

**Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/9**  
**on a regional research programme for rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea**  
**(geographical subarea 29)**

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

*CONSIDERING* that the objective of the Agreement for the establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM Agreement) is to ensure the conservation and sustainable use, at the biological, social, economic and environmental level, of marine living resources in the GFCM area of application;

*RECALLING* that, in giving effect to the objective of the GFCM Agreement, the GFCM shall adopt recommendations on conservation and management measures aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of fishing activities, in order to preserve the marine living resources and the economic and social viability of fisheries and that, in adopting such recommendations, the GFCM shall give particular attention to measures to prevent overfishing and minimize discards as well as to the potential impacts on small-scale fisheries and local communities;

*RECALLING* that in giving effect to the objective of the GFCM Agreement, the GFCM shall foster, as appropriate, a subregional approach to fisheries management and aquaculture development in order to better address the specificities of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;

*CONSIDERING* that the GFCM shall adopt management measures based on an ecosystem approach to fisheries to guarantee the maintenance of stocks at levels which can produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY);

*RECALLING* that the 2016 Bucharest Declaration towards enhanced cooperation on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture, in particular the technical outputs of the expert meetings (Panel 1) in its Annex, recommends cooperation with the GFCM towards the promotion of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, which includes the collection of information on fisheries-related issues, such as relevant socio-economic data, discards, incidental catches of vulnerable species, invasive species and other aspects of marine ecosystems;

*RECALLING* that the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture calls upon Black Sea riparian countries to enhance multilateral cooperation and implement actions to improve the sustainability of resources, particularly with regard to data collection, scientific evaluation and implementation of an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework in the Black Sea;

*CONSIDERING* that the GFCM shall apply the precautionary approach in accordance with the Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks of 4 August 1995 and the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

*CONSIDERING* that the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries provides that states “should apply the precautionary approach widely to conservation, management and exploitation of living aquatic resources in order to protect them and preserve the aquatic environment, taking account of the best scientific evidence available. The absence of adequate scientific information should not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take measures to conserve target species, associated or dependent species and non-target species and their environment”;

*CONSIDERING* that the measures formulated by the GFCM shall be based on the best scientific advice available and on the work of the BlackSea4Fish project in supporting the advice delivered by the Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS), taking into account relevant environmental, economic and social factors;

*NOTING* that the conclusions of the fifth meeting of the Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea (Georgia, December 2017) suggest that rapa whelk fisheries are already reaching MSY levels and that care should be taken in further expanding this fishery;

*CONSIDERING* that fishing mortality should be kept below safe thresholds to ensure long-term high yields while limiting the risk of stocks collapse and guaranteeing stable and more viable fisheries;

*CONSIDERING* the socio-economic importance of rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea and the need to ensure their long-term economic sustainability;

*CONSIDERING* that certain fisheries management measures need to be revised and adapted to the evolution of both the status of exploited stock and scientific knowledge and that an appropriate method shall be established to this end;

*ADOPTS*, in conformity with Articles 5 b), 8 b), and 13 of the GFCM Agreement the following recommendation:

## **PART I**

### **Objectives, scope and definitions**

#### ***Objectives of the research programme***

1. This recommendation shall establish a regional research programme towards the sustainable exploitation of rapa whelk in the Black Sea (geographical subarea [GSA] 29) (hereafter “regional research programme”).
2. This recommendation shall apply to all commercial fishing activities exploiting rapa whelk in the Black Sea (GSA 29).
3. The regional research programme established by this recommendation shall support the WGBS and be scientifically assessed and coordinated within the BlackSea4Fish project.
4. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) whose vessels are actively fishing in GSA 29 agree to implement the regional research programme in accordance with the objectives of this recommendation.

#### ***Geographical scope***

5. The regional research programme and the transitional measures established by this recommendation shall apply to GSA 29.

#### ***Definitions***

6. For the purpose of this recommendation:
  - a) “Black Sea” means GSA 29 as defined in Resolution GFCM/33/2009/2 on the establishment of geographical subareas in the GFCM area of application, amending Resolution GFCM/31/2007/2;

- b) “Rapa whelk” means gastropods pertaining to the species *Rapana venosa*;
- c) “Vessel actively fishing for rapa whelk” means any vessel equipped with fishing gear to fish for rapa whelk or used for scuba diving to fish for rapa whelk, and holding a valid fishing authorization for rapa whelk.

## **PART II**

### **Operational and specific objectives**

- 7. The operational objective of this recommendation shall be to improve scientific, technical and socio-economic knowledge of the fisheries exploiting rapa whelk by establishing a regional research programme on rapa whelk.
- 8. The specific objective of this recommendation shall be to collect data on fishing activities in order to improve research and scientific knowledge for the sustainable exploitation of the stock, aiming at maintaining the stock at MSY levels as well as the socio-economic viability of rapa whelk fisheries.
- 9. The WGBS, at its annual meeting in 2021, shall assess the outcome of the regional research programme established by this recommendation, taking into consideration the national efforts made by CPCs to manage rapa whelk fisheries. The WGBS shall report to the GFCM, at its forty-fifth session in 2021, and, if deemed necessary, present proposals for the adaptation of the measures set by this recommendation and for complementary management and control measures.

