

# Charting Progress since the MEDFISH4EVER DECLARATION



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## » INTRODUCTION

As Mediterranean states of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) gather for the High-level Conference on MedFish4Ever Initiatives, it presents a valuable opportunity to reflect, assess, and implement lessons learned since the adoption of the Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration in 2017. This declaration on the future of Mediterranean fisheries adopted in Malta in 2017 by the ministers of key riparian states included commitments to: improve data collection and scientific assessments; establish an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework; foster a culture of compliance and eradicate illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; support sustainable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture; and strengthen solidarity and cooperation in the Mediterranean region. In this paper, we examine the extent to which the GFCM has delivered on those commitments, thus providing a snapshot of the progress achieved on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean.

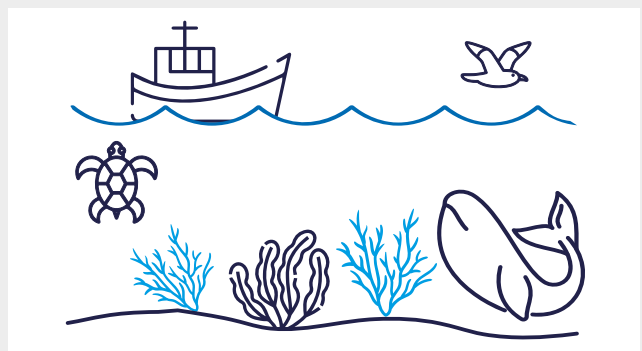


Out of 20 commitments assessed, only 7 have been achieved, 8 partially achieved, and 3 are lacking any significant progress.



### Based on the findings of the assessment, we recommend that the GFCM contracting parties:

- Tackle the root cause of overfishing in the Mediterranean, by adopting a regional capacity plan that guarantees a balance between resources and fleet capacity in all riparian countries.
- Accelerate the creation of Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs) to protect sensitive habitats, species, and vulnerable deep-sea marine ecosystems.
- Create multi-annual management plans for all Mediterranean priority species.
- Create and maintain a public list of compliance indicators and adopt a compliance mechanism. In cases of serious non-compliance, list vessels on the IUU fishing vessel list.
- Ensure operational Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) on all GFCM vessels above 15 metres length with urgency, and establish a regional VMS platform.
- Mitigate and eliminate bycatch and discards of vulnerable and protected species such as sharks and rays, seabirds, sea turtles, and marine mammals.
- Act to protect carbon-rich habitats to ensure a climate-resilient ocean.





This analysis evaluates the status of commitments made in the 2017 Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration<sup>1</sup>. The analysis uses a colour-coded system with four colours: green, orange, red, and grey. Green indicates that the target has been fully achieved, orange denotes that further efforts are required, red signifies a worrisome lack of progress with no significant action taken, and grey indicates that there was no sufficient information to assess the progress on the target.



This analysis primarily relies on publicly available sources of information from the GFCM website, including decisions (binding recommendations and resolutions), meeting reports, information management tools, and activities. It is further informed by *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2022* report<sup>2</sup>. The analysis also draws on the *GFCM 2030 Strategy*<sup>3</sup> for comparative purposes and to identify targets that have not been met.



The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic has been factored into the assessment, given the absence of GFCM decisions in 2020. Consequently, this analysis assesses actions taken since 2017, prioritising decisions adopted over meeting deadlines. The assessment applied a quantitative approach, analysing whether decisions have been made and drawing on numerical data where relevant. However, it does not assess the quality of these decisions or their implementation. The results of the assessment are presented in the tables below.

## ENHANCE DATA COLLECTION AND SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION

### TARGET

**32. Ensure that 100% of key Mediterranean stocks are subject to adequate data collection and scientifically assessed on a regular basis by 2020.**

**33. Call upon the forum on fisheries science to be convened by GFCM to ensure an effective unity of action of scientific activities through effective coordination of stock assessment, common guidelines on data collection and stock assessment methodologies, as well as data exchange through the effective interconnection of databases.**

### PROGRESS

// Improvement in spatial and temporal coverage of validated stock assessments (99 assessments were available in 2020).  
 // Coverage still incomplete or non-existent for 7 of the 19 priority species.<sup>4</sup>

// The first Fish Forum was held in 2018, and another is scheduled for 2024.  
 // Development of several databases, including the stock assessment results (STAR) framework in 2019.  
 // Development of two sets of guidelines on data collection.<sup>5</sup>  
 // Updated Data Collection Reference Framework manual in 2018<sup>6</sup> and update of an online platform.



