



The **MED** Statement

THE MEDITERRANEAN STATEMENT:

a Call for Action to Save the Mediterranean — the World's most Overfished Sea

We, members of the international science community, want to raise attention about the severe fisheries and environmental crisis in the Mediterranean Sea, a region considered to be **the most overfished in the world**¹.

The European Union (EU) has a major responsibility for this alarming environmental situation as it is the main fishing actor in terms of volume, fleet size, and capacity. Almost 90% of assessed stocks exclusively under EU competence are overfished, with an average exploitation rate that is 2.3 times higher than sustainable levels².

To overcome this bleak situation, the EU must adopt ambitious multiannual plans (MAPs), created under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), that truly reform fisheries in the region and respond to the challenges it has faced for decades. To that end, **it is critical that the Western Mediterranean [MAP](#) for demersal fisheries strictly follow scientific advice** to restore and maintain stocks above biomass levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and tackle the negative impacts of fisheries on marine ecosystems. Pursuant to commitments set under the CFP, the MSY exploitation rate for all stocks must be achieved by no later than 2020.

In this sense, it is of particular relevance to restrict the use of the most destructive and unselective gears in the region — bottom trawls. This type of fishing gear is responsible for the bulk of discards (more than 40%), juvenile bycatch, incidental catches of vulnerable species³ and overall degradation of demersal habitats.

The coastal zone is considered the most sensitive and productive part of our seas. **Increasing the trawl-free zone from the current 50 m depth to at least 100 m throughout the entire year would better protect juvenile fish aggregations** — crucial for rebuilding biomass — and would improve the protection of key sensitive habitats, such maërl and coralligenous beds where trawling is already prohibited⁴ but not effectively enforced.

Additionally, areas deeper than 100 m where the presence of spawners, juvenile aggregations, and/or sensitive habitats (e.g., crinoid beds, cold-water corals, gorgonian and coral gardens) have been scientifically shown, also should be temporally or permanently closed to fisheries.

¹ FAO (2018). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2018 - Meeting the sustainable development goals. Rome. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

² Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Monitoring the performance of the Common Fisheries Policy (STECF-Adhoc-18-01). Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018, ISBN 978-92-79-85802-4, doi:10.2760/329345, JRC111761.

³ GFCM, 2016. The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries. FAO, Rome 2016.

⁴ COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea, amending Regulation (EEC) No 2847/93 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1626/94



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Furthermore, the coastal zone would be reserved for well-managed, low-impact and selective fisheries, especially small-scale and artisanal fisheries, which have historically and culturally predominated in the Mediterranean Sea and should also represent its future.

The 'Mediterranean fisheries way', under which only effort controls (mainly 'days at sea') and technical measures have been accepted as management tools, should be changed as these tools have proven to be grossly ineffective; fishing mortality has remained very high over recent decades.

To ensure a level-playing field and achieve the same objectives in all EU sea-basins, **an effective fishing opportunities regime should be introduced, in line with scientific recommendations** to restore and maintain stocks at their MSY.

We urge all EU and national decision-makers to walk the talk of the CFP legal commitments, show their leadership and take action now to recover the Mediterranean Sea and its fisheries before it is too late.

