

Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/12 on the establishment of a set of minimum rules for sustainable recreational 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 living marine resources in the GFCM area of application;

FURTHER 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 (Fish Stocks Agreement);

FURTHER 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 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”;

NOTING the recommendations stemming from the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Recreational Fisheries, in particular the following statement: “Management organizations should provide the mechanisms and the means for monitoring compliance and for enforcing regulations, but, regardless of the governance system, recreational fishers should share the responsibility for compliance by informing themselves and their fellows, and by self-policing”;

FURTHER NOTING the 2001 FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing;

RECALLING the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14 “Life below water”;

NOTING the objectives of the GFCM 2030 Strategy towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries;

RECALLING that the 2017 Malta Ministerial MedFish4Ever Declaration requires the establishment of baseline rules to ensure an effective management of recreational fisheries and to ensure “adequate data collection and exchange on all types of fleets including small-scale and recreational fisheries to reinforce scientific knowledge on fish stocks and ecosystems”;

NOTING that the 2018 Malta Ministerial Declaration on a Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea recognizes the interactions and synergies between recreational fisheries, small-scale fisheries and other marine economies, encourages their good cooperation, and calls for strengthening knowledge on their interactions and improving the control and surveillance of all fishing activities to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;

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);

RECOGNIZING the high socioeconomic value of recreational fisheries in the GFCM area of application, as well as their impacts on the stocks they exploit;

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

NOTING that the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC), at its twenty-third session (Rome, June 2022), stressed the need to continue monitoring recreational fishing and to identify solutions to mitigate the pressures of this activity;

FURTHER NOTING that the SAC endorsed a revised list of species and expressed support for a dedicated research programme on recreational fisheries;

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

PART I

General objective, scope and definitions

General objective

1. This recommendation establishes minimum rules to ensure an effective management, control and monitoring of recreational fishing activities in the Mediterranean Sea (geographical subareas [GSAs] 1–27).

Scope

2. This recommendation applies to all recreational fishing activities listed in this recommendation.

Definitions

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

- a) “Recreational fishing activities” or “recreational fishing” or “recreational fisheries” means a non-commercial fishing activity exploiting marine living resources for recreation, tourism or sports;
- b) “Angling” means fishing with rod and lines, pole or hand-held lines;
- c) “Fishing licence” means an official document conferring on its holder the right, as determined by national legislation, to fish for one or more aquatic species, using certain fishing gear, during a specified season or all year, eventually with catch limitations and other obligations (e.g. catch reporting);
- d) “Live weight” means the weight of a catch of marine biological resources measured immediately upon catch;
- e) “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 on a regional plan of action to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the GFCM area of application.

PART II

Specific objectives

4. This recommendation shall contribute to the objectives mentioned in Article 2 and the principles listed in Article 5 of the GFCM Agreement.

5. In particular, the recommendation shall aim to:
 - a) contribute to managing the impact of recreational fisheries on marine living resources towards their sustainable exploitation, in particular through applying conservation, control and monitoring measures;
 - b) improve the scientific, technical and socioeconomic knowledge of recreational fisheries;
 - c) encourage the participation of recreational fishers in the governance of their activity; and
 - d) deter IUU fishing activities.

PART III

Conservation measures

Prohibitions

6. It shall be prohibited to:
 - a) engage in recreational fishing without a valid fishing licence or registration, in accordance with paragraph 10 and from its date of application;
 - b) sell or trade catches from recreational fishing activities;
 - c) retain any specimen pertaining to the species listed in Annex 1;
 - d) retain any specimen smaller than the minimum conservation reference sizes adopted by the GFCM;
 - e) fish in the areas listed in Annex 3;
 - f) fish underwater with a self-contained breathing apparatus;
 - g) fish underwater from sunset until dawn; and
 - h) use simultaneously hand-held spears or spear guns and a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (aqualung).

Practices and fishing gear allowed in recreational fisheries

7. The following practices and fishing gear shall be allowed:
 - a) rods, hand lines and trolling lines, utilized without an electromechanical aid or with an electromechanical aid that does not exceed a power limit of 800 W;
 - b) hand-held spears or spear guns;
 - c) fishing underwater to catch fish or collect crustaceans and molluscs;
 - d) fishing by foot to collect crustaceans and molluscs;
 - e) traps and pots, with a maximum of three traps and three pots per permit;
 - f) longlines, with a maximum number of hooks to be established in accordance with paragraph 32;
 - g) cast nets (or throw nets);
 - h) corks and line; and
 - i) using artificial light when fishing for cephalopods with rods, hand lines or hand-held spears.
8. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs), on the basis of stock assessment and impact assessment, may limit the number of fishing gear and their accessories (e.g.

number of longlines and hooks for each longline, number of traps and pots, lures) authorized per fisher and may define further specific regulation for passive gear.

9. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties, on the basis of the most recent scientific advice, may adopt additional measures to regulate recreational fisheries, such as landing limits and spatial and temporal closures (e.g. on mapped spawning areas, spawning periods, spawning and juvenile aggregations).

PART IV **Control and monitoring measures**

Licences

10. By 1 January 2025, CPCs shall put in place and maintain either a mandatory licensing scheme or a registry scheme covering all recreational fishers. This provision applies to recreational fishers on foot, only after a proper assessment has been completed by the GFCM.

11. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may, where relevant, further simplify the application procedure for the licences and registrations referred to in paragraph 10, including for tourists or time-limited licences.

12. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may limit the number of licences issued.

13. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may launch information campaigns and maintain up-to-date websites to inform the public and recreational fishers on the measures regulating recreational fisheries under this recommendation, as well as national legislation, by involving fishing federations, associations and sectorial shops.

14. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may provide the information referred to in paragraph 13 to recreational fishers when granting them a fishing licence or registration.

Catch declaration and reporting

15. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may establish a pilot project on catch declaration for recreational fisheries when catch declaration is applicable and on a voluntary basis. Where possible, CPCs may opt for ergonomic digital app-based catch declaration tools. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall ensure that recreational fishers participating in this pilot project declare the following elements, at least for the species listed in Annex 1 and Annex 4:

- a) fishing licence or registration number;
- b) species and estimated live weight per species and fishing trip; and
- c) fishing zone.

Control and enforcement

16. For recreational fishing activity conducted from a vessel, CPCs shall establish and implement a system to control and monitor recreational fishing activities, complementing existing national control plans. Such a system shall be based on risk analysis, taking into account the frequency of recreational fishing activities and the threats they pose to marine living resources, in particular regarding the prohibitions listed in paragraph 6.

17. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall establish and implement an effective sanctioning system against any infringement to the rules set out in this recommendation. The sanctions and penalties applied shall be effective, proportionate and dissuasive and shall take into account

the frequency of recreational fishing activities and the threats they pose to marine living resources, in particular regarding the prohibitions listed in paragraph 6.

18. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may implement measures on fin-clipping for certain species in order to prevent their illegal sale to fishmongers and restaurants.

PART V

Scientific information

Data collection

19. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall sample and survey the recreational fishing activities taking place on their territory and may use for harmonized sampling and surveying the relevant FAO *Handbook for data collection on recreational fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea*.

Pilot projects and research programme

20. In 2023, the Working Group on Recreational Fisheries shall prepare a concept note for a research programme on recreational fishing activities. The SAC shall review the concept note at its twenty-fourth session in 2023 and provide advice to the GFCM. The forty-sixth session of the GFCM in 2023 shall review the concept note for adoption.

21. The GFCM Secretariat shall launch the research programme in 2024.

Data reporting

22. By 31 January 2024 and then each following year, CPCs shall report to the GFCM Secretariat the elements listed below:

- a) the list of species whose capture is prohibited for recreational fishing under national and/or local legislation;
- b) the fishing methods prohibited for recreational fishing under national and/or local legislation;
- c) the areas specifically prohibited for recreational fishing under national and/or local legislation;
- d) the list of species whose capture is regulated for recreational fishing under national and/or local legislation; and
- e) any other measures regulating recreational fishing activities under national and/or local legislation.

Scientific assessment

23. By 2024, the SAC shall:

- a) provide an overview of recreational fisheries in the GFCM area of application;
- b) provide a socioeconomic assessment of recreational fisheries in the CPCs;
- c) endeavour to assess the status of species caught by recreational fishing activities, including through its regular stocks assessment cycle; and
- d) propose, if necessary, a priority list of species that may require further regulation.

24. Starting in 2024 and then each following year, the SAC shall review the list of species set out in Annex 1 and Annex 4 and formulate advice, on the revision of these lists in view of the GFCM session,.

25. Starting in 2024 and then each following year, the session of the GFCM shall consider the SAC advice referred to in paragraph 24 and amend the lists under Annex 1 and Annex 4 accordingly.

PART VI

Participation to governance and promotion of best practices

26. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall endeavour to involve federations and associations in the management of recreational fishing activities.

27. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties shall actively encourage federations, associations and individual recreational fishers to:

- a) develop websites to inform their members and the public about compliance with local/national regulations, ecological issues and the impacts of their activity on resources and coastal and marine environment;
- b) participate in sustainability efforts through regular training and dissemination of information; and
- c) behave in an environmentally friendly way, including by:
 - encouraging the recycling of fishing material;
 - discouraging anchoring over sensitive habitats;
 - encouraging the targeting and the destruction of non-indigenous species;
 - promoting alternatives to materials that are potentially hazardous to the environment (lead sinkers, artificial fishing lines, bait containers and lures, barbed hooks, etc.);
 - recovering ghost gear and disposing of it in accordance with national legislation;
 - killing retained fish speedily and responsibly to avoid unnecessary suffering; and
 - promoting best practices for catch and release (“no kill”) fishing.

