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Regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea



PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT FOR AGRICULTURE,
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High-level conference on sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea

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Ensuring best practice becomes future standard practice

MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON A REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BLACK SEA

Preamble

1. We, Ministers, Heads of national delegations, and the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, have met in Malta, on 26 September 2018 to support and promote small-scale fisheries for the coming ten years through the adoption of a regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;
2. This regional plan of action (hereafter the “plan”) aims at establishing the objectives, principles and concrete actions that should be applied to ensure the long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability of small-scale fisheries;
3. Since millennia, the small-scale fisheries sector has been supporting livelihoods within coastal communities, as well as local economies. The sector generates socio-economic value and, in the case of subsistence economies, plays an important role for food security. Globally, 37 million people are estimated to be directly employed in small-scale fisheries activities, while 100 million people are estimated to be engaged in related activities;
4. In the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, small-scale fisheries constitute over 83 percent of the fishing fleet and 31 percent of fishing capacity, employ at least 57 percent of the total workforce onboard fishing vessels and account for approximately 22 percent of the total landing value from capture fisheries in the region;
5. Small-scale fishers are firmly rooted in local communities, traditions, cultural heritage and values. Many of them are self-employed and provide fish for direct human consumption within their households or communities. They play a pivotal role in social inclusion and cohesion by sustaining populations in remote and rural areas;
6. Small-scale fisheries create added value for local development, as well as contribute to social and environmental sustainability, thanks to their ability to produce short value chains and provide consumers with quality and varied fish, and due to the fact that, in general, they have a relatively low impact on the environment and offer a significant role for women through diversification of fishing activities;
7. However, in some countries, the sector lacks recognition and representativeness, in particular due to the high number of segments and the scattered nature of the fishing activities, as well as to the presence of other local fishing industries and maritime economies. Furthermore, there is lack of a clear characterization of the sector;
8. As a result, in some cases, small-scale fisheries actors may not be sufficiently involved in relevant decision-making processes at all levels (local, regional, national and international bodies) through participative approaches. Their lack of voice also weakens the weight of small-scale fishers and fish workers within the market, as well as their possibilities to access financial assistance, landing sites,

waters and fishing opportunities, also preventing their ecological knowledge, collective ideas and proposals from being heard and taken into account;

9. The sector's capacities are limited in terms of human capital (ageing fishers, difficulty to attract young people, lack of access to proper education, working conditions, safety rules on board), investment (access to credit) and innovation. As a consequence, the sector has difficulties in meeting minimum compliance requirements regarding, in particular, data collection, traceability and monitoring, control and surveillances measures;

10. Many other maritime activities interact with small-scale fisheries in terms of access to maritime space, infrastructure, landing sites and ports. This situation could lead to marine pollution and the alteration of marine ecosystems, thus having an impact on small-scale fisheries. The maritime economies that particularly interact with small-scale fisheries are, *inter alia*, other commercial fisheries, hydrocarbon extraction, ocean energy projects, recreational fishing, other *métiers*, sand extractions for beach regeneration, aquaculture, coastal tourism and maritime transport;

11. Nonetheless, there are synergies and positive interactions between small-scale fisheries and other maritime activities that can be realized, for example, through sharing facilities and suppliers, ecotourism and the participatory management of marine protected areas (MPAs);

12. Due to their intimate knowledge of and close relationship with marine ecosystems, small-scale fisheries actors are well placed to observe major environmental and climate changes. Consequently, small-scale fishers are not only resource users but also play a role as “guardians of the sea”. In this context, they should therefore play a central role in waste management and recycling and be recognized as actors of the circular economy;

13. This plan is based on the conclusions of the First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (Malta, November 2013), the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines – adopted in Rome in 2014), the conclusions of the Regional Conference “Building a future for sustainable small-scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea” (Algeria, March 2016), the outcomes of the High-level conference on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture (Bulgaria, June 2018) and the High-level conference towards enhanced cooperation on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture (Romania, October 2016), the Ministerial conference on the sustainability of Mediterranean Fisheries “MedFish4Ever” (Malta, March 2017) and the Mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries adopted by the GFCM, as well as the FAO Blue Growth Initiative;

14. This plan is also in line with “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 “Zero hunger” and its Target 2.3, SDG 5 “Gender equality” and its Targets 5.a and 5.b, SDG 8 “Decent work and economic growth” and its Target 8.5, SDG 13 “Climate action” and SDG 14 “Life below water” and in particular its Target 14.b., which specifically refers to small-scale fisheries.

