



**GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR  
THE MEDITERRANEAN**

**COMMISSION GÉNÉRALE DES PÊCHES  
POUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE**



**SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC)**

**Fourteenth Session**

**Sofia, Bulgaria, 20-24 February 2012**

**Task Force for the improvement and modernization of the  
GFCM - Report of Expert Meeting on SAC and CAQ related issues  
GFCM HQs, Rome, Italy, 15-16 December 2011**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Expert Meeting, convened within the framework of the Task Force for the improvement and modernization of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (“the Task Force”), was held at the GFCM Headquarters in Rome, Italy, on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011. The meeting was attended by 29 experts involved in the activities of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ) and participants from FAO and the GFCM Secretariat. The Agenda and list of Participants are annexed under Appendix A and B of this report, respectively.
2. The Agenda provided for plenary sessions, otherwise the two groups of experts met independently to discuss items 3, 4 and 5, namely “Summary of past reviews, recommendations and suggested ways forward” (item 3); “Proposals to the Task Force on the options for improving and modernizing the SAC/CAQ” (item 4) and “Conclusions and recommendations on the way forward” (item 5).

## **OPENING OF THE MEETING**

3. Mr Abdellah Srour, GFCM Executive Secretary, welcomed the participants to the new Palazzo Blumenstihl and briefly reminded the context of the meeting. He gave the floor to Mr Stefano Cataudella, Chairperson of the GFCM, who underlined the importance of the meeting of experts in providing input to the works of the Task Force. In this connection, he recalled that the Task Force was established by the Commission at its 35<sup>th</sup> session to review and prioritize the recommendations of the GFCM Performance Review for consideration at the next annual Session of the Commission. He then illustrated the progress that has been made thus far by the Task Force and invited the experts to consider ways of strengthening their respective committees to ensure that they are more compatible with the current priority issues and with the needs of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. He also referred to

the value of defining strengthened mechanisms for formulating management advice for consideration by the Commission. Mr Cataudella's address is reproduced under Appendix E of this report.

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE MEETING**

### **Introduction of the GFCM; Outcomes of the GFCM Performance Review; Task Force considerations towards a possible revision of the GFCM Agreement, its Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations**

4. A plenary session of the SAC and CAQ experts was held to introduce the background and context of the meeting. Mr Nicola Ferri, GFCM legal consultant, delivered a presentation to inform participants on the process that led to the establishment of the Task Force. He reviewed the GFCM legal framework, including the GFCM Agreement, the Rules of Procedure and the Financial Regulations and presented most relevant outcomes of the GFCM Performance Review. He noted that the recommendations made by the Performance Review Panel included consideration of amendments to both the GFCM Agreement and the Rules of Procedure.

5. Mr Ferri explained the establishment and terms of reference of the Task Force. The terms of reference of the Task Force include a review of the GFCM framework which encompasses the legal and institutional components, as well as other issues relevant to the work of SAC and CAQ. In this respect, he noted that the works of the Task Force do not involve only GFCM Members but also its Committees and the GFCM sub-regions, consistent with the scope of existing sub-regional projects.

6. Mr Roberto Emma, from the GFCM Secretariat, made a presentation on the GFCM Discussion Forum, electronic platform which was launched on 13th October 2011 in order to initiate a collaborative exchange of views among GFCM Members on topics identified on the basis of the GFCM Performance Review and the terms of reference of the Task Force; questions pertaining to each of those topics are addressed therein and supported by background documents and informative material that were included to facilitate GFCM Members in conveying their replies. He also informed that the sensitivity of the task had been taken into account through reasonable security measures to prevent and detect access from unauthorized users, including, *inter alia*, a verified registration for each participant. Mr Emma finally provided information on the current status of registration and participation to the GFCM Discussion Forum.

### **Overview of the process on amending the GFCM Agreement, its rules of procedure and financial regulations**

7. Ms Judith Swan, GFCM Consultant, presented an overview of the procedures necessary to amend the GFCM Agreement, Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations. She explained the procedures in detail, referring to the governing provisions in the GFCM Agreement and Rules of Procedure.

