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Report from the outcome of the debate of the 44th Session of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

Executive Summary

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) is a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) established under the provisions of Article XIV of the FAO Constitution to rationally manage fisheries and sustainably develop aquaculture in all marine waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. Fifteen out of its 23 contracting parties, including the European Union, and four out of its six cooperating non-contracting parties are currently FAO Members in the Europe and Central Asia region. At its last annual session, in 2021, the GFCM adopted a significant number of management measures for both the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. Furthermore, as the result of the launching of the 2030 Strategy in support to fisheries and aquaculture, the GFCM is poised to continue contributing to accelerating progress at the regional level towards meeting the targets set out in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.¹

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

ERC Secretariat

ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org

¹ SDG 14 is to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

I. General background information

1. The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) was established in 1949, pursuant to Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, and came into force in 1952. In 2014, the GFCM amended for the fourth time its constitutive agreement, with a view to modernizing its institutional and legal framework and furthering its role in the Europe and Central Asia region. This role is of primary importance, given that 15 out of the 23 contracting parties to the GFCM,² as well as four out of its six cooperating non-contracting parties,³ are FAO Members in the Europe and Central Asia region.
2. Through negotiations and the adoption of binding recommendations, the GFCM aims to promote the conservation and sustainable use – at biological, social, economic and environmental levels – of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. The implementation of these recommendations is facilitated by the GFCM Secretariat, which backstops the Commission's subsidiary bodies, namely the Scientific Advisory Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ), the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC), the Compliance Committee (CoC), the Committee on Administration and Finance (CAF), and the Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS).
3. The primary challenges affecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions are the overexploitation of main commercial species, the interactions between fisheries/aquaculture and other human activities, and the incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Currently, there are significant efforts being made by the GFCM to promote a subregional approach in addressing fisheries and aquaculture issues. Following the successful showcase of the establishment and operationalization of the subregional technical unit in Burgas, Bulgaria, the GFCM enhanced the implementation of a subregional approach through the establishment of other subregional technical units for the Western Mediterranean in Málaga, Spain, the Central Mediterranean in Tunis, Tunisia, the Eastern Mediterranean in Beirut, Lebanon, and the Adriatic Sea in Split, Croatia.

II. Relevant outcomes of the GFCM Session

4. The 44th Session of the GFCM was held from 2 to 6 November 2021. Meetings were held virtually due to restrictions related to COVID-19.
5. A total of 21 binding recommendations were adopted, dealing with, among others, the following issues: the establishment of a fishing effort regime for key demersal stocks in the Adriatic Sea; the establishment of fisheries restricted areas in the Jabuka/Pomo Pit and the Bari Canyon in the Adriatic Sea; a management plan for the sustainable exploitation of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea; a multiannual management plan for sustainable trawl fisheries targeting giant red shrimp, and blue and red shrimp in the Levant Sea and the Ionian Sea; sustainable trawl fisheries targeting giant red shrimp, and blue and red shrimp in the Strait of Sicily; sustainable exploitation of sprat and sustainable piked dogfish fisheries in the Black Sea; the mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of seabirds, sea turtles, cetaceans and elasmobranchs in the Mediterranean Sea; a catch certificate scheme for turbot in the Black Sea; the establishment of a record of authorized vessels over 15 metres; and the establishment of a list of vessels presumed to have carried out illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
6. Also in 2021, the GFCM launched its 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (GFCM 2030 Strategy). The new strategy

² These 15 contracting parties are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The European Union is also a contracting party to the GFCM.

³ These four cooperating non-contracting parties are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The GFCM also cooperates closely with the Russian Federation.

embodies the continued commitment by the GFCM in providing a united vision for the region. It must be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the GFCM postponed to a later date the Black Sea Conference, which will be held in Georgia, and the second GFCM Forum on Fisheries Science in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (Fish Forum). Both interventions fall within the scope of the new strategy.

7. The Commission welcomed the increased voluntary contribution by the European Union to underpinning effective capacity development and technical cooperation across the GFCM area of application. Furthermore, two projects related to technical assistance to be funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – implemented by FAO and executed at the national level in close cooperation with relevant authorities and stakeholders – are expected to be in place in the second half of 2022. The projects will have as beneficiaries, countries from the Mediterranean region (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey) and the Black Sea region (Georgia, Turkey and Ukraine). The beneficiary countries confirmed the validation of the final project documents submitted by FAO to the GEF Secretariat on the occasion of the 44th Session of the GFCM, ahead of the 63rd Session of the GEF Council.

8. The GFCM approved its autonomous budget for 2022 in the amount of USD 2 462 221.