

FISHERIES RESTRICTED AREAS 2017

Tools for the protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems and Essential Fish Habitats in the Mediterranean

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WHAT IS WHAT AND WHERE ARE THEY?

Definitions

FISHERIES RESTRICTED AREAS (FRAs): are spatial management measures adopted under the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (GFCM) to regulate or restrict demersal fisheries in the high seas. Since 2006, a total of six FRAs have been established in the GFCM area, each under different management objectives. Three were established to protect Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs), while the other three were adopted to protect Essential Fish Habitats (See Fig. 1).

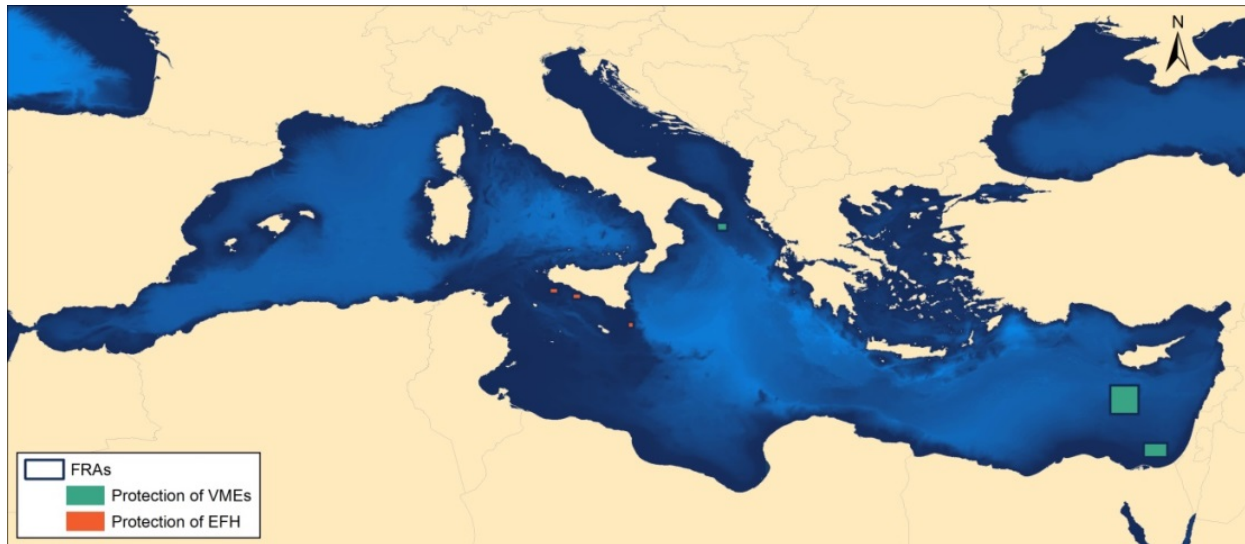
VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (VMEs): According to FAO (2009), a marine ecosystem should be classified as vulnerable based on the following characteristics: uniqueness or rarity, functional significance, fragility, life-history traits of species that make its recovery difficult, and structural complexity. VMEs are also described by their vulnerability, which is dependent upon the nature of the fishery in the areas. VME Indicator Species (stony corals, black corals, gorgonians, sponge grounds, etc.) are frequently found in association with particular features of the seabed, such as seamounts, submarine canyons and trenches, hydrothermal vents, etc. (FAO, 2009). To date only three FRAs provide protection to VMEs: Santa Maria di Leuca, Erathostenes and Nile Delta (See Fig. 1).

ESSENTIAL FISH HABITATS (EFHs): are habitats identified as essential to the ecological and biological requirements for critical life history stages of exploited fish species, and which may require special protection to improve stock status and long term sustainability, such as nursery and spawning grounds (STECF, 2006). Compromising these prime locations would affect the fish lifecycle and consequently the healthy status of fish stocks. In particular, considering that Mediterranean commercial fisheries are oriented toward smaller sizes (Colloca *et al.* 2013), it is a matter of priority to adopt an ecosystem approach to fisheries management in this region by protecting EFHs, and in particular nursery grounds. Currently only three FRAs have been established, aimed at protecting EFHs as part of the multiannual management plan for hake and deep-water rose shrimp fisheries in the Strait of Sicily (See Fig. 1).

FAO. 2009. International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas. FAO, Rome, Italy, 73pp.

STECF. 2006. Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries opinion on 'sensitive and essential fish habitats in the Mediterranean Sea'. Commission staff working paper, Rome, 48 pp

Colloca, F., Cardinale, M., Maynou, F., Giannoulaki, M., Scarcella, G., Jenko, K., Bellido, J.M., Fiorentino, F. (2013). Rebuilding Mediterranean fisheries: a new paradigm for ecological sustainability in single species population models. Fish Fish. 14, 89-109.



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

According to the last SAC assessment, 97% of stocks assessed under GFCM purview are overexploited¹. Reversing this situation should be a matter of urgency for Riparian States, according to Target 1 under the GFCM Mid-Term Strategy 2017-2020² “Reverse the declining trend of fish stocks through strengthened scientific advice in support of management” and the obligation set in the revised GFCM Agreement.

In addition to the obligations established under the GFCM text agreement, Mediterranean ministers have recently recognised the urgency for intervention in the Mediterranean by signing the **Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration**³ (March, 2017), and have established key steps to be undertaken without further delay in this region. In particular, reversing overexploitation of Mediterranean commercial fish stocks by adopting multi-annual management plans supported by complementary conservation measures to protect **Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME)** and **Essential Fish Habitats (EFH)** through a network of Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRA). Such a network should be adopted by 2018 under GFCM prior evaluation of the SAC.

¹ [Report of the eighteenth session of the Scientific Advisory Committee on fisheries, Nicosia, Cyprus, 21–23 March 2016](#)

² [Mid-term strategy \(2017–2020\) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries \(Mid-term strategy\)](#)

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/2017-03-30-declaration-malta.pdf>

OCEANA PROPOSALS

Being aware of the current situation, Oceana suggests the following actions be considered by the SAC:

- Establish regular meetings of the **Working Group on VMEs** as was determined during the first meeting. Many technical issues need to be developed and discussed in detail (e.g. move-on rules related to a potential Encounter Protocol).
- Anticipate the discussion on the **network of Essential Fish Habitats** to be evaluated by 2018, so as to properly assess the areas that will be included and their coherence with the agreed adoption of multi-annual management plans aiming at rebuilding stocks.
- Support the development and establishment of **proper monitoring of the FRA implementation**.



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OCEANA EUROPE

European Headquarters
Gran Vía, 59-9º
28013 Madrid, Spain
Phone: + 34 911 440 880
Fax: + 34 911 440 890
Email: europe@oceana.org

European Union Office
Rue Montoyer, 39
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 513 22 42
Fax: +32 (0)2 513 22 46
Email: brussels@oceana.org

Baltic Sea Office
Nyhavn 16, 4 sal
1051 Copenhagen, Denmark
Phone: + 45 33151160
Email: baltic@oceana.org