8. In summary, amendment of the GFCM Agreement requires approval by two-thirds of the Members, and proposals must be circulated in advance by the Secretary and included in the provisional agenda of the session. The amendment is effective upon adoption, except where it creates new obligations for Members in which case they must notify their acceptance in order for it to be binding on them. Whether an amendment constitutes a new obligation is determined by each Member, and then collectively by GFCM (for example, it may be financial or related to national legal requirements). All amendments must be sent to Council, after a review by the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters, an advisory body. FAO Council or

Conference may disallow the amendment if it is inconsistent with the GFCM Agreement or FAO Constitution.

9. Amendment of the GFCM Rules of Procedure requires approval by two-thirds of the Members, and proposals must be distributed at least 24 hours before a plenary meeting and announced at the meeting. They are effective upon adoption (except for Rule XVI, relating to amendment procedures for the Agreement which is not effective until the following session of the Commission). They must not be inconsistent with the GFCM Agreement or FAO Constitution.

10. Amendment of the GFCM Financial Regulations requires approval by two-thirds of the Members, and must be consistent with the principles in the FAO Financial Regulations. The FAO Finance Committee may disallow amendments that are inconsistent with such principles. In addition, Rule XI applies the Financial Regulations to the Commission except as otherwise provided in the Rules.

### **Open discussion**

11. In response to requests of participants to provide details about the objective of this meeting in the broader Performance Review/Task Force process, Mr Srouf explained that the final objective was to amend the GFCM Agreement and provided details on said process, including on consultations that had been envisaged to ensure its completion. He further informed participants that the GFCM Bureau had met on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and decided on interactions with GFCM Members as part of the process, and that Terms of Reference were accordingly being developed. The outcomes of said meeting would also be integrated into the broader GFCM Performance Review/Task Force process.

### **SAC RELATED ISSUES**

12. Mr. Jean-Jacques Maguire, acting as moderator of the SAC Expert Meeting, briefly reviewed elements of the GFCM Performance Review, of the Updating of the SAC Reference Frame and Medium Term Strategic Plan (2010) and of the Ad Hoc Meeting of Experts on the Independent Appraisal of the Achievements of the SAC 1999 – 2003. He noted that the objectives of the GFCM do not specifically mention sustainable use, as already highlighted by the GFCM Performance Review. He also reiterated recommendations of previous SAC reviews that stated that “*the characteristics of the GFCM Region are such that a relatively heavy scientific structure with numerous subcommittees, WGs, expert groups or other subsidiary bodies may not be appropriate*” [...] and that “*fewer subcommittees but more focused ad hoc WGs with targeted participants could encourage and foster more the multidisciplinary and multispecies approaches where GFCM could achieve real progress*”.

13. The participants agreed on the importance of addressing the objective, structure and effectiveness of SAC, particularly in view of the challenging nature of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. In tackling these matters, the meeting considered: (1) General issues; (2) Weaknesses of the SAC and its subsidiary bodies; (3) Relevant questions on the GFCM Forum Discussion Questionnaire; and (4) Conclusions and recommendations for the way forward. These considerations of the experts are interrelated and described below. Past reviews of SAC, carried out in 2003 and 2010, were noted too.

## 1. General issues

14. In general, it was considered that the effectiveness and efficiency of the GFCM, and therefore of SAC, could be improved by incorporating elements and principles of modern international fisheries instruments.

15. At the outset, experts identified general issues of concern. Consequently, several issues were identified as affecting both the fulfillment of the SAC mandate and the efficiency of its performances, including an excessive workload caused by an excessive concentration of meetings and commitments and the limited uptake by the Commission of the advice for management measures provided by SAC.

16. The issue of limited data reporting and that of the need for reinforcing national institutions in providing data were both pointed out. Where data is provided by national institutions, no mechanism exists to monitor its use within GFCM SAC and no subsequent feedback process on quality issues is in place. Advice is provided by SAC based on, *inter alia*, such data, but few management measures are adopted by GFCM based on this advice because only GFCM Members are allowed to introduce recommendations for consideration at GFCM annual sessions. At the same time, there is no means of following up on the implementation of the recommendations on a regular basis, so as to review the effect of decisions taken by the Commission. In this regard, the relationship between SAC outputs and the Commission's decisions could be strengthened through requiring SAC under the GFCM Agreement to perform regular reviews on the effect of adopted management measures.

