

Resolution GFCM/41/2017/4
on a permanent working group on vulnerable marine ecosystems

ACKNOWLEDGING the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions 59/25, 61/105 and 64/72 on sustainable fisheries, in particular regarding the obligation to prevent significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs);

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the 2009 FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas, which provide states and regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements (RFMO/As) with guidance in formulating and implementing appropriate measures for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas through a range of management tools and measures necessary to ensure the conservation of target and non-target species as well as affected habitats;

TAKING NOTE of the mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, Target 4: “Minimize and mitigate unwanted interactions between fisheries and marine ecosystems and environment”;

CONSIDERING the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) regarding the protection of VMEs, based on the outcomes of the first meeting of the Working Group on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (WGVME) (Spain, April 2017);

CONSIDERING the necessity to give a more permanent status to the activities of the WGVME;

ADOPTS, in conformity with Articles 5 and 8 of the Agreement for the establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM Agreement), the following resolution:

1. The WGVME and its activities should be included, on a permanent basis, in the GFCM annual work programme;
2. The mandate and terms of reference of the WGVME, as provided in the Annex, should be reviewed and complemented so as to ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned UNGA resolutions.
3. The WGVME should continue to review and examine, in 2018, the technical elements¹ for the protection of VMEs in the GFCM area of application, as provided by the SAC at its nineteenth session (Slovenia, May 2017), in order to formulate advice towards the adoption by the Commission of dedicated protocols for the protection of VMEs, in line with similar protocols established by other regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs).
4. The WGVME should also contribute to identify the technical elements concerning management measures to be applied for:
 - fishing vessels above 15 m length overall (LOA) operating with bottom contact fishing gear targeting the species *Aristaeomorpha foliacea*, *Aristeus antennatus*, or *Plesionika martia*; and
 - fishing vessels above 15 m LOA operating with bottom contact gear (bottom trawls, bottom set gillnets, bottom longlines and pots and traps) at depths deeper than 300 m.

¹ Notably on the basis of the work of the WGVME.

Terms of reference for a permanent working group on vulnerable marine ecosystems

As agreed by the fortieth session of the GFCM, the Working Group on VMEs (WGVME) was established to develop initial measures related to the protection of VMEs in the GFCM area of application, in accordance with the FAO mandate. Once such initial measures are defined, the WGVME should also provide advice for the SAC.

In particular the WGVME should carry out the following tasks:

- collect information and map the distribution of VMEs (annual update);
- advise on new proposals for closures and on the enforcement of existing measures (efficiency of existing FRAs addressing VME protection);
- assess technical information provided by fishers and other institutions;
- advise the SAC on any VME-related matter and coordinate the elaboration of management tools.

The WGVME will also contribute to:

- the design and management of the Mediterranean VME geodatabase;
- the establishment of a close collaboration and proper communication channels with scientific bodies from other RFMOs (e.g. ICES working group on deep-water ecology), scientific national institutions and the FAO.