

Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/3 on a multiannual management plan for the sustainable exploitation of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea (geographical subareas 1 to 3), repealing Recommendations GFCM/44/2021/4, GFCM/43/2019/2 and GFCM/41/2017/2

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 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 the 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;

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

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

CONSIDERING that the GFCM shall apply the precautionary approach in accordance with the 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);

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”;

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;

RECALLING Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7 on a regional plan of action to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the GFCM area of application;

CONSIDERING that fishing mortality should be kept below safe thresholds to ensure long-term high yields while limiting the risk of stock collapse and guaranteeing stable and more viable fisheries;

CONSIDERING the socioeconomic importance of fisheries exploiting blackspot seabream, especially at the local level, and the need to ensure their sustainability;

RECALLING that transitional management measures (Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/2 on the management of blackspot seabream fisheries in the Alboran Sea (geographical subareas 1 to 3) for a two-year transition period) and adaptive management measures (Recommendation GFCM/43/2019/2 on a management plan for the sustainable exploitation of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea [geographical subareas 1 to 3], rolled over by Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/4) have been adopted to manage the stock of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea;

NOTING that the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) has recurrently, including in 2022, considered that the stock of blackspot seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) is in overexploitation in the geographical subareas (GSAs) 1 to 3;

RECALLING that according to the latest SAC scientific advice in 2022, the blackspot seabream stock is overexploited, with low fishing mortality due to low biomass ($F/F_{msy} = 0.78$, $SSB/SSB_{lim} = 0.91$);

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 definition

General objectives

1. The present recommendation establishes a multiannual management plan for sustainable fishing activities in the Alboran Sea (geographical subareas [GSAs] 1 to 3) exploiting blackspot seabream by means of handlines and set and mixed longlines. On the basis of SAC advice, the scope of this recommendation could be extended to other types of fishing gear.
2. The multiannual management plan shall be consistent with the precautionary approach. It shall be designed to provide high long-term yields consistent with the MSY and to guarantee a low risk of stock collapse while maintaining the sustainability and relative stability of fisheries and dependent industries.
3. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) whose vessels are actively fishing in GSAs 1 to 3 agree to implement such a multiannual management plan for the fisheries concerned and in accordance with the general and specific objectives and measures set forth by this recommendation.
4. A set of transitional precautionary management measures for the Alboran Sea shall be developed in order to ensure that stocks and fisheries progress towards biologically sustainable levels while minimizing socioeconomic impacts and finalizing scientific advice by the SAC.
5. The multiannual management plan for the concerned fisheries shall also pursue a reduction in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities in GSAs 1 to 3.

Geographical scope

6. The multiannual management plan provided by the present recommendation shall apply to GSAs 1, 2 and 3.

Definitions

7. For the purpose of this recommendation:
 - a) “ F_{msy} ” means the value of the estimated fishing mortality that, with a given fishing pattern and under current average environmental conditions, gives the long-term maximum yield.
 - b) “ B_{lim} ” means the limit reference point, expressed as spawning stock biomass below which there may be reduced reproductive capacity.

- c) “B_{pa}” means the precautionary reference point, expressed as spawning stock biomass, that ensures that the spawning stock biomass has less than a 5 percent probability of being below B_{lim}.
- d) “Stock within safe biological limits” means a stock with a high probability of its estimated spawning biomass at the end of the previous year being higher than the limit biomass reference point (B_{lim}).
- e) “Alboran Sea” means GSAs 1 to 3 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.
- f) “Vessel actively fishing” means any vessel catching blackspot seabream and entitled by the CPC whose flag it flies to carry out specific fishing operations during a specified period in a given area or for a given fishery under specific conditions.
- g) “Key stock” means marine organisms pertaining to the blackspot seabream (*Pagellus bogaraveo*) species.
- h) “Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing” or “IUU fishing” means the activities set out in paragraph 3 of the 2001 FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and following the provisions of Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7.
- i) “Authorized ports” means ports or places close to the shore designated by CPCs according to paragraphs 40 and 41 of this recommendation.

PART II

Specific objectives and transitional measures

- 8. The multiannual management plan shall aim to contribute to the objectives mentioned in Article 2 and to the principles listed in Article 5 of the GFCM Agreement.
- 9. The multiannual management plan shall, in particular:
 - a) apply the precautionary approach to fisheries management;
 - b) apply to recreational and commercial fisheries;
 - c) ensure that exploitation levels of key stocks are at maximum sustainable yield (MSY) as soon as possible and at the latest by 31 December 2030;
 - d) prevent increases in fishing capacity in comparison to year 2018–2021 levels;
 - e) prevent increases in the number of lines (maximum 30 lines per vessel per day), hydraulic pullers on board (maximum 3 pullers on board) and number of hooks (maximum 1 000 hooks per person on board, maximum 2 600 hooks per vessel) and fix hook size (minimum L = 3.95 cm, minimum S = 1.65 cm);
 - f) protect nursery and spawning areas and essential fish habitats important for the key stock from 2024 onwards;
 - g) contribute to the elimination of discards by avoiding and reducing unwanted catches below minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) and by ensuring that all catches are landed. Exemptions to the total landing of catches should be granted upon proper scientific justification for the high survivability of the unharmed specimen, which shall be released immediately into the sea in the area where it has been caught; and
 - h) provide for measures to adjust fishing capacity and catches to fishing mortality levels consistent

with MSY with a view to ensuring economically viable fleets without overexploiting marine living resources.