17. Some experts expressed concern that data reporting requirements for Task 1 are not linked in a timely manner to stock assessment schedules to effectively support the formulation of management measures. Task 1 data are supposed to be reported for current year minus 2 while the assessments use current year minus 1.

18. Experts were strongly in favor of improving and strengthening cooperative relations and coordination with other organizations, including through the conclusion and adoption of Memoranda of Understanding ("MoU") with partner organizations where they do not currently exist, for example (*inter alia*, with ICCAT, STECF and ICES).

19. A question was raised about whether it would be possible to include in the Rules of Procedure requirements for decision-making in subsidiary bodies. The FAO Legal Office advised that normally subsidiary bodies are advisory in nature and make recommendations to the governing body of a statutory body for endorsement and action by its members. These recommendations are usually made once a consensus is reached on the matter within the subsidiary body. In the absence of a consensus, in some cases the Rules of Procedure stipulate that the governing body and other subsidiary bodies are informed. If a subsidiary body wishes to adopt recommendations with a qualified majority, provisions linked to this requirement would have to be envisaged in the Rules of Procedure. It was also indicated that decisions taken by the governing body of existing statutory bodies (i.e. GFCM) that have no financial, policy or programme implications for the organization, may be transmitted directly to the members of the body concerned for their consideration and action.

20. It could be also possible that explicit provisions can be made for a governing body to delegate to a subsidiary body decision-making powers; this would however be unusual and could lead to complex situations. In similar cases, a determining factor would be the mandate of the subsidiary body.

21. The GFCM objective refers to fishery development and it was noted that many countries are particularly eager to develop their artisanal fisheries. Participants suggested that improving the social and

economic conditions, against the background of sustainable use, would better correspond to the objectives of modern international fisheries instruments.

22. The experts considered the development of the first GFCM Framework Programme for Sustainable Development of Fisheries and Aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which has been formulated in support of the Task Force, and agreed it should be based on sustainable use, including for artisanal fisheries. This is consistent with the desire to ensure that modern principles form a basis for the works of SAC and the GFCM.

23. Extensive discussions occurred in relation to the need for a more focused approach by SAC in carrying out assessments and in this context experts noted that internationally shared and straddling stocks in particular could be considered, possibly as defined on a sub-regional basis. Although it will be necessary to define a series of areas where international problems arise, it would also be important that a more focused approach by SAC does not affect the broad mandate of GFCM over all marine living resources in the area of competence.

24. It was noted that FAO Fisheries Report No. 770 recommends that the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ) should function as a subcommittee of SAC, because of the need for scientific advice to be provided to aquaculture. This option was also considered in the proposed recommendations for restructuring SAC, as described in paragraph 33 below.

## **2. Weaknesses of the SAC and its subsidiary bodies**

25. The experts identified specific weaknesses of the SAC and its subsidiary bodies and jointly addressed them according to their experience and shared vision, as follows:

### *Data and statistics*

26. The objectives of data collection need to be very clear, and there should be full consistency between data reporting and the work done by the GFCM. The following items should be addressed by the Task Force:

- Data is collected for use and advice.
- It is important to have as much information as possible on all stocks, not just those that are straddling/shared.
- There is some confusion between GSA and stock boundaries, but on the whole the current assessment units are considered to broadly correspond to biological units.
- Solutions for the timeframe of subcommittee meetings should be identified in order to ensure they are complementary, and information is provided to other relevant subcommittees in a logical and complementary manner. This weakness is further addressed below in paragraph 33.
- SAC should have a mandate to initiate scientific studies.

### *Training*

27. The meetings of the Subcommittee on Stock Assessment and of its working group play an important role in training scientists in the GFCM area. However, this should remain a small component of stock assessment meetings and it should not become an impediment to the efficient formulation of advice to the Commission. The Task Force should hence consider how GFCM, relevant FAO regional projects, as well as other RFMOs and international organizations, could better coordinate their training activities.