# ESTABLISH AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



## TARGET

## PROGRESS

**35. By 2020, establish and implement a regional capacity plan ensuring an adequate balance between resources and fleet capacity in all riparian countries.**

- // No regional capacity plan has been adopted.
- // The only active recommendation on management of fishing capacity is GFCM/34/2010/2.<sup>7</sup>
- // GFCM 2030 Strategy commits to manage and adapt fishing capacity to ensure an adequate balance between the productivity of marine living resources and that of the fishing fleet. This shows that more efforts are needed to achieve the target.



**36. By 2020, manage 100% of the key fisheries with a multi-annual management plan.**

- // Nine multi-annual management plans were in place in the Mediterranean in 2022.
- // 35% of Mediterranean priority species are covered by a multi-annual management plan.
- // GFCM 2030 Strategy includes a commitment to develop multi-annual management plans for key fisheries, signalling that the target was not yet met and more efforts are needed.



**37. Ensure adequate protection of vulnerable species and sensitive habitats<sup>8</sup> including in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) through inter alia specific fisheries management measures embedded in multi-annual management plans.**

- // Four Recommendations for the conservation of vulnerable species and mitigation of fisheries impact: GFCM/44/2021/13, GFCM/44/2021/14, GFCM/44/2021/15, GFCM/44/2021/16.<sup>9</sup>
- // One Resolution on measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems formed by coral communities: GFCM/43/2019/6.<sup>10</sup>
- // Permanent working group on vulnerable marine ecosystems and essential fish habitats, which meets once per year: GFCM/41/2017/4.<sup>11</sup>
- // GFCM multi-annual management plans do not include provisions on sensitive species and sensitive habitats.<sup>12</sup>
- // GFCM 2030 Strategy includes a commitment to establish area-based measures to minimize and mitigate impacts on vulnerable species, sensitive habitats, and essential fish habitats. This indicates more efforts are needed and that the target has not yet been achieved.



# ESTABLISH AN ECOSYSTEM-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

## TARGET

**38. Further develop fisheries restricted and marine protected areas ensuring an effective protection of at least 10% of the Mediterranean Sea by 2020 and implementing relevant actions under the Barcelona Convention's Roadmap on MPAs**

**39. Establish by 2020 a set of baseline rules to ensure an effective management of recreational fisheries across the Mediterranean.**

**27. Ratify and implement the Barcelona convention and its protocols on the conservation of Mediterranean environment.**

## PROGRESS

// Slow progress on adopting new GFCM Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs). Since the 2017 creation of Jabuka/Pomo Pit FRA (GFCM/41/2017/3)<sup>13</sup>, only one new FRA was established (GFCM/44/2021/3)<sup>14</sup> and an existing one was strengthened (GFCM/44/2021/5).<sup>15</sup>

// GFCM FRAs represent less than 1% of the Mediterranean Sea, excluding the deep-water FRA (below 1000 m depth).

// In 2020, 8.3% of the Mediterranean Sea was under protection, but the total area of no-go, no-take, or no-fishing zones represented only 0.04%.<sup>16</sup>

// The GFCM adopted two specific roadmaps (GFCM/45/2022/4, GFCM/44/2021/3)<sup>17</sup> with the aim of establishing FRAs, but the process is lengthy. Other proposals have not progressed or have been delayed.<sup>18</sup>

// Resolution GFCM/41/2017/519 on a network of Essential Fish Habitats was adopted, but was followed-up with only one FRA adoption.

