

## **Resolution GFCM/44/2021/2**

### **on the definition of a minimum conservation reference size for priority stocks in the Mediterranean Sea**

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

*RECALLING* 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;

*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;

*NOTING* the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources” and Target 14.4 “By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics”;

*RECALLING* the recommendations by the second performance review of the GFCM to develop conservation measures and management plan, making full use of the science-policy interface provided by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) and to initiate, within five years, appropriate interim management measures to conserve fisheries, stocks and habitats targeted by the different fisheries, comprising the small-scale fisheries sector;

*CONSIDERING* that the GFCM shall apply the precautionary approach in accordance with the United Nations Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of 4 August 1995 and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

*FURTHER CONSIDERING* that the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries provides that states “should apply the precautionary approach widely to conservation, management and exploitation of living aquatic resources in order to protect them and preserve the aquatic environment, taking account of the best scientific evidence available. The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species and non-target species and their environment”;

*HAVING REGARD* to Article 8 b) ii) of the GFCM aiming to minimize the impacts of fishing activities on marine living resources and their ecosystems;

*RECALLING* that the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration (MedFish4Ever Declaration), specifically its paragraph 36, requires that, in the context of establishing an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework, all key fisheries should be managed with management plans;

*CONSIDERING* Decision GFCM/37/2013/1 on guidelines on precautionary conservation measures pending the development and adoption of GFCM multiannual management plans for relevant fisheries at the subregional level in the GFCM area of application, which provides guidelines on precautionary conservation measures pending the development and adoption of GFCM multiannual management plans for relevant fisheries in the GFCM subregions;

*FURTHER CONSIDERING* Recommendation GFCM/40/2016/5 establishing a minimum conservation reference size for European hake in the Mediterranean Sea, aimed at restoring and maintaining the population of this important stock;

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

## **PART I**

### **General objective and scope**

#### ***General objective***

1. This resolution establishes a requirement to adopt a minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) for the GFCM priority species in the Mediterranean listed in the annex to this resolution, by GFCM subregion when relevant, in order to ensure that the MCRS is applied by all contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) with a view to strengthening conservation measures and establishing a level playing field between CPCs.

#### ***Scope***

2. This resolution applies to all commercial and recreational fishing activities in geographical subareas 1 to 27, taking into account potential differences in MCRS between the GFCM subregions.

## **PART II**

### **Data collection, monitoring and research**

3. The CPCs are encouraged to only harvest species that are above the MCRS in order to minimize the bycatch of juveniles during fishing operations.

4. Following Decision GFCM/37/2013/1, the CPCs shall systematically report information on the catch and undersized specimens of all harvested species, in line with the technical manual of the GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF).

5. In order for the SAC to identify the length at maturity, based on literature and on the reporting by CPCs in line with DCRF requirements in each GFCM subregion, and in order to define a uniform basis for an updated MCRS list by GFCM subregion based on the MCRS already adopted on a voluntary basis under Decision GFCM/37/2013/1, the CPCs shall call the attention of the relevant national and international authorities in order to improve the collection of data on the size and location of the catches by species.

6. The provisions referred to in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 are without prejudice to stricter rules implemented by the CPCs.

## **PART III**

### **Final provisions**

7. Not later than 30 June 2022, the SAC is requested to develop a methodology for establishing the best scientific basis for proposing a MCRS for the species listed in the annex to this resolution. Such methodology should be developed in compiling and assessing all available information reported under Decision GFCM/37/2013/1, by GFCM subregion, on the length and maturity stages of all priority species listed in the annex to this resolution. Any other source of additional information, including, but not limited to, scientific literature, surveys at sea and research projects, may be used by the SAC in order to update the existing MCRS list and its extension to all priority stocks of the GFCM area of application, with a view to securing a level playing field in the region.

8. Based on the data collected, the SAC shall propose a list of MCRS by species. The objective of the updated MCRS list is to ensure that all priority stocks exploited during fishing activities have been able to reproduce at least once in their life history and to keep the bycatch of juveniles to the lowest possible level in the entire GFCM area of application.

9. The SAC, at its twenty-third session in 2022 shall report to the GFCM on the progress accomplished thereon and on the knowledge gaps identified and provide the updated MCRS for the compilation of a future MCRS list by GFCM subregion with the objective of minimizing juvenile catch and bycatch in the GFCM area of application.

