



**GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION
FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN
COMMISSION GÉNÉRALE DES PÊCHES
POUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE**



GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC)

**Meeting of the Sub-Committees (SCSA, SCESS, SCMEE, SCSI)
Malaga, Spain, 30 November – 3 December 2009**

**DRAFT MEDIUM WORKING PROGRAMME TO IMPROVE
KNOWLEDGE AND ASSESS THE STATUS OF ELASMOBRANCHES
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BLACK SEA***

* Available only in English

Background:

In the Mediterranean region, elasmobranches are characterized by their diversity (47 sharks and 38 rays). They constitute an important by-catch of commercial fisheries targeting bony fishes, rare are fisheries targeting sharks, but usually almost all specimen bycatch are marketed. The landing of these species increased from 10,000 to 25,000 tonnes between 1970 and 1985, and then slowly decreased to 15,000 tonnes in 2002.

There is evidence that the elasmobranches of the Mediterranean are declining in abundance, diversity and range due to the intense fishing activity. Their biological characteristics (low fecundity, late maturity and slow growth rates) make also elasmobranches vulnerable to fishing pressure. Some species are already threatened. In addition, there is a lack of aggregated knowledge on the biology and fishery of elasmobranches in many parts of the Mediterranean.

Taking into account the vulnerability of elasmobranches fishes and in frame of a protection and stock management strategy of this group, many action plans were elaborated on this issue (FAO IPOA-shark, the Action Plan for the conservation of the cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean (UNEP-RAC/SPA, 2003), the EC Action Plan for the Conservation and Management of Sharks...). In this way, the GFCM organized a transversal working group on bycatch/incidental catches (Italy, September 2008) and a transversal workshop on selectivity improvement and by-catch reduction (Tunisia, September 2009) where elasmobranches were well concerned.

These last meetings concluded that there is a lack of knowledge on the biology and fishery of elasmobranches in many parts of the Mediterranean and strongly encouraged more studies on population dynamics (population size, structure and demographics) on species of conservation concern (also in terms of fishery management) in parallel to mitigation measure in those cases where protected species are involved.

The above mentioned workshop held in Tunisia suggested to setup a medium term working programme to identify and fill gaps in the current knowledge that exist in elasmobranches fisheries, in order to assess and manage the Mediterranean stocks. This program should identify the activities to be carried out including the organisation of a specific expert meeting on the elasmobranches during 2010

As request by the workshop, Bradai, coordinator of the SCME, Dimech and Poisson made prepared this draft document for consideration by the next session of the Sub-Committees (Malaga, 30 November to 3 December 2009).

Activities to be carried out

It is suggested to focus on the following axes:

I. Undertake in 2010 a regional study aimed to:

- Performing a systematic inventory of the cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean including a review of available information on taxonomy and species distribution in the area.
- Gathering and compiling data and information on fishing activities targeting elasmobranchs including the potential impact on habitat Loss and Degradation as well as on bycatch of elasmobranchs species in particular those of concern interest. The main Indicative data needed is related to the fisheries and the biology of species (a standard protocol should be used):
 - Description of the fisheries
 - Catch estimates/bycatch
 - Catch by unit effort
 - Fishing areas
 - Sex and sizes composition of the catches
 - Reproductive biology;
 - Age and growth;
 - Feeding habits.

*It is suggested to update the priority species list of the GFCM by adding the following species: *Mustelus mustelus*, *Mustelus punctulatus*, *Carcharhinus plumbeus*, *Alopias vulpinus*, *Rhinobatos rhinobatos*, *Rh. cemiculus*, *Raja clavata*, *Squalus blainvillei*).*

- Updating the available information on studies on mitigation measures for bycatch reduction. It is proposed to test mitigation measures and technologies that have been developed outside the Mediterranean and that are currently used and employed by the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations;
- Analysing the available information on critical habitats (nursery) and species distribution, mainly for those at high risk which need special management or protection.
- Elaborating a GFCM publication on the above mentioned topics

II. Establish an international network of experts dealing with the subject (2010)

This action is aimed to identify international experts working on various issues of elasmobranchs (biology and ecology, economic, population dynamic...)

III. Organize in 2010 a first expert meeting.

This meeting will be aimed to analyse the progress and the outcome of the regional study on elasmobranchs and to facilitate the establishment of the international network. This meeting should also be the opportunity to prepare stock assessment of selected species and to identify specific needs (data, models...) to perform it

IV. Organize in 2010 a training course on age and growth parameters regarding the main elasmobranchs species.

This activity could be undertaken possibly in the framework of the FAO regional projects

V. Organize in 2011 a second expert meeting

This meeting will assess the available information and studies and proceed to a practical assessment of the status of selected elasmobranchs

The above proposed working programme is referring to the implementation of the *FAO International Plan and also considering the « Action Plan for the conservation of the cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean Sea » elaborated by RAC/SPA in the frame of the Barcelona convention.*

VI. Requirements for the medium term working programme

- The SCMEE is invited to designate a coordinator for this working programme. The SAC will be invited to make the final nomination of the coordinator
- This work will be undertaken in collaboration with the relevant partners and initiatives
- The FAO projects will consider the possibility to support this programme
- The SCMEE and the SAC will suggest draft Terms of reference for the proposed meetings
- The SAC will identify relevant elements to set up the required budget to perform this activity including the identification of needs in consultancy and others.