| | <u>Title</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Surname(s)</u> | <u>Country</u> | <u>Position/ Affiliation</u> |
|----|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Dr. | Giorgio | Aglieri | <i>Italy</i> | Conisma - Post Doc |
| 2 | Dr. | Ana | Aguiar | <i>UK</i> | Senior Scientist |
| 3 | Ms. | M ^a Remedios | Alarcón Vllora | <i>Spain</i> | IMIDRA |
| 4 | Prof. | Miquel | Alcaraz | <i>Spain</i> | Research Institute (Retired) |
| 5 | Dr. | Teresa | Alcoverro Pedrola | <i>Spain</i> | Centre d'Estudis Avançats de Blanes CEAB-CSIC |
| 6 | Prof. | Edward | Allison | <i>USA</i> | School of Marine and Environmental Affairs, Univ. of Washington |
| 7 | Dr. | Eduardo | Almansa Berro | <i>Spain</i> | Spanish Institute of Oceanography, Senior Researcher |
| 8 | Mr. | Óscar | Álvarez Losada | <i>Spain</i> | PhD student |
| 9 | Dr. | Daniel | Bachiller | <i>Spain</i> | IMEDEA/CSIC Staff Scientist |
| 10 | Dr. | Carmen | Barberá | <i>Spain</i> | University of Alicante |
| 11 | Dr. | Jorge | Baro Domínguez | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía, Centro Oceanográfico de Málaga |
| 12 | Prof. | Daniela | Basso | <i>Italy</i> | Univ. of Milano-Bicocca, Dir. of the Master's Programme in Marine Sciences |
| 13 | Dr. | Giovanni | Bearzi | <i>Italy</i> | Dolphin Biology and Conservation |
| 14 | Ms. | Emna | Ben lamine | <i>Tunisia</i> | University of Nice |
| 15 | Prof. | Ghazi | Bitar | <i>Lebanon</i> | |
| 16 | Dr. | Isabella | Bitetto | <i>Italy</i> | COISPA Tecnologia & Ricerca |
| 17 | Dr. | Cesar | Bordehore | <i>Spain</i> | Environment Research Inst. Ramon Margalef and Dept. of Ecology, Univ. of Alicante |
| 18 | Prof. | Joseph A. | Borg | <i>Malta</i> | Associate Professor and Head, Department of Biology, University of Malta. |
| 19 | Dr. | Antonio | Caenpa | <i>Spain</i> | Escuela Politecnica Superior, Univ. de Burgos, Postdoctoral Researcher |
| 20 | Prof. | Barbara | Calcinai | <i>Italy</i> | DISVA università Politecnica delle Marche Ancona |
| 21 | Dr. | Antonio | Canepa | <i>Spain</i> | University of Burgos, Postdoctoral Researcher |
| 22 | Dr. | Maria | Capa | <i>Spain</i> | Ramon y Cajal Fellow |
| 23 | Dr. | Roberto | Carlucci | <i>Italy</i> | Department of Biology University of Bari |
| 24 | Mr. | Griffin | Carpenter | <i>UK</i> | Senior Researcher, New Economics Foundation |
| 25 | Dr. | José Juan | Castro Hernández | <i>Spain</i> | Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canarias |
| 26 | Dr. | Myriam | Catalá | <i>Spain</i> | Rey Juan Carlos University, Associate Professor |
| 27 | Dr. | Ignacio | Catalán | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 28 | Dr. | Luis | Cayuela | <i>Spain</i> | Universidad Rey Juan Carlos |
| 29 | Dr. | Emma | Cebrian | <i>Spain</i> | Universitat de Girona |
| 30 | Ms. | Maria Elena | Cefali | <i>Spain</i> | Phd Student, Universidad de Girona |
| 31 | Prof. | Carlo | Cerrano | <i>Italy</i> | Polytechnic University of Marche |
| 32 | Ms. | Rosa M. | Chefaoui | <i>Portugal</i> | CCMAR, University of Algarve Post-Doc Researcher |
| 33 | Dr. | Pierre | Chevaldonné | <i>France</i> | CNRS Researcher |