// A Recommendation was adopted that established minimum rules for sustainable recreational fisheries (GFCM/45/2022/12).<sup>20</sup>

// All GFCM contracting parties (CPCs) are parties to the Barcelona Convention and three of its Protocols.<sup>21</sup>

// Various GFCM CPCs are not parties to four Protocols of the Barcelona Convention (i.e., the Offshore Protocol, Hazardous Wastes Protocol, Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and Dumping Protocol).<sup>22</sup>



# DEVELOP A CULTURE OF COMPLIANCE AND ELIMINATE IUU FISHING

## TARGET

## PROGRESS

**41. Ensure that by 2020, all States have an adequate legal framework and the necessary human and technical capabilities to meet their control and inspection responsibilities as flag, coastal, and port state. To this end, we ask the GFCM to support the development of national control and sanctioning systems including the training of inspectors, the implementation of modular solutions for monitoring, control and surveillance, and the continuation of the operationalisation of a regional VMS and control system.**

- // Adoption of the GFCM Regional Plan of Action for the fight against IUU fishing (GFCM/41/2017/7).<sup>23</sup>
- // The GFCM IUU Vessel List<sup>24</sup> has been updated annually, but it mainly includes vessels identified by other RFMOs. Only one vessel has been listed by the GFCM since 2018.<sup>25</sup>
- // No regional Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) has been set up, but pilot projects exploring the possibilities of a centralised or regionalised VMS are ongoing. The GFCM 2030 Strategy also mentions plans to establish a centralised/regional VMS and a related control system.
- // Creation of GFCM-Lex, a multilingual online platform on relevant legislation in the GFCM area of application.<sup>26</sup>
- // Trainings of port state inspectors, joint training of national inspectors and control personnel.
- // Establishment of minimum technical standards for a GFCM Vessel Monitoring System and control system,<sup>27</sup> but this has not yet been implemented.
- // Support provided for a mutual assistance mechanism.<sup>28</sup>



**42. Establish Joint Schemes of International Inspection by sub-regional area to ensure the monitoring of high seas areas subject to IUU fishing with joint patrolling and inspections.**

- // Creation of two Joint Inspection Schemes which will run until the end of 2030.<sup>29</sup>
- // Facilitation of enhanced access to information gathered during joint inspections.<sup>30</sup>
- // Recommendation adopted banning transshipments at sea in the GFCM area (GFCM 45/2022/14).<sup>31</sup>
- // Mechanism established for reporting and responding to sightings of vessels engaged in presumed IUU activities (GFCM/44/2021/21).<sup>32</sup>



**43. By 2018, invite the GFCM through its Compliance Committee to set up and maintain compliance indicators, available to the public, to monitor the evolution of control and surveillance activities as well as IUU fishing and its quantification.**

- // A compliance assessment scheme was outlined through Resolutions<sup>33</sup> including criteria to determine non-compliance of CPCs and the level of severity of non-compliance types. However, it is not binding and does not include indicators.
- // There is no compliance mechanism in place that allows the GFCM to take effective action against cases of non-compliance or adopt dissuasive measures in case of continued non-compliance.
- // CPCs are not assessed on the implementation and enforcement of GFCM control and surveillance activities, solely on transposition of GFCM conservation and control measures alongside fulfilment of reporting requirements.



**44. By 2020, ensure the allocation of a unique vessel identifier (IMO number) to commercial fishing vessels of 24 metres and above.**

- // The IMO number requirement for fishing vessels of 24 m or above is only included within a Resolution, and is therefore not binding.<sup>34</sup>



**26. Ratify and implement the FAO agreement on Port State Measures to prevent, deter, and eliminate IUU fishing.**

- // Nine of 23 GFCM CPCs are still not parties to the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures.<sup>35</sup>





## SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

### TARGET

### PROGRESS

45. Set up as from 2018 a regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries which will streamline funding schemes to strengthen the support to local projects.

// The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea was laid out in a 2018 ministerial declaration followed by implementing decision (GFCM/45/2022/3).<sup>36,37</sup>



46. From 2017, commit to the implementation of the GFCM Strategy for the sustainable development of Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture.

// In a 2017 Resolution,<sup>38</sup> the GFCM adopted its strategy for the sustainable development of Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture.<sup>39</sup>



47. Support partnerships between producers and the marketing chain to enhance the valorisation of catches with a balanced distribution of profits.<sup>40</sup>



## GREATER SOLIDARITY AND COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

### TARGET

### PROGRESS

48. By end 2018, establish within the GFCM a permanent network for cooperation and technical assistance.<sup>41</sup>

// The GFCM established the capacity development programme 'MedSea4Fish' for the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>42</sup>  
// MedSea4Fish is implemented through four subregional projects.<sup>43</sup>



49. Present a work programme on spatial planning with a pre-identification of priority areas.



50. Invite all relevant regional organisations and instruments competent for the environmental, economic, and social sustainability in the Mediterranean Sea to formalise their cooperation through relevant instruments such as memoranda of understanding.