We agree to ensure the long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability of small-scale fisheries on the basis of the following objectives and principles:

15. Recognize the status of the small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, taking into account their regional specificities, experience, knowledge and contribution to the cultural heritage of local communities;

16. Recognize the socio-economic specificities of small-scale fisheries, such as the seasonality of their activities and the variability of their income;

17. Support livelihoods for coastal communities, especially in remote/rural areas, through sustainable small-scale fisheries;

18. Ensure fishers are aware and accountable for the need to reconcile economic and social objectives with environmental objectives;

19. When relevant, encourage the creation of bodies/associations to better structure, organize and represent the sector in a specific way in all decision-making processes. Strengthen and recognize the existing small-scale fisher organizations and platforms, including the associations of women, as stakeholders to be taken into account;
20. Improve the capacity to collect relevant data on small-scale fisheries and benefit from the traditional knowledge of small-scale fishers on the marine environment;
21. Provide equitable access to fishery resources for small-scale fishers by taking into account the socio-economic and cultural role of their activity in local communities;
22. Facilitate direct access to markets and public services for small-scale fisheries communities, and take action to promote and valorize local and fresh fish;
23. Give adequate attention and financial support to small-scale fisheries without unduly favouring large-scale operators;
24. Ensure proper establishment of monitoring, control and surveillance systems appropriate for small-scale fisheries;
25. Promote access to and use of new technologies within small-scale fisheries, with a view to improving safety, as well as monitoring, control and surveillance;
26. Promote fishing practices that minimize bycatch and impacts on the marine environment;
27. Prevent any practice that would contribute to an underground economy and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities;
28. Avoid any policies that may contribute to overcapacity or may negatively affect small-scale fishing communities;
29. Reinforce the valorization of the sector, notably for locally caught fish, in order to maximize the economic benefits of small-scale fisheries;
30. Support the diversification of activities to ensure the sustainable development of the sector and coastal communities;
31. Promote the diversification of catches and promote quality over quantity so as to provide an advantage to small-scale fisheries with benefits for consumers, fishers and the environment;
32. Promote the improvement of the qualification levels and skills of fishers;
33. Ensure that the establishment of MPAs is carried out in a participatory manner taking into consideration the reality of small-scale fisheries livelihoods;
34. Take due account of small-scale fisheries in marine spatial planning, including their interactions with other sectors, such as other commercial fishing sectors, recreational fishing, aquaculture, renewable marine energies, oil drilling, transport and tourism;
35. Encourage the visibility and participation of small-scale fisheries representatives in the national and local decision-making and advisory processes when addressing fishery and other relevant policies, such as environment, transport, tourism and infrastructure;
36. Promote decent work and working conditions throughout the entire value chain for small-scale fisheries;
37. Consider the particular role of women in the economy of small-scale fisheries and coastal communities;
38. Recognize and take into account the impact of natural and human-induced disasters and climate change on small-scale fisheries;

39. Encourage regional organizations and institutions, non-governmental organizations and other interested stakeholders to play a significant role in promoting the objectives and principles of the plan and the SSF Guidelines, as well as to continue their contribution to the sustainability of small-scale fisheries;

Consequently, we commit, in accordance with existing rules and available resources, to implement the actions foreseen in the plan by 1 January 2028. To this end, the aforementioned objectives, principles and actions shall be implemented in national strategies and/or plans.

Signed in Malta, on 26 September 2018, in two originals in English.

REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BLACK SEA

The Regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) is composed of the following actions:

1. Adopt, as soon as possible, a characterization of small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, reflecting their socio-economic relevance and specificities on the basis of a set of indicative criteria (vessel size, gear used, duration of fishing trip, non-vessel based fishing activities, etc.);

A. Scientific research

2. Initiate an integrated regional research activity in order to collect accurate, valid and complete data on the value and socio-economic impact of small-scale fisheries;

3. Develop scientific studies to strengthen knowledge about the interactions between small-scale fisheries and marine ecosystems and their impact on marine resources. When relevant, involve fishers in scientific monitoring activities, taking into account their traditional knowledge and ensuring that they are informed of the results of these studies;

4. Develop scientific studies to strengthen knowledge about the interactions between recreational fisheries and small-scale fisheries;

5. Design and implement pilot and innovative projects covering all aspects of small-scale fisheries;

6. Consider the assessment of small-scale fisheries within forecast studies on adaptation to climate change, including its carbon-binding potential;