| | <u>Title</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Surname(s)</u> | <u>Country</u> | <u>Position/ Affiliation</u> |
|----|--------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|--|
| 34 | Dr. | Giovanni | Chimienti | <i>Italy</i> | Department of Biology, University of Bari, Post-Doc |
| 35 | Dr. | Marta | Coll | <i>Spain</i> | Institute of Marine Science (ICM-CSIC) |
| 36 | Dr. | Josep | Coll | <i>Spain</i> | Marine Ecology and MPAs Consultant |
| 37 | Dr. | Francesco | Colloca | <i>Italy</i> | Istituto per l'Ambiente Marino Costiero, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche |
| 38 | Dr. | Gianpaolo | Coro | <i>Italy</i> | National Research Council of Italy, Researcher |
| 39 | Dr. | David | Costalago | <i>Canada</i> | UBC |
| 40 | Dr. | Philippe | Cury | <i>Belgium</i> | IRD |
| 41 | Dr. | Ricardo | Cuscó Marín | <i>Spain</i> | ULPGC |
| 42 | Dr. | Léa | David | <i>France</i> | EcoOcéan Institut, Project Officer |
| 43 | Dr. | Silvia | de Juan | <i>Spain</i> | Marie Curie Fellow at the Marine Sciences Institute |
| 44 | Dr. | Antonio | Di Franco | <i>France</i> | University of Nice Sophia Antipolis-CNRS |
| 45 | Dr. | Antonio | Di Natale | <i>Italy</i> | Fondazione Acquario di Genova Onlus |
| 46 | Ms. | Elena | Diaz Almela | <i>Spain</i> | CEAB-CSIC, PhD Student |
| 47 | Dr. | Enrique | Díaz Martínez | <i>Spain</i> | Geological Survey of Spain (IGME) |
| 48 | Ms. | Donna | Dimarchopoulou | <i>Greece</i> | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, PhD Student |
| 49 | Prof. | Gianfranco | D'Onghia | <i>Italy</i> | University of Bari Aldo Moro, Full Professor of Ecology |
| 50 | Dr. | Julian | Evans | <i>Malta</i> | University of Malta |
| 51 | Mr. | Paulo | Fonseca | <i>Portugal</i> | IPMA - Portuguese Institute for the Ocean and Atmosphere |
| 52 | Dr. | Toni | Font Payeras | <i>Spain</i> | Researcher |
| 53 | Ms. | Maïa | Fourt | <i>France</i> | IMBE, PhD student |
| 54 | Dr. | Alexandros | Frantzis | <i>Greece</i> | Pelagos Cetacean Research Institute |
| 55 | Dr. | Silvia | Frey | <i>Switzerland</i> | OceanCare |
| 56 | Ms. | Ana | García | <i>Spain</i> | University Rey Juan Carlos |
| 57 | Dr. | Lara Silvia | Garcia Corral | <i>Spain</i> | King Juan Carlos University |
| 58 | Prof. | Didier | Gascuel | <i>France</i> | Pole halieutique Agrocampus Ouest, Université Bretagne Loire |
| 59 | Dr. | Guido | Gay | <i>Switzerland</i> | Fondazione Guido Gay Azionemare, President |
| 60 | Dr. | Vasilis | Gerovasileiou | <i>Greece</i> | Hellenic Centre for Marine Research |
| 61 | Dr. | Sylvaine | Giakoumi | <i>France</i> | University of Nice Sophia Antipolis |
| 62 | Dr. | Luis | Gil de Sola | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía, Researcher |
| 63 | Prof. | Josep-Maria | Gili | <i>Spain</i> | Institute of Marine Sciences of Barcelona (CSIC), Research Professor |
| 64 | Prof. | Emanuel | Gonçalves | <i>Portugal</i> | MARE - Marine and Environmental Sciences Centre, ISPA - Instituto Universitário, Associate Professor |
| 65 | Prof. | Antonio | Gonzalez Ramos | <i>Spain</i> | University (Researcher and Senior Lecturer) |
| 66 | Dr. | Andrea | Gori | <i>Spain</i> | Institut de Ciències del Mar - Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas |
| 67 | Dr. | Laura | Govers | <i>Netherlands</i> | University of Groningen |
| 68 | Ms. | Susanne | Hagen | <i>Switzerland</i> | NGO, Coordinator Science and Education |