10. The multiannual management plan shall be based on a two-step approach whereby: i) during the transitional period 2023–2025, a provisional catch limit regime shall be applied; and ii) from 2026 onwards, yearly catch limits shall be adopted in order to reach F_{msy} and remain within safe biological limits. The yearly catch limits shall be proposed by the SAC based on an evaluation of the state of the stocks using up-to-date scientific data.

11. In 2023, 2024 and 2025, a transitional fishing regime shall be established. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall ensure that national catch limits and a maximum number of hooks of minimum size, namely $L \geq 3.95$ cm and $S \geq 1.65$ cm, are established for blackspot seabream, aligned with annual reductions of 7 percent in hook number and of 7 percent in catch limits in order to produce reductions proportional to the fishing mortality stemming from each fleet. Such reductions should be made with respect to the catch limits of 2018–2021 and the number of hooks over the same period, with a maximum of 70 hooks by line, maximum 30 lines per day and 2 600 hooks per vessel. Based on this paragraph, the catch limits and number of hooks for 2023, 2024 and 2025, with the temporary allocation, are established in Annex 1. Each CPC may, in addition, establish individual allocations by fleet segment for catch limits and number of hooks.

12. During the transitional period, recreational fishing activities shall be limited to one fish per fisher per day with a MCRS of 40 cm and a strict prohibition shall be implemented during the closure period of commercial fisheries. In addition, each CPC shall make an effort to ensure the reporting of catches from recreational fisheries, when applicable. Based on SAC advice in 2025, management measures (including, if necessary, a full prohibition) shall be updated.

13. In 2023, 2024 and 2025, CPCs shall be fully committed to supporting and updating the blackspot seabream benchmark assessment and the management strategy evaluation provided for in paragraph 15, in line with Appendix 5/B of the report of the twenty-third session of the SAC. In 2025, the GFCM shall decide, based on the SAC advice and the latest available status of stocks, on the catch limits and other measures to be applied in 2026.

14. A Working Group on Blackspot Seabream (WGSBR) shall be established by the GFCM in 2023, within 30 calendar days following the twenty-fourth session of the SAC in 2023, in order to analyse and assess the benefits of spatio-temporal restrictions with a view to defining further appropriate restrictions to protect spawning and nursery areas for the key stock.

15. The SAC, at its twenty-fifth session in 2024, shall give a mandate to the WGSBR to update a blackspot seabream benchmark in 2024 and the Workshop on the assessment of management measures (WKMSE) to carry out a management strategy evaluation.

16. The catch limits and hook limits for the period 2023–2025 established by CPC as in paragraphs 11 and 12 shall be set without prejudice to the discussions to take place in the context of the working group referred to in paragraphs 14 and 15 of this recommendation.

PART III

Long-term management plan

17. A long-term management plan for the period 2026–2030 is established. Each year, on the basis of SAC advice and the advisory timing provided in paragraphs 35 and 36, the GFCM shall establish yearly catch limits.

18. Over the first three years, beginning with 2026, the variation between annual catch limits in comparison to the previous year shall not exceed 10 percent, while for the remaining years of the plan, it shall not exceed 20 percent. These limitations on the variation between annual catch limits shall not apply in the case that the stock is not within safe biological limits.

Safeguards

19. The operational objective of the multiannual management plan shall be to maintain fishing mortality for blackspot seabream stock within the agreed precautionary reference values for F_{msy} , with a view to achieving or maintaining F_{msy} levels in accordance with the objectives of this recommendation.

20. Where, based on SAC scientific advice, the spawning biomass of the blackspot seabream stock is below B_{pa} , the GFCM shall take remedial measures to ensure the rapid return of the concerned stock to a level capable of producing MSY. In particular, catch limits shall be set at levels consistent with producing a fishing mortality lower than F_{msy} , taking into account the decrease in biomass.

21. Where, based on SAC scientific advice, the spawning biomass of blackspot seabream is below B_{lim} , the GFCM shall take further remedial measures to ensure the rapid return of the concerned stock to a level capable of producing MSY. In particular, such remedial measures may include suspending the targeted fishery of the concerned stock and an adequate reduction in catch limits.