*SAC Programme of work*

28. All participants agreed that the current number of meetings carried out during the intersessional period is too high. This results in a heavy workload that does not allow involved experts to properly allocate the necessary time and prepare on each relevant task included the works of the committee.

29. In this regard, the need to revise the list of stocks SAC is currently dealing with was raised. It was indicated that there should be a reduced number of priority stocks, ensuring that they are of interest to a relatively large number of GFCM Members. However, it was specified that the competence of GFCM over all marine living resources, as provided for in the GFCM Agreement, should be retained. It was concluded that the selection of the priority stocks should be carried out taking advantage of the existence of various FAO regional projects covering the entire region.

30. In light of the discussions, it was argued that the functioning of the Sub-Committees (SCs), and the linkages between them, should be directly addressed. The Sub-Committee on Stock Assessment (SCSA) is considered the most important one, as it performs a constant and intensive work, whose outputs should serve as the foundation for actions by the other SCs (i.e. Economic and Social Sciences, Statistics and Information, Marine Environment and Ecosystems). It was hence decided that the timeframe in which the SCs operates (along with transversal sessions and back-to-back workshops) could be expanded upon in order to bring about a more complementary approach; its structure should be accordingly regrouped, so that the meetings of sub-committees are held in a series, possibly using a two-year cycle.

*Management recommendations*

31. It was noted that the implementation of management plans, not mentioned in the GFCM Agreement, should be reinforced. It was recalled that currently only GFCM Members are entitled to submit recommendations to the Commission, to be considered for possible adoption during the annual session. It was suggested that this could be a limitation on the effectiveness of the outputs of the SAC.

32. All experts agreed that, taking into consideration that management plans should be based on SAC scientific advice, SAC should be empowered to make management recommendations to the Commission at its annual session. More precisely, it was suggested that the works of GFCM should be defined to require that all management recommendations relating to stocks proposed by GFCM Members must be examined during the SAC and then proposed to the annual session. In parallel, SAC management recommendations could be required to be circulated in a reasonable time in advance of the annual session when they would be considered, in order for national authorities to review and consider them.

*Ecosystem approach to fisheries management ("EAF")*

33. The experts considered that the EAF should have greater emphasis as a pillar for the works of SAC, mindful that the institution of marine protected areas in particular is very important tool to implement the EAF.

34. GFCM recognizes that sustainable development aims at protecting marine ecosystems and enables humans to benefit socially and economically from these ecosystems; it is therefore necessary to explicitly consider how their increased protection will affect humans and their activities. The ecosystem approach to fisheries does not necessarily imply a full understanding of the structure and the functioning of marine ecosystems; the EAF on the other hand, as proposed by the FAO, is a pragmatic process based on assessing the risk of not meeting agreed biological, social, economic and/or institutional management objectives on the

basis of existing knowledge. The EAF is about improving decision making, having the importance of ecosystems in mind, recognizing that decisions have to be made consistent with the information available as it is not possible to wait to have a complete understanding of all the processes before taking management actions.

35. The approach is essentially a risk assessment and risk management process. It recognises that the ecosystem influences fishery resources, that fishing influences the ecosystem and that the ecosystem is influenced by other human activities. This implies that in an EAF, human activities other than fishing that have an impact on the ecosystem, and therefore on fishery resources, need to be taken into account and that mechanisms exist or can be created to facilitate decision making on competing uses of marine areas.

### **3. Relevant questions on the GFCM Forum Discussion Questionnaire**

36. Participants considered the following questions on the GFCM Discussion Forum Questionnaire. The correspondent number in the questionnaire is shown below:

#### *1.1 GFCM objectives*

37. The objectives, functions and principles of GFCM should be “modernized” and brought in line with more recent fisheries instruments. The Task Force may also wish to consider other relevant international instruments in this context, such as the Convention on Migratory Species, whose objectives may be pertinent also in the context of GFCM.

#### *1.3 Marine spatial planning*

38. Marine spatial planning is one of the activities of the future. It is recommended that GFCM management framework takes into account marine spatial planning because of its importance as a tool to implement the EAF. It was noted that GFCM has already adopted measures having considered marine spatial planning and that marine spatial planning might be an area where CAQ and SAC could work together in the future, due to the importance of marine spatial planning for aquaculture too.