| | <u>Title</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Surname(s)</u> | <u>Country</u> | <u>Position/ Affiliation</u> |
|-----|--------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 69 | Prof. | Jason | hall-spencer | <i>UK</i> | University of Plymouth |
| 70 | Ms. | Sandra | Hernández | <i>Spain</i> | PhD Student |
| 71 | Dr. | Manuel | Hidalgo | <i>Spain</i> | IEO, Researcher |
| 72 | Dr. | Francesca | luculano | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 73 | Prof. | Stuart | Jenkins | <i>UK</i> | Bangor University |
| 74 | Dr. | Gabriel | Jorda | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía |
| 75 | Dr. | Mohsen | Kayal | <i>France</i> | Université de Perpignan Via Domitia |
| 76 | Prof. | Sally | Leys | <i>Canada</i> | University of Alberta, Professor & Researcher |
| 77 | Dr. | Claudio | Lo Iacono | <i>UK</i> | |
| 78 | Ms. | Maria | Lópe-Acosta | <i>Spain</i> | CEAB-CSIC, PhD Candidate |
| 79 | Mr. | Oswaldo | López | <i>Spain</i> | Oceanographer at INNOVA Oceanografía Litoral SL |
| 80 | Dr. | Jesús | López-Angulo | <i>Spain</i> | URJC |
| 81 | Prof. | Ángel | Luque | <i>Spain</i> | Dept. of Biology (Zoology), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Researcher and Titular Professor |
| 82 | Dr. | Angeliki | Lyssimachou | <i>Portugal</i> | Centre of Marine and Environmental Research, Affiliated Researcher |
| 83 | Dr. | Francisco | Machin | <i>Spain</i> | University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria |
| 84 | Dr. | Teresa | Madurell | <i>Spain</i> | Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM/CSIC) |
| 85 | Prof. | Porzia | Maiorano | <i>Italy</i> | University of Bari Aldo Moro, Department of Biology |
| 86 | Dr. | Núria | Marbà | <i>Spain</i> | Institut Mediterrani d'Estudis Avançats (IiUIB-CSIC) |
| 87 | Dr. | David | March | <i>Spain</i> | ICTS SOCIB, Researcher |
| 88 | Dr. | Isabel | Marin | <i>UK</i> | |
| 89 | Dr. | Brezo | Martínez | <i>Spain</i> | King Juan Carlos Univesity, Associate Professor |
| 90 | Dr. | José | Martínez-Garrido | <i>Portugal</i> | Center of Marine Sciences (CCMAR), University of Algarve, Researcher. |
| 91 | Mr. | Pablo | Martín-Sosa Rodríguez | <i>Spain</i> | Spanish Institute of Oceanography, Researcher |
| 92 | Dr. | Anne-Leila | Meistertzheim | <i>France</i> | CNRS, Researcher-in-Contract |
| 93 | Dr. | Marco | Milardi | <i>Italy</i> | University of Ferrara, Researcher |
| 94 | Dr. | Monica | Montefalcone | <i>Italia</i> | University of Genoa, Researcher |
| 95 | Dr. | Carmen | Morales | <i>Spain</i> | Researcher |
| 96 | Prof. | Beatriz | Morales-Nin | <i>Spain</i> | IMEDEA CSIC/UIB, Research Institute, Researcher |
| 97 | Dr. | Joan | Moranta | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía-Centre Oceanogràfic de Balears |
| 98 | Mr. | Gabriel | Morey | <i>Spain</i> | Asociación Ondine, Researcher |
| 99 | Dr. | Ivan | Murray | <i>Spain</i> | Assistant Lecturer, University of the Balearic Islands |
| 100 | Dr. | Giuseppe | Notarbartolo di Sciara | <i>Italy</i> | Tethys Research Institute |
| 101 | Dr. | Maja | Novosel | <i>Croatia</i> | University of Zagreb, Marine Biology Expert |
| 102 | Dr. | Oscar | Ocaña Vicente | <i>Spain</i> | Director of the Museo del Mar de Ceuta |

| | <u>Title</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Surname(s)</u> | <u>Country</u> | <u>Position/ Affiliation</u> |
|-----|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--|
| 103 | Mr. | Frederico | Oliveira | <i>Portugal</i> | |
| 104 | Mr. | James | Oliver | <i>Switzerland</i> | Senior Programme Officer, Marine and Polar Conservation |
| 105 | Dr. | Pere | Oliver | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 106 | Dr. | Covadonga | Orejas Saco del Valle | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía |
| 107 | Prof. | Daniel | Oro | <i>Spain</i> | CSIC |
| 108 | Dr. | Nicolas | Pascal | <i>France</i> | Blue finance NGO |
| 109 | Dr. | Daniel | Pauly | <i>Canada</i> | |
| 110 | Dr. | Thierry | Perez | <i>France</i> | Cnrs |
| 111 | Mrs. | Sílvia | Pérez Mayol | <i>Spain</i> | IMEDEA, Graduate Research Technician |
| 112 | Dr. | Carlo | Pipitone | <i>Italy</i> | CNR-IAMC |
| 113 | Dr. | Chiara | Piroddi | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 114 | Dr. | Laura | Prieto | <i>Spain</i> | ICMAN-CSIC, Researcher |
| 115 | Sr. | Pere | Puig | <i>Spain</i> | Marine Sciences Institute (ICM-CSIC) |
| 116 | Dr. | Ariadna | Purroy | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 117 | Dr. | Montserrat | Ramón | <i>Spain</i> | Institut of Marine Science (CSIC), Researcher |
| 118 | Prof. | Alfonso | Ramos Esplá | <i>Spain</i> | University of Alicante, Senior Professor of Zoology |
| 119 | Mr. | Fabian | Ritter | <i>Germany</i> | Director of Research, M.E.E.R. e.V. |
| 120 | Dr. | Callum | Roberts | <i>UK</i> | |
| 121 | Mr. | Jose | Rodriguez | <i>Spain</i> | Research Institute, Researcher |
| 122 | Ms. | Laura | Rodríguez | <i>Spain</i> | PhD student |
| 123 | Prof. | Antoni | Rodriguez-Perea | <i>Spain</i> | Illes Balears University |
| 124 | Prof. | Eelco | Rohling | <i>Australia</i> | Australian National University |
| 125 | Mr. | Joan Domènec | Ros | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 126 | Dr. | Andrew | Rosenberg | <i>USA</i> | Union of Concerned Scientists |
| 127 | Dr. | Guiomar | Rotllant | <i>Spain</i> | ICM-CSIC, Researcher |
| 128 | Ms. | Laura | Royo Marí | <i>Spain</i> | Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies (IMEDEA-CSIC-UIB) |
| 129 | Dr. | Klaus | Ruetzler | <i>USA</i> | Smithsonian Inst., Ntl. Museum of Natural History, Research Biologist Emeritus |
| 130 | Dr. | Enric | Sala | <i>USA</i> | National Geographic Society, Explorer-in-Residence |
| 131 | Mr. | Antonello | Sala | <i>Italy</i> | |
| 132 | Dr. | Carmen | Salas | <i>Spain</i> | University of Málaga |
| 133 | Dr. | Marta | Sales | <i>Spain</i> | Institut Menorquí d'Estudis, Researcher |
| 134 | Dr. | Maria | Salomidi | <i>Greece</i> | Institute of Oceanography, HCMR, Researcher |
| 135 | Dr. | Mohamed | Samy-Kamal | <i>Spain</i> | University of Alicante, Researcher |
| 136 | Mr. | Manuel | San Felix | <i>Spain</i> | Asociación Vellmari |

