing activities, including as minimum requirements: operating days, operating area and total catch of European sprat. This information shall be transmitted to the GFCM Secretariat twice a year, not later than 31 July and 31 January each year.

15. Without prejudice to the provisions referred to in paragraph 12, and when a system to avoid discards as well as the obligation to land all catches have been established by a CPC, the master of the fishing vessel shall not be allowed to discard those catches and shall therefore land the fish caught, in line with the provisions stipulated by such CPC. All such quantities landed shall be recorded and shall not be displayed, offered for sale nor used for human consumption.

16. The CPCs implementing a landing obligation scheme as referred to in paragraph 15 shall notify its contents and characteristics to the GFCM Secretariat, prior to the subsequent annual session of the GFCM, with a view to informing the other parties. The CPCs may designate, where applicable, additional spatial/temporal restrictions/closures to those already established where fishing activities may be banned or restricted in order to protect aggregation areas of juveniles of sprat. In 2023, the WGMSE shall examine such additional measures. Where applicable, CPCs shall notify to the GFCM Secretariat, by 31 December 2022 the list of these areas and the restrictions applied.

PART IV

Management of fishing effort

17. The CPCs shall communicate to the GFCM Secretariat for the first time, not later than 31 January 2022, the list of all their vessels actively fishing for sprat.

18. Such list shall contain, for each vessel, the information referred to in the annex to this recommendation.

19. The CPCs shall ensure that their fleet capacity or fishing effort is maintained at the levels authorized and applied in the recent years for the exploitation of European sprat in the Black Sea.

20. The CPCs shall promptly notify the GFCM Secretariat of any addition to, deletion from and/or modification of the fishing fleets for European sprat at any time such changes may occur or at least on a monthly basis.

21. The GFCM Secretariat shall maintain and update the list of fishing vessels authorized to fish for European sprat and publish it on the GFCM website in a manner that is consistent with GFCM data confidentiality policy and procedures.

22. Each CPC shall ensure the set-up of adequate mechanisms for the recording of each fishing vessel in a national fleet register and for the recording of vessel catches and fishing effort via the logbook.

PART V

Specific measures to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

23. The obligation to declare catches shall apply irrespective of the volume of the catch.

24. Each CPC shall designate landing points where the landings by vessels actively fishing for European sprat in the Black Sea shall take place.

25. It shall be prohibited to land or tranship from fishing vessels any quantity of European sprat fished in the Black Sea at any place other than the designated landing points.

26. The CPCs shall engage in cooperation for the fight against IUU fishing, in particular by sharing information and gathering intelligence to fight against illegal activities.

27. The above provisions are without prejudice to Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7 on a regional plan of action to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the GFCM area of application.

PART VI

Monitoring, control and surveillance programme

28. All vessels above 12 metres length overall actively fishing for European sprat shall be equipped with a vessel monitoring system (VMS) or any other geopositioning system allowing control authorities to track their activities.

29. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/1 concerning the establishment of a GFCM logbook, amending Recommendation GFCM/34/2010/1 all catches of European sprat shall be reported in the logbook irrespectively of the live weight of the catch.

PART VII

Final provisions

30. The provisions contained in this recommendation shall be applied without prejudice to stricter national rules enforced in CPCs.

Fishing authorizations – List of authorized vessels

Subject to more detailed provisions under the GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework, the list referred to in paragraph 18 shall contain, for each vessel, the following information:

- vessel name;
- national registration number (code assigned by CPCs);
- vessel registration number (country ISO 3-alpha code + 9 digits, e.g. xxx000000001);
- port of registration (full name of the port);
- previous name (if any);
- previous flag (if any);
- previous details of deletion from other registers (if any);
- international radio call sign (if any);
- VMS (indicate Y/N)
- type of vessel, length overall, gross tonnage and engine power expressed in kW;
- name and address of owner(s) and operator(s);
- main gear used to fish for European sprat and fleet segment allocation; and
- seasonal period authorized for fishing European sprat.