// Active memoranda of understanding established with 16 partners, although this does not necessarily mean that cooperation is reinforced or effective.



## FOLLOW-UP OF THE DECLARATION

### TARGET

**51. We invite the GFCM to steer and coordinate actions to ensure the implementation of the declaration, and to provide an annual report on the implementation of the actions set forth in this declaration.**

### PROGRESS

// Reporting has neither been done systematically nor in a way that allows tracking of progress against the commitments.



## » REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration. (2017). Ministerial Conference on the Sustainability of Mediterranean Fisheries. Malta, 30 March 2017. <https://gfcmsitestorage.blob.core.windows.net/website/MedFish4Ever/2017-03-30-declaration-malta.pdf>.
- <sup>2</sup> FAO. (2022). *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2022. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean*. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc3370en/cc3370en.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> FAO. (2021). *GFCM 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea*. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7562en>
- <sup>4</sup> There were no stock assessments for three priority species (silver-cheeked toadfish, devil firefish, European eel). For four species (giant red shrimp, blue and red shrimp, red coral, and common dolphinfish), stock assessments were conducted but not for all relevant GFCM subregions.
- <sup>5</sup> FAO. (2019). *Monitoring discards in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries: Methodology for data collection*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 639. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/discards/>; FAO. (2019). *Monitoring the incidental catch of vulnerable species in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries: Methodology for data collection*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 640. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/vulnerablespecies/>.
- <sup>6</sup> FAO. (2018). *GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF)*. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/dcrf/>.
- <sup>7</sup> GFCM. (2010). Recommendation GFCM/34/2010/2 on the management of fishing capacity.
- <sup>8</sup> “with a specific attention to cetaceans, turtles, seabirds, seagrass habitats and coralligenous and maerl beds”
- <sup>9</sup> GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/16 on mitigation measures for the conservation of elasmobranchs; GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/15 on mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of cetaceans; GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/14 on mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of sea turtles; GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/13 on mitigation of fisheries impacts for the conservation of seabirds.
- <sup>10</sup> GFCM. (2019). Resolution GFCM/43/2019/6 on the establishment of a set of measures to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems formed by cnidarian (coral) communities in the Mediterranean Sea.
- <sup>11</sup> GFCM. (2017). Resolution GFCM/41/2017/4 on a permanent working group on vulnerable marine ecosystems.
- <sup>12</sup> Three multi-annual management plans (GFCM/45/2022/7, GFCM/45/2022/6, GFCM/2022/5) call on the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) to finalise “the identification of the fishing footprint on vulnerable marine ecosystems”. This is included in the technical measures over the transitional period.
- <sup>13</sup> GFCM. (2017). Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/3 on the establishment of a fisheries restricted area in the Jabuka/Pomo Pit in the Adriatic Sea. Note: The GFCM declared this FRA permanent in 2021 (GFCM/44/2021/2).
- <sup>14</sup> GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/3 on the establishment of a fisheries restricted area in the Bari Canyon in the southern Adriatic Sea (geographical subarea 18).
- <sup>15</sup> GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/5 on the establishment of a fisheries restricted area to protect spawning aggregations and deep-sea sensitive habitats in the Gulf of Lion (geographical subarea 7), repealing Recommendation GFCM/33/2009/1.
- <sup>16</sup> MedPAN. (2021). *The system of Mediterranean MPAs in 2020*. <https://medpan.org/en/system-mediterranean-mpas-2020>.
- <sup>17</sup> GFCM. (2022). Resolution GFCM/45/2022/4 on the launch of a roadmap for the establishment of a fisheries restricted area in the Cabliers coral mounds in the Alboran Sea with a view to adopting adequate protection and management measures); GFCM. (2021). Resolution GFCM/44/2021/3 on a roadmap for the establishment of a fisheries restricted area in the southern Adriatic Sea (geographical subarea 18).
- <sup>18</sup> For example, at the GFCM 44<sup>th</sup> session in 2021, the GFCM did not adopt a proposed FRA in the Ebro Delta Margin (EDM FRA).
- <sup>19</sup> GFCM. (2017). Resolution GFCM/41/2017/5 on a network of essential fish habitats in the GFCM area of application.
- <sup>20</sup> GFCM. (2022). Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/12 on the establishment of a set of minimum rules for sustainable recreational fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea.
- <sup>21</sup> Protocols on: Prevention and Emergency; Land-Based Sources; and Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity.
- <sup>22</sup> Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Monaco, Montenegro, and Türkiye are not parties to the Offshore Protocol. Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Monaco, Spain, Slovenia, and the EU are not parties to the Hazardous Wastes Protocol. Bulgaria is not party to this Protocol as it is not a Mediterranean country. Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Monaco, Tunisia, and Türkiye are not parties to the ICZM Protocol. Montenegro is not party to the Dumping Protocol.
- <sup>23</sup> GFCM. (2017). Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7 on a regional plan of action to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the GFCM area of application.