| | <u>Title</u> | <u>Name</u> | <u>Surname(s)</u> | <u>Country</u> | <u>Position/ Affiliation</u> |
|-----|--------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| 137 | Dr. | Jorge | Santos Goncalves | <i>Portugal</i> | CCMAR - University of Algarve, Senior Researcher |
| 138 | Dr. | Rafael | Sarda | <i>Spain</i> | Consejo superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) |
| 139 | Prof. | Patrick Joseph | Schembri | <i>Malta</i> | University of Malta, Professor of Biology |
| 140 | Mr. | Ralph O. | Schill | <i>Germany</i> | |
| 141 | Ms. | Celia | Sitja | <i>Spain</i> | |
| 142 | Dr. | José | Templado | <i>Spain</i> | Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (CSIC) |
| 143 | Dr. | Jorge | Terrados | <i>Spain</i> | Researcher at IMEDEA (CSIC-UIB) |
| 144 | Mr. | Osku | Tervonen | <i>Italy</i> | |
| 145 | Dr. | Athanasios | Tsikliras | <i>Greece</i> | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Assoc. Professor |
| 146 | Dr. | Leonardo | Tunesi | <i>Italy</i> | ISPRA |
| 147 | Dr. | Gabriele | Turco | <i>Italia</i> | University of Palermo, PhD student |
| 148 | Dr. | Jean | Vacelet | <i>France</i> | IMBE, Directeur de Recherches CNRS émérite |
| 149 | Dr. | Serinde | van Wijk | <i>UK</i> | Bangor University |
| 150 | Dr. | Raquel | Vaquer-Sunyer | <i>Spain</i> | Mediterranean Institute for Advanced Studies (IMEDEA), Postdoctoral Researcher |
| 151 | Dr. | Josefa | Velasco | <i>Spain</i> | University of Murcia, Researcher |
| 152 | Dr. | Patrícia | Ventura | <i>Portugal</i> | |
| 153 | Dr. | Ilaria | Vielmini | <i>Italy</i> | |
| 154 | M.Sc. | Tom | Vierus | <i>Germany</i> | Independent Researcher |
| 155 | Dr. | Tomas | Virbickas | <i>Lithuania</i> | Nature Research Centre, Senior Researcher |
| 156 | Ms. | Sanja | Svrkota | <i>Montenegro</i> | Project Coordinator in NGO |
| 157 | Prof. | Les | Watling | <i>USA</i> | University of Hawaii at Manoa |
| 158 | Dr. | Lidia | Yebra | <i>Spain</i> | Instituto Español de Oceanografía, Researcher |
| 159 | Prof. | Dirk | Zeller | <i>Australia</i> | Univ. of Western Australia; Professor and Leader of Sea Around Us - Indian Ocean |