

Ministerial conference on the sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries

Malta, 30 March 2017

Malta MedFish4Ever MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

Preamble

1. We, Ministers, heads of national delegations and the European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, have met in Valletta, Malta, on 30 March 2017 to strengthen governance to attain the environmental, economic and social sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries;
2. For millennia, Mediterranean fisheries have supported the livelihood of the coastal communities and local economies. They are of vital importance for food security and provide essential socio-economic value and function. Over 300 000 persons are directly employed on fishing vessels in the Mediterranean, whilst many more indirect jobs depend on the sector;
3. 14 years after the ministerial declaration for the sustainable development of fisheries in the Mediterranean adopted in Venice, Italy, we are standing once again at a historical juncture;
4. The objectives set by the Venice declaration have led to significant progress in regional fisheries management at institutional, scientific, technical and inter-governmental levels;
5. However, despite common efforts, with more than 85 % of the scientifically assessed stocks fished beyond safe biological limits, the future of fisheries in the Mediterranean is today at stake, putting increasing pressure on our fishermen as sub-optimal yields become an increasing threat to employment, further jeopardising stability of food supply and regional security;
6. Increasing pressures are exerted on marine ecosystems by a variety of human activities which include overfishing and unsustainable fishing practices, as well as drilling, transport, coastal urbanisations, agriculture and industry oriented pollution, climate change and invasive species;
7. In the light of the unprecedented humanitarian challenges faced in the Mediterranean, securing fishery resources is a major leverage to preserve the livelihoods of coastal communities, especially the most fragile ones, and contribute to set the conditions for stabilisation and fruitful international cooperation in the region;
8. In the spirit of solidarity in the Mediterranean, recognise that we have the shared responsibility to ensure the biological, social and economic sustainability of Mediterranean fishery resources for present and future generations, taking into account the importance to implement management, conservation and control measures, giving due consideration to the particular needs of developing coastal States in the definition and implementation of such measures ;

We agree to strengthen governance for Mediterranean fisheries based on the following objectives and principles

9. Develop a comprehensive governance involving all stakeholders and empowering fishermen, especially within small scale fleets, to take direct responsibility in the participative management of fisheries, building on the Mediterranean self-regulatory tradition;
10. Highlight the central role of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean to support cooperation in sustainable development of both fisheries and aquaculture among coastal States, together with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas;
11. Achieve exploitation at Maximum Sustainable Yield to preserve food security, artisanal and subsistence fisheries and the socio-economic role of fisheries, in line with the Johannesburg declaration on sustainable development and Sustainable Development Goal 14 to 'Conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development';
12. Building on the applicable national and international rules, establish a culture of compliance based on transparency, cross-border cooperation as well as efficient prevention, detection and action to ensure a rule-based management of fisheries;
13. Ensure adequate data collection and exchange on all types of fleets including small-scale and recreational fisheries to reinforce scientific knowledge on fish stocks and ecosystems;
14. Recognize that small scale and recreational fisheries must play an increased role in contributing to data collection and collective research efforts;
15. Further integrate the socio-economic dimension in fisheries management and data collection;
16. Encourage fair and balanced distribution of fishing opportunities between small scale and larger fleets, especially where fleet interoperability exists for different high-value iconic fish stocks, giving due consideration to low impact methods as well as other environmental, social and economic criteria;
17. Improve working conditions and promote the role of women in the fisheries sector and aquaculture and support young people experiencing difficulties in accessing the labour market;
18. Develop fisheries management in the framework of a comprehensive eco-systemic approach, in order to strive towards the gradual elimination, on case by case basis, of discards, bycatches, and of incidental catches of vulnerable species, to enhance the protection of sensitive habitats and address the effects of pollution and other external factors on fisheries; In this respect, without prejudice to the sovereign rights of States and in accordance with relevant international law, implement and promote well-managed marine protected areas and other area-based management tools such as fisheries restricted areas, to ensure complementarity between objectives for biodiversity protection and sustainable fisheries;
19. Take into account the specificity of small-scale fisheries and the potential of aquaculture as a major source of food, income and activity for coastal communities;
20. Devise and consider appropriate incentives for small scale and recreational fisheries to play a more active role as 'guardians of the sea' to meet environmental and security objectives;

21. Increase the profitability and value chain of fishery products whilst ensuring food security; in line with the FAO strategic objectives;
22. Take into account the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy of 17 November 2015, which stresses the need for the Mediterranean region to make the best use of the potential of the blue economy to promote growth, jobs and investments and reduce poverty, whilst safeguarding healthy seas and developing a clear vision for the sustainable and integrated development of marine and maritime sectors, including fisheries, at national and sea basin level;
23. Investing in the sustainable development of the blue economy as a new attractive alternative for fisheries under increasing pressure;
24. Seek a comprehensive approach to promote sustainable fisheries and economic diversification towards sustainable blue economy in coastal communities, in particular by encouraging coordinated actions through the existing cooperation frameworks in the Mediterranean, both at political and technical levels.

We urge all riparian States to

25. Comply with the management measures adopted by the GFCM and fully implement the GFCM mid-term strategy for 2017-2020 towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black sea fisheries;
26. Ratify and implement the FAO agreement on port State measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;
27. Ratify and implement the Barcelona convention and its protocols on the conservation of Mediterranean environment, as applicable for the signatories;
28. Ensure an effective implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and relevant climate change objectives, as well as the COP 22 Marrakech proclamations and provide their support to the Med COP process;
29. Strengthen solidarity across the Mediterranean basin to address the needs of coastal States and provide them with technical, scientific and financial support to improve their administrative capability, making the best use of existing international, regional and bilateral funding mechanisms to develop their sustainable use of marine resources, in particular through the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and the European External Investment Plan;
30. Cooperate to establish fisheries restricted and marine protected areas including in international waters without prejudice to the sovereign rights and in accordance with relevant international law;

We commit to implement the following actions

- A) Enhance data collection and scientific evaluation*

31. Ensuring proper data collection and enhancing the knowledge on stocks are of utmost importance to achieve sustainable management of stocks. To this aim, we:
32. Will ensure that 100 % of key Mediterranean stocks are subject to adequate data collection and scientifically assessed on a regular basis by 2020, taking into account the impact of recreational fisheries and external factors such as pollution. We ask the GFCM during its 2018 annual session at the latest, to prepare a progressive calendar to achieve this target ;
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 stocks assessment methodologies to ensure reproducibility and data quality as well as data exchange on a need-to-share basis through the effective interconnection of databases, taking into account existing systems and relevant data protection requirements. We ask the regional forum on fisheries science to submit to the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) a proposal for common working rules implementing the abovementioned objectives, to be then submitted to the GFCM annual session in 2019 for adoption as recommendation;

B) Establish an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework

34. Existing management measures will be complemented and expanded to progressively achieve exploitation at maximum sustainable yield. To this end, we undertake to:
35. To the extent possible no later than 2020, establish and implement a regional capacity plan ensuring an adequate balance between resources and the fleet capacity in all riparian countries;
36. To the extent possible no later than 2020, manage 100 % of the key fisheries with a multi-annual management plan in order to restore and maintain the populations of fish stocks above fishing mortality levels capable of producing maximum sustainable yield. We ask the GFCM to agree during its 2018 annual session on the list of key fisheries for which a multi-annual management plan should be implemented and on a progressive calendar with yearly quantified objectives to set-up management plans by 2020. The plans should be based on the GFCM guidelines for multiannual management and include *inter alia* and whenever applicable management measures based on effort capacity or catch limits and associated technical measures , targeting the gradual elimination of discards and increased selectivity;
37. Ensure adequate protection of vulnerable species and sensitive habitats, with a specific attention to cetaceans, turtles, seabirds, seagrass habitats and coralligenous and maërl beds, including in marine protected areas without prejudice, if applicable, to the sovereign rights of States, designated for their conservation, through *inter alia* specific fisheries management measures embedded in multi-annual management plans;
38. Further develop fisheries restricted and marine protected areas ensuring an effective protection of at least 10% of the Mediterranean Sea by 2020, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development goal 14.5 and Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 and by implementing the relevant actions under the Barcelona Convention's 'Roadmap for a comprehensive coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas (MPAs)'. We call upon GFCM contracting parties and the SAC to present to the GFCM annual session in 2018 proposals for the development of new fisheries

restricted areas, without prejudice to the state's sovereign rights and in accordance with relevant international law, in particular to establish a consistent network of essential fish habitats, following a thorough consultation process. We invite the GFCM during this 2018 annual session to agree on a progressive calendar with quantified objectives to achieve this target;

39. Establish, as soon as possible and by 2020 at the very latest, a set of baseline rules to ensure an effective management of recreational fisheries across the Mediterranean. This common base will be further complemented by additional measures in in multi-annual management plans when relevant;

C) Develop a culture of compliance and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

40. The fight against IUU fishing must be reinforced to effectively eliminate illegal fishing activities in the Mediterranean, through the efficient and responsible action of flag States in coordination with coastal, port and market States to ensure an effective level playing field across the Mediterranean. To achieve this result, we will:

41. Ensure that by 2020, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14.4 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 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 operationalization of a regional VMS and control system, in the frame of the GFCM regional plan of action against IUU.

42. Establish, as soon as possible and where it is appropriate, Joint Schemes of International Inspection by subregional area to ensure the monitoring of high seas areas subject to IUU fishing with joint patrolling and inspections;

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;

44. By 2020, ensure the allocation of a unique vessel identifier (IMO number) to commercial fishing vessels of 24 meters and above¹, in line with the applicable international rules;

D) Support sustainable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture

45. The sustainable development of small-scale fisheries should be supported to ensure the livelihood of coastal communities. To this end, we will set up as from 2018 a regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries, on the basis of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and the FAO Regional Conference on "Building a future for sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea" (March 2016, Algiers, Algeria). This plan of action will streamline funding schemes to strengthen the support to local projects related inter alia to fisheries co-management, low-impact techniques and fishing gear, social inclusion, valorisation of catches, diversification, the contribution of fishermen to environmental protection, data collection and collective research efforts;

¹ With the exemption of wooden vessels

46. The sustainable development of aquaculture should be supported to contribute to food security in the Mediterranean and to strengthen coastal economies. To this end, we commit, as from 2017, to the implementation of the GFCM Strategy for the sustainable development of Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture which will support, inter alia, farming of food fish products, market access and trade, thereby creating employment opportunities and reducing the current stress on marine capture fisheries;
47. Support partnerships between producers and the marketing chain to enhance the valorisation of catches with a balanced distribution of profits, in particular those resulting from selective and low-impact fishing techniques;

E) Greater solidarity and coordination in the Mediterranean

48. A permanent network for cooperation and technical assistance will be established within GFCM by end 2018, taking into consideration FAO existing projects, to ensure an optimal coordination of the actions undertaken to develop the scientific and administrative capabilities of riparian countries, including monitoring and inspection;
49. We call upon the GFCM to present a work programme on spatial planning with a pre-identification of priority areas during its 2018 annual session. This work programme will be based on the result of consultations with riparian countries and relevant regional organisations and instruments;
50. We invite all relevant regional organizations and instruments competent for the environmental, economic and social sustainability in the Mediterranean Sea to formalize their cooperation through relevant instruments, such as memoranda of understanding, in order to avoid duplications and promote synergies;

Follow-up of the declaration

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, reflecting the reports provided by riparian countries when relevant.