## **PART III**

### **Regional research programme and scientific monitoring**

- 10. CPCs with fishing fleets targeting rapa whelk shall ensure that a mechanism for adequate scientific monitoring of rapa whelk catches in the Black Sea is duly in place, with a view to facilitating the implementation of the regional research programme and to allowing the WGBS to provide descriptive information and advice on at least the following:
  - a) deployed fishing effort (e.g. number of fishing days/week) and overall catch levels at the national or supranational levels, indicating the fishing gear used;
  - b) data on overall bycatch quantities by fishing gear and species, excluding scuba diving;
  - c) biological and socio-economic effects of alternative management scenarios, including input/output and/or technical measures, such as fishing gear/environmental impacts, as proposed by the CPCs; and
  - d) possible spatio-temporal closures in order to preserve fisheries sustainability.
- 11. The BlackSea4Fish project shall facilitate and coordinate the assessment of relevant data at the regional level under the regional research programme.
- 12. The GFCM Secretariat, with the support of the WGBS, shall provide terms of reference, including costs, services and other requirements to support the implementation of a research programme on rapa whelk in the Black Sea, as described in Annex 1 of this recommendation. The regional research programme shall be launched in 2019.

**PART IV**  
**Final provisions**

13. In light of the results of the regional research programme referred to in Part III of this recommendation, the GFCM may propose and adopt new appropriate management and control measures, including monitoring of fishing activities and catches.

## **Key elements of the regional research programme on rapa whelk in the Black Sea**

### **Introduction**

There is high need for scientific and research projects in the Black Sea aimed to fill gaps of knowledge on rapa whelk, a high commercial value species in the Black Sea. There has been an increase in the coverage and in the quality of data on the abundance of rapa whelk, with some data on length and age composition. Based on such data, the first rapa whelk scientific assessment was carried out in 2017 by the Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea. However, the overall lack of fisheries-independent surveys in the Black Sea covering the regional distribution of the main commercial species in a comprehensive manner persists.

### **Main features of the regional research programme on rapa whelk in the Black Sea**

- Clear objectives defined in advance (e.g. biomass in tonnes, abundance in number of km<sup>2</sup>, spatio-temporal distribution patterns);
- Priority given to the collection of useful data for the provision of scientific advice in support of management (length, age, life cycle);
- Combination of fishery-dependent and fishery-independent sources of information to ensure a regular monitoring;
- All Black Sea CPCs should be involved;
- The regional research programme should also provide guidelines and facilitate harmonization, standardization of protocols, coordination and comparison of the results obtained by past, ongoing and future national, regional and international research programmes addressing rapa whelk, such as the BlackSea4Fish project.

### **Work packages**

Work packages are designed to address the main aspects mentioned above as well as the need to evaluate the social and economic aspects of the rapa whelk fisheries in the context of the sustainable management and exploitation of the stock.

Work Package 1 – Biology and ecology

Work Package 2 – Fishery-independent data collection – Surveys-at-sea

Work Package 3 – Fishery-dependent data collection

Work Package 4 – Stock assessment

Work Package 5 – Socio-economic elements

Work Package 6 – Management proposals

### **Main objectives of each work package**

**WP 1** – Biology and ecology of rapa whelk, including demography. Biology: studies on size, density, abundance, biomass, recruitment, growth, reproduction, physiology, environmental parameters, habitat,

feeding and bycatch surveys). Ecology: genetics, interactions with other species, impacts of fishing gear on the marine environment).

**WP 2** – Fishery-independent data collection through multiannual demersal beam trawl/dredge surveys-at-sea, e.g. biomass and abundance indices, size/age distribution, bycatch.

**WP 3** – Fishery-dependent data collection through port sampling (e.g. landings, length/distribution, fishing techniques used and vessels engaged in the fishing activity, value) and through observers on board (e.g. bycatch, days at sea).

**WP 4** – Stock assessment: investigation on methodologies for assessing the status of rapa whelk, including by compiling historical data.

**WP 5** – Socio-economic elements: socio-economic survey on the sector, trade, markets and development of economic indicators, external aspects affecting the fishery, economic sustainability of related fishing gear.

**WP 6** – Management proposals: identification of possible additional measures through management strategy evaluation (MSE) for the sustainability of rapa whelk fisheries.

### **Implementation of the regional research programme**

The GFCM shall:

- Assess progress in the different work packages,
- Define standardized methods (e.g. in ageing) as well as research protocols, and
- Organize capacity-building activities.