PART IV

Technical and conservation measures

Spatial and temporal closures

22. Over the transitional period from 2023 to 2025, CPCs shall apply specific temporal closures at the fleet level (even if not simultaneously for different type of fishing gear), with a view to protecting the key stock during spawning periods. Such closures shall cover the key areas of distribution of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea and affect all vessels concerned by this recommendation for periods of no less than 30 continuous days per fleet segment. Such closures shall take place from December to March. Each CPC shall submit the closure period to the GFCM Secretariat and the list of vessels concerned.

23. The SAC shall evaluate in 2023 the impact of all types of fishing gear on the fishing mortality of blackspot seabream in order to decide if it is necessary to include other types of fishing gear in the closure area measure or any other management measure deemed necessary.

24. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall communicate to the GFCM Secretariat, no later than 30 April 2023 and thereafter annually, the spatial restrictions, as defined in paragraph 22, that apply in the waters under their jurisdiction, with a view to protecting spawning and nursery areas for blackspot seabream stock.

Minimum conservation reference size

25. Through the end of 2023, as a transitional measure, it shall be prohibited to land specimens of blackspot seabream measuring a total length of less than 30 cm.

26. In 2023, the WGSBR shall analyse and assess the benefits of updating the MCRS in order to define further appropriate restrictions with a view to protecting juvenile fish of the key stock and allowing for an increase in the spawning biomass. On the basis of the results of this working group and the advice of the SAC, the GFCM will adopt at its forty-sixth session an MCRS for blackspot seabream.

PART V

Fleet management measures

27. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall ensure that the overall fleet capacity of fleets fishing blackspot seabream with handlines and set and mixed longlines in terms of gross tonnage (GT), engine power (kW) and number of vessels, as recorded both in national and GFCM registers, does not exceed, over the duration of this recommendation's mandate, the fleet capacity for the same fisheries averaged over the years 2018–2021. Based on this paragraph, the number of vessels and their characteristics are established in Annex 2.

28. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall adapt, with respect to fishing opportunities (catch limits and number of hooks), the overall fleet capacity of fleets operating with handlines, set and mixed longliners and fishing blackspot seabream in terms of gross tonnage (GT), engine power (kW) and number of vessels, as recorded both in national and GFCM registers.

29. Vessels authorized under the scope of this recommendation to fish blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea shall be listed by the CPC whose flag they fly.

30. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall communicate to the GFCM Secretariat, no later than 1 August of the first year and by 31 March of each subsequent year, the list of the vessels flying their flag and fishing blackspot seabream during the current year or forthcoming years. This list shall include, for each vessel, the information referred to in Annex 3.

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

32. Each CPC shall ensure that adequate mechanisms are set up to record each fishing vessel in a national fleet register and to record vessels' catches and fishing effort via the logbook, as well as to monitor fishing vessels' activities and landings via catch and effort sampling surveys according to the rules stipulated by each CPC.

33. The above provisions are without prejudice to Recommendation GFCM/33/2009/7 concerning minimum standards for the establishment of a vessel monitoring system in the GFCM area of application.

PART VI

Scientific monitoring, adaptation and revision of the plan

34. The SAC shall provide, on an annual basis beginning from 2023, advice on the status of the key stock in the Alboran Sea, including specific objectives for catch and hook limits to maintain fishing mortality within agreed precautionary fishing mortality reference points and to maintain or restore the key stock at levels that can produce MSY in accordance with the objectives set out in paragraphs 2 and 9.

35. Since a rapid provision of scientific advice is essential for the stock to recover, CPCs shall annually ensure that either all scientific fisheries (echo-survey) and/or commercial (catch and discard) data collected in year N are provided to the GFCM Secretariat by 1 April of year N+1 in order to perform a yearly updated stock assessment in May (year N+1). From 2025, on the basis of scientific advice and while taking into account socioeconomic effects on fleets and industry, the SAC annually will propose catch limits by single species to be adopted by the GFCM at its annual session (year N+1) and implemented from 1 January (year N+2).

36. Based on SAC advice, the GFCM may review the content of the multiannual management plan.

37. Where SAC advice indicates that the general or specific objectives of the multiannual management plan are not being met, the GFCM shall decide on additional or alternative management measures to contribute to achieving those objectives.

38. Where, for any reason (e.g. lack of appropriate data), the SAC is not in a position to provide accurate advice on the stock status of the key stock and on its exploitation level, the GFCM shall decide on the most appropriate management measures to ensure the sustainability of the fisheries. These measures shall be based on SAC advice in accordance with the precautionary approach and taking into consideration environmental and socioeconomic elements in a way that guarantees the sustainability of the fisheries.