B. Small-scale fisheries data

7. Using all appropriate tools, develop information and data collection systems that involve small-scale fisheries actors in the collection of regional-level data on fleets and fishing activities, including the record of all catches;

8. Establish national fishing fleet registers that record small-scale fishing vessels;

9. Integrate the traditional ecological knowledge of small-scale fishers into fisheries management;

C. Small-scale fisheries management measures

10. Implement, where appropriate, fisheries management plans which establish specific rules designed to ensure, in particular, preferential access for sustainable and low-impact small-scale fisheries along the coastal band;

11. Taking into account management measures and their impact on the resources, facilitate equitable access to living marine resources that should be based on sustainable fisheries and their socio-economic role;

12. Support investments in small-scale fisheries to, among others, improve selectivity, preserve biodiversity, minimize bycatch and interactions with vulnerable species and predators and promote energy efficiency;

13. Guarantee good and fair access to landing sites and ensure they are adequately equipped to facilitate small-scale fishing activities (fully serviced docking areas, moorings, refrigerated warehouse, drinking water service, ice machines, etc.);

14. Promote the reduction of incidental catches by, *inter alia*, improving the selectivity of gear, training fishers and strengthening rescue and first aid centres;

15. Encourage small-scale fisheries to be fully equipped with efficient communication, navigation and onboard catch preservation equipment, in accordance with flag state requirements; develop small-scale fisher training programmes for optimal use of such technologies;
16. Encourage the traceability of small-scale fishing vessels by using technologies based on radio frequencies, satellites or internet applications;
17. Promote traceability of gear used by small-scale fishers, in particular through to the marking of fishing gear;
18. Promote, where appropriate, participative surveillance of fishers, in particular in the identification of illegal, unreported and unregulated(IUU) fishing practices;
19. Strengthen control and surveillance of all fishing activities, including other commercial and recreational fisheries, both at sea and on land, making efforts to avoid IUU fishing practices;
20. Promote the restoration and conservation of essential fish habitats for small-scale fisheries, potentially including the construction of artificial reefs, according to the GFCM Practical Guidelines for Artificial Reefs in the Mediterranean and Black Sea and in respect of the environment; the use of unsuitable materials and dumping of waste shall be strictly avoided;
21. Prepare best practice guidelines to extend and share successful experiences at the regional level;

D. Small-scale fisheries value chain

22. Promote the creation or reinforcement of cooperatives, producers organizations or other collective organizations, in order to improve market access for small-scale fisheries products and to increase the availability of local food within coastal communities;
23. Establish regional plans for small-scale producer organizations in order to increase their profitability and improve the quality and traceability of their products;
24. Enhance the promotion of direct sales of fresh fish in accordance with the national regulations;
25. Organize information and/or awareness campaigns for consumers on the importance of responsible consumption of local products, on the role of short value chains in guaranteeing freshness and on the consumption of less-known and underutilized species, with a view to increasing the diversity of catches;
26. Promote the creation of certified seafood labels and fishery product brands that can encourage operators and consumers to buy locally and sustainably sourced seafood; encouraging the creation of affordable certified brands should promote responsible small-scale fisheries and raise consumer awareness on these local fisheries;
27. Encourage the first processing of landings by the fishers themselves, their cooperatives or their producer organizations in order to expand the shelf life of products;
28. Ensure traceability of small-scale fisheries products, guaranteeing that the local products introduced in the market are of good quality and environmentally sustainable;

E. Participation of small-scale fisheries in decision-making processes

29. Associate small-scale fisheries in the creation and implementation of marine development strategies and local development strategies;
30. Integrate small-scale fishers in a participative approach to the designation and management of marine protected areas, in order to enable the commitment and compliance with rules of all stakeholders, engagement in conflict resolution processes and sustainable management through an integrated ecosystem-based management, in line with scientific recommendations;
31. Ensure that marine spatial planning at the national and regional level takes into account small-scale fisheries and that they are specifically represented throughout the entire process;