#### *2.1 GSAs*

39. GSAs are generally appropriate for collecting data, but should not be used for stock assessments. GSAs are currently not intended as biological limits, and stock assessments are considered to be mostly based on biological limits. It was noted that a statistical grid has been adopted (Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/1 Annex 2) which does not perfectly match GSA boundaries but provides a defined basis for data collection and analysis. In case of needs to change GSA boundaries a process would have to be set in motion consistent with that which led to establishing the GSAs (i.e. through subcommittees, SAC and the Commission).

#### *2.2 Priority species*

40. The SAC should reassess and reduce the list of priority species and stocks. It should review shared and straddling stocks but also be able to include all available assessments from all stocks to provide integrated advice.

41. It was noted that in terms of conservation and management of fish stocks, it is clearly the responsibility of the SAC to provide advice but other taxonomic groups could also fall under the mandate of

other organizations. It is important that GFCM recommendations focus on exploited species or stocks. The GFCM Agreement should be modernized so that decisions can be taken also on species related to fish stocks and that are otherwise affected by fishing activities (such as seabirds).

### 3.1 Regional allocation process

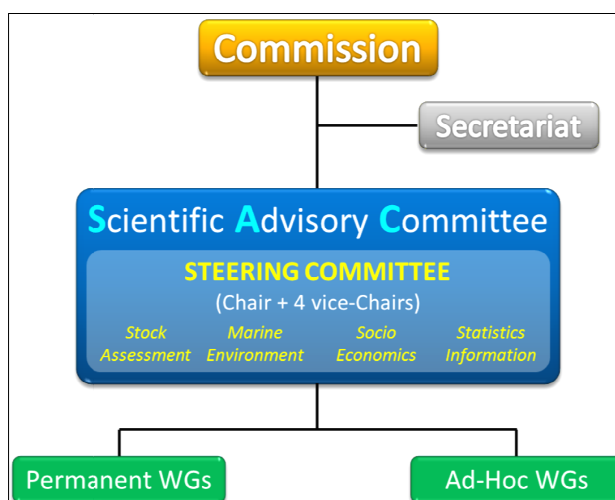
42. Two aspects of the allocation process will need to be strengthened: (i) to ensure that SAC may follow up on assessing the effect of relevant measures and (ii) to request the Compliance Committee to discharge control related duties in conformity with GFCM body of law. Experts agreed that the national allocation of effort for shared and straddling stocks would represent a step forward.

### 3.2 Technical assistance programmes

43. The participants considered that existing provisions on technical assistance are sufficient, and existing programmes, initiatives, and partner organizations, as well as resort to international experts, should be utilized to the extent possible.

## 7.1 Decision-making functions of GFCM Committees

44. Mindful of the heavy workload, relatively heavy structure and need for greater effectiveness and efficiency of SAC, it is recommended that the sub-committees annual meetings be cancelled and a new modus operandi be established as follows:



*GFCM-SAC proposed structure*

45. SAC and its current sub-committees would be consolidated through one expanded plenary meeting with designated thematic sessions. A Chair and four Vice-Chairs/coordinators would serve as a steering committee, and receive remuneration subject to the availability of funds. The thematic sessions would be on the topics currently addressed by the sub-committees. Other themes could be also considered.

46. The work programme of SAC could be arranged on the basis of a longer timeframe and/or the structure of the committee could be streamlined as indicated in the diagram.

47. The meeting agreed that the saving of time and financial resources that could be brought about by the proposed diagram would be significant, and that this diagram would also foster the integration of information and decision-making.



## 7.2 *Observers*

48. SAC is open to observers but their participation to relevant meetings has to be agreed within the framework of FAO.

## 9.2 *Work of other organizations*

49. It is important that GFCM and SAC are aware of relevant activities by other organizations which are of interest to their works and strengthen, to this end and as appropriate, cooperation and collaboration. MoU would be a useful tool to ensure partnerships and the complementarity in the respective work programmes.