PART VII

Specific measures to address illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

39. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall establish a mechanism to ensure that vessels actively fishing in the Alboran Sea declare all catches of the key stock. If possible, the obligation to electronically declare catches, as well as catches of non-target species exceeding 50 kg, shall apply, irrespective of the volume of the catch, to vessels above 12 m and vessels catching more than 10 000 kg per year regardless of their length from 1 January 2023. Meanwhile, for vessels below 12 m catching less than 10 000 kg per year, the Compliance Committee (CoC) shall assess the most appropriate system of catch reporting.

40. Each CPC shall designate landing points at which landings by vessels actively fishing for the key stock in the Alboran Sea shall take place.

41. For each designated port, the concerned CPC shall specify permitted landing.

42. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall carry out inspections on the basis of a risk analysis.

43. It shall be prohibited to land or transship from fishing vessels any quantity of the key stock fished in the Alboran Sea at any place other than the ports designated by CPCs in accordance with paragraph 41.

44. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall transmit to the GFCM Secretariat, no later than 30 April 2023 and subsequently by 30 November each year, any changes to the list of the designated landing points at which landings of key stock in the Alboran Sea may take place.

45. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall engage to cooperate in the fight against IUU fishing activities, in particular through sharing information and gathering intelligence to fight against illegal activities.

46. Part VII of this recommendation is without prejudice to Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7.

PART VIII

Monitoring, control and surveillance programme

47. Vessels operating with handlines and set and mixed longliners catching blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea shall be allowed to carry out specific fishing activities only if these are indicated in a valid fishing authorization issued by the competent authorities.

48. Starting from 30 April 2023, authorized vessels above 15 m length overall shall be equipped with a vessel monitoring system (VMS) or another geolocation system allowing control authorities to track their activity at all times during the fishing trips. At the latest by 1 January 2024, authorized vessels above 10 m length overall shall be equipped with a VMS or another geolocation system allowing control authorities to track their activity at all times during the fishing trips.

49. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall monitor the consumption of the catch limit set respectively in accordance with paragraphs 10 and 11, as well as Annex 1 until the end of the transitional period and thereafter in paragraph 17 as follows:

For individual CPC catch limits, beginning from the date when 80 percent of the quota has been exhausted, the CPC concerned shall communicate to the GFCM monthly reports on catch. Such report should be sent by the fifteenth day of the month for the previous month. When the catch limit has been reached, the CPC shall prohibit the catch of blackspot seabream, taking into account paragraph 18.

PART IX

National management plans

50. In order to ensure adequate conservation of blackspot seabream stock, CPCs shall adopt fisheries management measures or national management plans in the Alboran Sea.

51. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall notify the GFCM Secretariat, from 30 September 2023, of the management measures or management plans adopted at the national level. Where appropriate, should these measures be modified, CPCs shall communicate such modifications by 30 April of the following year.

PART X

Final provisions

52. The present recommendation repeals Recommendations GFCM/44/2021/5, GFCM/43/2019/2 and GFCM/41/2017/2.

53. The multiannual management plan established by this recommendation remains in force for eight years from the date of its adoption.

54. Measures in this recommendation shall be without prejudice to stricter measures adopted by CPCs.

55. On the basis of SAC scientific advice, the GFCM may revise this recommendation after four years.

Annex 1

Fishing opportunities (catch limits and number of hooks) for blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea (GSAs 1–3) over the transitional period 2023–2025

In line with paragraphs 10 and 11, the catch limits (average 2018–2021) and the number of hooks for 2022 are reported in the tables below:

	Catch limits (in tonnes)		
	2023	2024	2025
European Union	32	29.76	27.67
Morocco	140	130.2	121

	Number of hooks			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
European Union	213 200*	198 276	184 397	171 489
Morocco	845 000*	785 850	730 840	679 682

*calculated for 2022 as the number of vessels in the GFCM database multiplied by 2 600 hooks per vessel.

Annex 2

Fishing capacity for fleets capturing blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea (GSAs 1–3) as target and bycaught species are shown in the table below:

	Number of vessels	
	Hooks, lines and longliners	Hooks, lines and multipurpose vessels of less than 12 m
European Union	82	0
Morocco	75	250

Annex 3

Subject to more detailed provisions under the GFCM data collection reference framework (DCRF), the list referred to in paragraphs 31 and 32 shall contain, for each vessel, the following information:

- vessel name;
- national registration number (code assigned by the relevant CPC);
- 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 yes/no);
- vessel type, length overall (LOA) and gross tonnage (GT) and engine power expressed in kW;
- name and address of owner(s) and/or charter and/or operator(s);
- main target species;
- main gear used for blackspot seabream and DCRF fleet segment allocation; and
- time period authorized for fishing with longlines or any other gear likely to fish blackspot seabream (if any such authorization).