Catch and release

28. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may actively encourage federations, associations and individual recreational fishers to apply and promote catch and release practices.

29. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties may mandate catch and release practices, in particular for relevant species or areas or during certain periods of the year or day.

PART VII

Implementation plan for developing contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties

30. By 31 March 2024 at the latest, developing CPCs may submit an implementation plan to the GFCM. Such a plan shall propose a timeline and supporting evidence justifying the progressive implementation of the applicable provisions set out in this recommendation.

31. In 2024, the SAC shall review such implementation plans and formulate appropriate advice. In 2024, pending possible amendments in line with SAC advice, the forty-sixth session of the GFCM shall review such implementation plans.

PART VIII

Regionalization

32. As of 2023, the GFCM shall adopt specific recommendations based on SAC advice in order to implement the principles of the present recommendation in each of the following subregions:

- a) western Mediterranean;
- b) central Mediterranean;
- c) Adriatic Sea; and
- d) eastern Mediterranean.

33. The SAC advice referred to in paragraph 24 shall take into account the specificities of the recreational fisheries in each subregion listed in paragraph 32.

PART IX
Final provisions

34. The minimum conservation reference sizes established by the CPCs for commercial fishing shall also apply to recreational fishing.

35. Where the SAC advises that certain recreational fishing activities have a substantial impact on stocks or that certain stocks targeted by recreational fisheries have collapsed or are at serious risk of collapsing, the GFCM may adopt appropriate measures.

36. The GFCM shall review this recommendation at its forty-ninth session at the latest or as deemed necessary by SAC advice.

37. The provisions contained in this recommendation shall apply without prejudice to stricter rules enforced by CPCs.

Prohibited species
Marine mammals (all species)
Marine birds (all species)
Marine reptiles (all species)
Species listed in Appendices I and II under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
Species listed in Appendices I and II under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)
Species listed in Annex II under the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention),
Marine species protected under CPC legislation
Marine species specifically prohibited for capture by recreational fishing under CPC legislation

Prohibited methods
Toxic, stupefying or corrosive substances
Explosives
Electric current
Methods prohibited under CPC legislation

Prohibited areas
Areas protected by means of and in accordance with GFCM decisions, in particular the sensitive habitats and fisheries restricted areas established to protect essential fish habitats and vulnerable marine ecosystems, in line with the recommendations in force
Areas specifically prohibited to recreational fishing under CPC legislation

List of priority species

GFCM subregions		Western Mediterranean	Central Mediterranean	Adriatic Sea	Eastern Mediterranean
Geographical subareas		1 to 11	12 to 16, 19 to 21	17 and 18	22 to 27
Scientific name	FAO 3-alpha code				
<i>Boops boops</i>	BOG	X	X	X	X
<i>Coryphaena hippurus</i>	DOL		X	X	X
<i>Dentex Dentex</i>	DEC	X	X		
<i>Dicentrarchus labrax</i>	BSS	X	X	X	
<i>Diplodus annularis</i>	ANN		X		
<i>Diplodus sargus</i>	SWA		X		X
<i>Epinephelus marginatus</i>	GPD	X			
<i>Epinephelus spp.</i>	GPX		X		X
<i>Lagocephalus sceleratus</i>	LFZ	X	X	X	X
<i>Loligo spp.</i>	SQC			X	
<i>Mullus barbatus</i>	MUT	X	X	X	X
<i>Mullus surmuletus</i>	MUR	X	X		X
<i>Octopus vulgaris</i>	OCC	X	X	X	X
<i>Pagellus bogaraveo</i>	SBR	X			
<i>Pagellus erythrinus</i>	PAC	X	X	X	X
<i>Pterois miles</i>	UHQ	X	X	X	X
<i>Scomber japonicas</i>	MAS	X			X
<i>Scomber scombrus</i>	MAC	X	X		
<i>Sepia officinalis</i>	CTC	X	X	X	
<i>Seriola dumerili</i>	AMB	X			
<i>Siganus luridus</i>	IGU				X
<i>Siganus rivulatus</i>	SRI				X

<i>Sparus aurata</i>	SBG	X		X	
<i>Sphyraena sphyraena</i>	YRS		X		
<i>Todarodes sagittatus</i>	SQE			X	
<i>Todaropsis eblanae</i>	TDQ			X	
<i>Trachurus mediterraneus</i>	GMM	X			
<i>Trachurus trachurus</i>	HOM	X	X		
Sharks and rays ¹		X	X	X	X
Seabirds, sea turtles, marine mammals ²		X	X	X	X

¹ Any species of sharks and rays caught during recreational fishing activities.

² Vulnerable species included in Annex II (endangered or threatened species) and Annex III (species whose exploitation is regulated) of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention).