

2016 Key Priorities

18th Session of the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

Nicosia, Cyprus, 21-23 March 2016

Despite being the oldest RFMO operating worldwide, GFCM assessments continuously depict an alarming picture of Mediterranean stocks which suggests a lack of effective and enforced fisheries management. Oceana calls upon the 18th session of the SAC to apply the best available scientific advice to halt overfishing and the continuing deterioration of fishing resources and the marine environment, through the support of new Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs) and measures to protect Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs).

FISHERIES RESTRICTED AREAS (FRAs)

In relation to **demersal stocks of hake and deep-water rose shrimp in the Strait of Sicily**, Oceana considers that, at the 18th SAC session, Contracting Parties should promote measures, based on scientific advice, aimed at ensuring the recovery of these overexploited yet unregulated stocks to above levels which can produce Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). Such measures include:

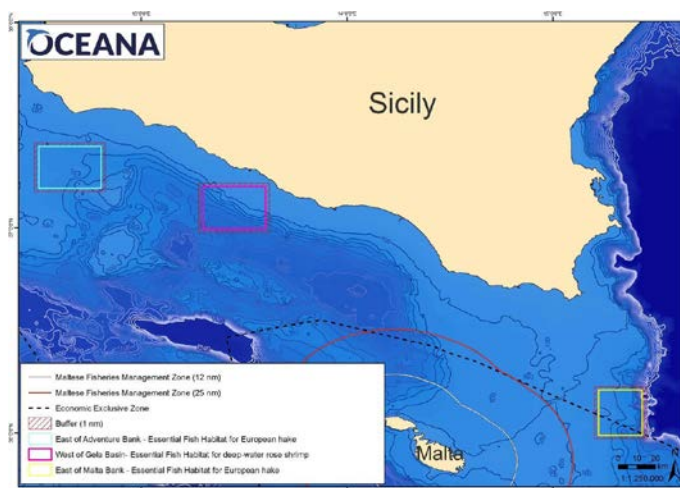
- **Adoption of FRAs in the Strait of Sicily to protect juveniles of both species:** in different GFCM fora, as well as at the 17th session of the SAC, FRAs comprising recruitment areas for hake and deep-water rose shrimp have been positively validated and recommended as the most appropriate measure required to reduce fishing mortality of juveniles in GSA 15-16;
- **Inclusion of FRAs within a multi-annual management plan:** in line with the advice of the GFCM Subregional Committee on the Central Mediterranean, FRAs in GSA 15-16 should be included within a comprehensive management plan **for demersal fisheries in the Strait of Sicily**. Such a plan should include **clear management objectives and targets** to allow highly overfished commercial stocks, in particular **hake**, to recover as soon as possible, in line with GFCM obligations and to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

ALARMING stock status

Only 1 out of 34 assessed stocks are considered to be sustainably exploited

Source: 2016 SAC Executive report on intersessional activities, advice and work plan

Fisheries Restricted Areas in GSA15-16 to be included in a multi-annual management plan for demersal bottom trawling fisheries in the Strait of Sicily. The FRAs were originally proposed by Oceana, on the basis of the most recent scientific studies, and then validated by the 17th session of SAC.



VULNERABLE MARINE ECOSYSTEMS (VMEs)

RFMOs are required to protect VMEs in accordance with international obligations, in particular United Nations General Assembly Resolutions 58/14, 59/25, 61/105 and 64/72. However, GFCM currently lags far behind other RFMOs in fulfilling these obligations. While other RFMOs have developed and implemented specific VME protocols and measures, the only Mediterranean-wide measure established to date by GFCM is the prohibition on trawling below 1000 m, which leaves many VMEs entirely unprotected.

To address this need, GFCM can draw on the experiences of RFMOs such as CCAMLR, NAFO, NEAFC, and SEAFO, which are further along in the process of implementing the FAO *International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas*. 2016 represents a critical opportunity for GFCM to initiate this process, by taking advantage of the FAO regional **workshop on Mediterranean VMEs which is planned to be held later this year**.

During the last meeting of the GFCM Working Group on MPAs (June 2015), one specific recommendation on VMEs was approved for submission to the SAC. This recommendation calls on the GFCM scientific advisory bodies and the Commission, in collaboration with FAO, to develop a regional risk-based approach to prevent significant adverse impacts of fishing on VMEs, which includes:

- i. Defining a comprehensive **list of VME-indicators** for the region;
- ii. **Identifying areas where VMEs occur** or are likely to occur, and closing those areas to bottom fisheries (above 1000 meters), until conservation and management measures are adopted to prevent significant adverse impacts upon them;
- iii. Establishing and implementing a **precautionary VME encounter protocol**, including scientifically-based thresholds for triggering the move-on rule;
- iv. Conducting prior **impact assessments** to determine whether individual bottom fishing activities would have significant adverse impacts on VMEs; and
- v. Strengthening **data collection** and sharing to improve knowledge about VMEs and fishing impacts.

Therefore, at the 18th session of the SAC, Oceana considers that Contracting Parties should:

- Lay out a clear process through which GFCM will develop measures for VME protection. As a first step, this process should include at least one scientific/expert meeting to begin defining a GFCM list of VME-indicator species and habitats.
- Consider interim measures that could be implemented for VME protection, such as precautionary encounter protocols.



Failure to comply
with international obligations to protect VMEs



No Action
has been taken within GFCM to protect VMEs since 2006



Only 3
specific areas have been designated to protect VMEs

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