## **4. Conclusions and recommendations for the way forward**

50. The following general conclusions and recommendations were agreed by the meeting:

- a) Excessive workload over a limited time is a major problem for SAC.
- b) Prioritize the universe: priority stocks/species list should be reviewed and reduced.
- c) The structure and working procedures of the SAC need to be reviewed. The work could be arranged on the basis of a longer timeframe and/or the structure of the committee could be made more efficient (see paragraph 33).
- d) Advice provided by SAC is generally not translated into binding recommendations of the Commission. SAC should be empowered to propose recommendations for direct consideration and possible adoption by the Commission.
- e) The objectives, functions and principles of the GFCM Agreement should be modernized, in the context of sustainable use, in order to take into account ecosystem related considerations, associated species and other tools as indicated in modern international fisheries instruments. The precautionary approach should be applied.
- f) Long term management plans should be developed for shared and straddling stocks.
- g) EAF should be progressively implemented in the Mediterranean to manage the fisheries.
- h) Reinforce cooperation and coordination and promote synergies between scientific organizations working in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.
- i) Fishing effort on shared and straddling stocks should be allocated between the countries involved in fisheries on those stocks.

**CLOSING OF THE MEETING**

51. The experts reconvened in plenary and reviewed the conclusions and recommendations of both SAC and CAQ related issues. It was emphasized that their recommendations, as agreed in each meeting, would be put forward but that there would need to be compatibility with the GFCM legal framework.

52. Mr Srouf congratulated the two groups for the excellent work done as well as its results, which were achieved in a very efficient way. He also thanked the moderators, experts, consultants and the staff of the GFCM Secretariat and expressed sincere appreciation to Italy, which provided the necessary support to enable the GFCM to convene the meeting.

**Agenda**

- 1. Opening of the meeting** (GFCM Chairperson and Executive Secretary)
- 2. Background and context of the meeting** (GFCM Secretariat)
  - Introduction of the GFCM. Including its Agreement and procedural rules
  - Outcome of the GFCM Performance Review
  - Task Force towards a possible revision of the GFCM Agreement, of the rules of procedure and the financial rules
- 3. Summary of past reviews, recommendations and suggested ways forward** (moderators J.-J. Maguire and F. Rad)
- 4. Proposals to the Task Force on the options for improving and modernizing the SAC/CAQ**
- 5. Conclusions and Recommendations on the way forward**
- 6. Adoption of the report of the meeting**
- 7. Closing of the meeting** (GFCM Executive Secretary)

**NB:** Agenda items 1, 2, 6 and 7 were addressed jointly by SAC and CAQ experts.

## Appendix B

**List of Participants****SAC Expert Meeting**

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## Appendix C

**GFCM Chairperson's opening address**

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Rome and, more specifically, to this meeting where we will be discussing the future of the two important subsidiary bodies of GFCM, the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) and the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ), in the light of the Task Force activities established this year by the Commission. Our aim is to improve and modernize the Commission through the possible amendment of its agreement and I can note with great satisfaction that, for the first time, SAC and CAQ are working together on this topic of prime importance for our Organization.

In this context, I would like to cursorily confirm that early in September, the Task force launched its activities thanks to the remarkable work done by the Secretariat. As a first step of this process, I have to mention that a GFCM Discussion Forum is currently active among the GFCM members on topics related to the Task Force programme and in line with the terms of reference set up by the Commission. At present, I am pleased to report that 19 out of 24 GFCM Members have focal points for the Task Force which are currently registered on this GFCM Discussion Forum.

As further step, the SAC and CAQ will hold their respective meetings over the next 2 days in order to examine how the roles of these committees could be strengthened within the remit of the Task Force. Let me say that this is an exceptional opportunity to discuss the future of our two main technical bodies within the overall progress of GFCM among key experts of the region. Since your suggestions and proposals will be instrumental for the work of the Task Force, I would like to kindly invite you to pay special attention, *inter alia*, to better defining your reference frames which should be more compatible with the current priority issues and with the multidisciplinary nature of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, as well as towards defining better mechanisms for formulating management advice for the consideration of the Commission.

I take this occasion to warmly thank all experts for accepting to be part of this team and the Secretariat for its excellent work.

I wish you many fruitful endeavors.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Stefano Cataudella  
GFCM Chairperson