10. At its forty-fifth session in 2022, the GFCM shall review the SAC advice and consider adopting an updated list of MCRS by subregion allowing for the achievement of the objectives of this resolution.

11. This resolution shall be without prejudice to stricter measures adopted by the CPCs for the vessels flying their flag.

## Annex

Under Decision GFCM/37/2013/1, a number of MCRS were suggested for voluntary adoption by CPCs; however this measure is limited in scope. In addition, the GFCM has adopted a MCRS for European hake in the Mediterranean as well as for select species falling under management plans in the Adriatic Sea, the Alboran Sea and the Strait of Sicily.

Minimum conservation reference sizes for priority species in the Mediterranean, by GFCM subregion

Scientific name	Common name	European Union waters	Entire Mediterranean	Adriatic Sea	Alboran Sea	Strait of Sicily
<i>Dicentrarchus labrax</i>	Seabass	25 cm				
<i>Diplodus annularis</i>	Annular seabream	12 cm				
<i>Diplodus puntazzo</i>	Sharpsnout seabream	18 cm				
<i>Diplodus sargus</i>	White seabream	23 cm				
<i>Diplodus vulgaris</i>	Common two-banded seabream	18 cm				
<i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i> (*)	European anchovy	9 cm		9 cm		
<i>Epiphenelus spp.</i>	Groupers	45 cm				
<i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i>	Sand steenbras	20 cm				
<i>Merluccius merluccius</i> (***)	European hake	20 cm	20 cm			
<i>Mullus spp.</i>	Red mullet	11 cm		11 cm		
<i>Pagellus acarne</i>	Axillary seabream	17 cm				
<i>Pagellus bogaraveo</i>	Blackspot seabream	33 cm			30 cm	

Scientific name	Common name	European Union waters	Entire Mediterranean	Adriatic Sea	Alboran Sea	Strait of Sicily
<i>Pagellus erythrinus</i>	Common pandora	15 cm				
<i>Pagrus pagrus</i>	Red porgy	18 cm				
<i>Polyprion americanus</i>	Wreckfish	45 cm				
<i>Sardina pilchardus</i> (**)	European pilchard (=sardine)	11 cm		11 cm		
<i>Scomber spp.</i>	Mackerel (including <i>S. scombrus</i> )	18 cm				
<i>Solea vulgaris</i>	Common sole	20 cm		20 cm		
<i>Sparus aurata</i>	Gilthead seabream	20 cm				
<i>Trachurus spp.</i>	Horse mackerel (including <i>T. mediterraneus</i> )	15 cm				
<i>Nephrops norvegicus</i>	Norway lobster	20 mm CL or 70 mm TL		20 mm CL or 70 mm TL		
<i>Homarus gammarus</i>	European lobster	105 mm CL or 300 mm TL				
<i>Palinuridae</i>	Spiny lobsters nei	90 mm CL				
<i>Parapenaeus longirostris</i>	Deep-water rose shrimp	20 mm CL		20 mm CL		20 mm CL
<i>Pecten jacobeus</i>	Mediterranean scallop	10 cm				
<i>Venerupis spp.</i>	Carpet clams	25 mm				
<i>Venus spp.</i>	Venus shells	25 mm <sup>1</sup>				

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Except for fisheries with a derogation granted at CPC level.

TL = total length; CL = carapace length.

(\*) Anchovy: CPCs may convert the MCRS into 110 specimens per kg.

(\*\*) Sardine: CPCs may convert the MCRS into 55 specimens per kg.

(\*\*\*) European hake: until 31 December 2008 a margin of tolerance of 15 percent of weight will be permitted for European hake between 15 and 20 cm. This tolerance limit shall be complied with by individual vessels, at sea or at the landing place as well as at first sale markets after landing. This limit shall also be complied with in any subsequent commercial transaction at the national and international level.

Upon request, the SAC will evaluate other species among the GFCM priority species for the Mediterranean and its subregions.

The following species are either commonly collected or have been collected in the past and may require a review by the SAC:

- European edible sea urchin (*Echinus esculentus*)
- Stony sea urchin (*Paracentrotus lividus*)
- Black sea ursin (*Arbacia lixula*)
- Truncate donax (*Donax trunculus*)