- <sup>24</sup> FAO. (2022). *GFCM IUU Vessel List*. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/iuu-vessel-list/en/>.
- <sup>25</sup> The vessel Al'Amir Muhammad was added to the GFCM IUU list in October 2018 for illegal fishing in the Strait of Sicily.
- <sup>26</sup> FAO. (2023). *Towards a region-wide legal framework for the management and conservation of Mediterranean living marine resources and ecosystems*. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/compliance/decisions/gfcm-lex/>.
- <sup>27</sup> GFCM. (2009). Recommendation GFCM 33/2009/7 concerning minimum standards for the establishment of a vessel monitoring system in the GFCM area of application.; GFCM. (2019). Resolution GFCM 43/2019/3 on the implementation of a vessel monitoring system and an electronic logbook in the GFCM area of application.
- <sup>28</sup> GFCM. (2017). Recommendation GFCM/41/2017/7 on a regional plan of action to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the GFCM area of application.
- <sup>29</sup> GFCM. (2018). Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/6 on an international joint inspection and surveillance scheme outside the waters under national jurisdiction in the Strait of Sicily.; GFCM. (2022). Recommendation GFCM/45/2022/16 on an international joint inspection and surveillance scheme outside the waters under national jurisdiction in the Ionian Sea.
- <sup>30</sup> GFCM. (2018). Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/10 on access to information and data related to monitoring, control, and surveillance within the framework of joint inspection and surveillance schemes.
- <sup>31</sup> GFCM. (2022). Recommendation GFCM 45/2022/14 on the regulation of transshipment in the GFCM area of application.
- <sup>32</sup> GFCM. (2021). Recommendation GFCM/44/2021/21 on vessel sightings.
- <sup>33</sup> GFCM. (2019). Resolution GFCM/43/2019/5 on a compliance assessment scheme for the implementation of Recommendation GFCM/38/2014/2 concerning the identification of non-compliance.; GFCM. (2021). Resolution GFCM/44/2021/13 on appropriate measures to deter non-compliance.
- <sup>34</sup> GFCM. (2017). Resolution GFCM/41/2017/6 on the application of an International Maritime Organization number.
- <sup>35</sup> Algeria, Bulgaria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Monaco, Slovenia, Syria, and Tunisia.
- <sup>36</sup> FAO. (2023). *Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea – RPOA-SSF*. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/small-scale-fisheries/rpoa-ssf/en/>
- <sup>37</sup> GFCM. (2022). Resolution GFCM/45/2022/3 on the implementation of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.
- <sup>38</sup> GFCM. (2017). Resolution GFCM/41/2017/1 on a strategy for the sustainable development of Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture.
- <sup>39</sup> GFCM. (2018). *GFCM Strategy for the sustainable development of Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture*. FAO. <https://www.fao.org/3/i9766EN/i9766en.pdf>.
- <sup>40</sup> In particular, those resulting from selective and low-impact fishing techniques.
- <sup>41</sup> To ensure an optimal coordination of the actions undertaken to develop the scientific and administrative capabilities of riparian countries, including monitoring and inspection.
- <sup>42</sup> FAO. (2022). *MedSea4Fish*. <https://www.fao.org/gfcm/activities/fisheries/cooperation/medsea4fish>.
- <sup>43</sup> In the Western Mediterranean, central Mediterranean, eastern Mediterranean, and Adriatic Sea.

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