32. Promote participative management systems, such as co-management bodies, where fisheries management measures and accompanying socio-economic programmes may be established and implemented;
33. Where necessary, at the national level, reinforce the analysis of legislation and institutional mechanisms which ensure the recognition of relevant small-scale fisher organizations and their inclusion in all activities regarding the sustainable development of the sector;
34. Establish roadmaps and/or plans that would enable positive synergies between small-scale fisheries and other related marine economies and initiatives, in particular coastal and ecological tourism, marine biotechnology, marine protected areas and aquaculture;
35. These plans should result in concrete benefits for responsible small-scale fisheries, such as shared infrastructure, suppliers and/or workers, direct selling opportunities, multi-purpose activities, supply of fish fry to aquaculture, the collection of marine organisms for marine technology, better monitoring and understanding of marine ecosystems for sustainable fisheries;
36. Organize supporting structures with the aim of addressing competing situations that may occur between small-scale fisheries and other interacting sectors;
37. Encourage good cooperation between small-scale fisheries and recreational fisheries;

F. Capacity-building

38. Establish a regional platform to engage and promote cooperation among small-scale fisheries associations (including women's associations) in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. This platform is expected to build on and reinforce existing subregional and national platforms in order to set up a participatory mechanism for knowledge sharing, collaboration, stakeholder involvement, representation of small-scale fisheries actors in decision-making processes and dissemination of best practices;
39. Reinforce capacity building of small-scale fisheries and give specific priority to financial assistance, in order to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes and ensure a level-playing field, in particular through the following actions:
 - a. Create and reinforce technical and financial support (direct/indirect incentives, bank loan schemes, etc.);
 - b. Assist small-scale fishers and women's organizations in simplifying their access to institutional funds, in order to ensure their transition towards long-term selective and sustainable fisheries;
 - c. Support the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries organizations and their networks;
 - d. Ensure access to consultancy services, and
 - e. Facilitate education and training opportunities for men and women of the fisheries sector, such as summer universities, aimed at developing fisheries-specific skills, policy knowledge (fisheries, environmental) and, in particular, knowledge of innovative solutions and technology developments;
40. In the context of local community development, implement regional diversification schemes that help small-scale fishers (including women of the fisheries sector) to diversify their activities (for example, entrepreneurship and leadership training, nautical and ecological tourism, recycling waste found at sea, marine scientific sampling missions);
41. The above measures shall be applicable to small-scale fishers and their families, and particular attention shall be given to women and young fishers;
42. Develop a regional programme aiming to provide support and technical assistance, in particular to developing countries, in order to build capacity within small-scale fisheries;
43. Encourage local and national administrations to disseminate and communicate information on fisheries policy developments, including on innovation and technology;

44. Encourage professional training opportunities for fishers, aiming to facilitate the generational turnover;

G. Decent work

45. Promote decent work, the improvement of working conditions as well as social protection for all small-scale fisheries workers;

46. With the assistance of the GFCM, organize by 2019 a conference to address the issue of social development, employment and decent work in relation to small-scale fisheries;

H. Role of women

47. Support projects dedicated to enabling women to undertake small-scale fishery activities;

48. Secure equal participation of women in decision-making processes for policies directed towards small-scale fisheries;

49. Encourage the development of better technologies appropriate to the work of women in small-scale fisheries;

I. Climate and environment

50. Involve the knowledge and expertise of small-scale fisheries actors in the development of policies and plans addressing climate change in fisheries, in particular adaptation and mitigation plans, including within the framework of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) set forth by the Paris Agreement;

51. Assist and support small-scale fisheries communities affected by climate change or natural and human-induced disasters;

52. Promote innovative solutions for the valorization and utilization of non-indigenous species;

53. Encourage small-scale fishers to actively participate in the circular economy, for instance, by establishing plans for the disposal and recycling of recovered nets in order to reduce the impacts of ghost fishing; such plans may include rewarding schemes for collecting marine litter;

54. Involve small-scale fisheries in the designation and management of marine protected areas to promote the use of sustainable fishing practices, in line with their environmental conservation objectives, and to raise awareness about the benefits of healthy oceans for productive fisheries;

J. Role of the GFCM

55. The GFCM shall provide technical assistance to developing states for the development of participative and cooperative management plans for small-scale fisheries;

56. The GFCM shall establish, at its forty-second session, a timetable indicating short-term and mid-term targets for the implementation of the actions listed in the RPOA-SSF;

57. The GFCM shall steer and coordinate actions to ensure the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, and provide an annual report on the implementation of the actions set forth in the RPOA-SSF, reflecting reports provided by riparian countries;

58. The GFCM is invited to closely work with relevant organizations for the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, where appropriate through existing memorandums of understanding;

59. The GFCM shall organize a mid-term conference in 2024 to evaluate progress in the implementation of the RPOA-SSF.