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GENERAL FISHERIES COMMISSION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

EXTRAORDINARY SESSION

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GFCM SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM PROGRAMME

INTRODUCTION

1. This document presents a summary of major activities of the medium-term programme of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and highlights some of its short term undertaking in capture fisheries and aquaculture. The programme for the medium term could be considered as including two to three biennia and compiles decisions recommendations or guidance made by the Commission which constitutes a framework for its activities. The short term covers a biennium. This usually corresponds to the cycle of the rolling Reference Framework for the work of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC), as provided by the Commission since 2001, and to the intersessional period for the programme of work of the Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ).

2. The purpose of this document is not to provide a strategic plan for the Commission which could ensure coherency to objectives, inputs, and expected results, so as activities can be organized, evaluated and adjusted efficiently. Rather, the document outlines some elements for backing the discussion on GFCM budget in conjunction with the related document quoted GFCM:ES/2004/3. It should be noted that the work programme includes only those activities which will be funded through the GFCM budget¹. Emphasis is on elements of the medium term programme as the short term activities are partly covered in the above mentioned session document.

¹ Thus activities resulting from individual obligations of Members are seldom covered. These are for example: the collection of basic data (in particular on catches and effort), the contributions of national scientists in the work SAC and CAQ, or the enforcement of agreed management measures.

3. The long term objectives for the Commission are laid down in Article III of the Agreement establishing the GFCM. It entails that fisheries management and aquaculture development will result from a collective effort amongst Members, where a large part is national and the remainder are joint activities carried out by the statutory and subsidiary bodies of the Commission, supported and co-ordinated by its Secretariat. What can therefore be achieved in the medium term heavily relies on effective progress made by the Parties, individually and collectively, on the shorter period and depends particularly on the resources assigned at national level and through the Secretariat to implement activities commensurate with available inputs.

4. Lastly, Members are invited to recall that in managing Mediterranean fisheries and aquaculture on behalf of its members, GFCM will be confronted with a set of characteristics which are not those usually encountered by most of the other international fishery commissions when addressing transboundary and high seas fisheries. These include: (i) the predominance of coastal and multi-species fisheries and small scale farmers targeting or culturing high value products; (ii) a strong impact of land-based pollution and of environmental runoff of nutrients having a significant impact of fisheries and fish farms productivity; (iii) a wide range in technical capacities, and in the social and economic conditions prevailing in the fishery sectors and economies surrounding the Mediterranean; (iv) important interactions between fisheries and aquaculture in competition for same market segments and, (v) responsibilities for enforcing management measures are a competence of Member States both at national and regional level.

ISSUES AND PROSPECTS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CAPTURE FISHERIES

5. Over recent years the volume and value of Mediterranean capture fisheries have continued to grow. This has been of concern to the GFCM as simultaneously fishing effort, and the resulting fishing mortality, for most stocks have been at levels generally considered to be too high while the catch per unit effort continued to decline in most fisheries. Such situation applies to fisheries for large pelagics and demersals, and in a lesser extend for small pelagics.

6. Within these broad categories developments are seldom uniform. Prospects for the medium term indicates that incentives for fishers to maintain fishing effort on large pelagics is likely to continue be greater than the resource can withstand. The need to effectively reduce fleet capacity will thus remain. Most fisheries based on demersal species and molluscs may no longer support increased effort and for many, schemes for limiting fishing effort need to be strictly implemented. There seems to be no strong reason to take drastic control measures on small pelagics with exception for anchovy where specific stocks tend to decline to levels lower than desirable.

7. Fishers and those drawing a livelihood from associated activities will also have to face more competition for resources from urban, touristic and industrial users of the coastal zone, including from recreational fisheries. These interest groups are all likely to demand the right to exploit and/or observe marine life in a manner that may only be satisfied if commercial fishers adapt their behaviour and practice. In turn, societal pressure on governmental and inter-governmental institutions to effectively implement responsible fisheries will likely intensify.

GFCM fisheries management in the light of recent experience

8. Until the establishment of the SAC in 1999, GFCM has directed most of its concerted action towards determining the status of marine resources and understanding the influence exerted on them by fishing and other factors. In particular GFCM has worked to: (1) improve collaboration in biological and technical research; (2) improve the exchange of information amongst members; (3) determine the potential of major stocks; (4) promote the adoption of traditional, technical measures (restrictions on mesh size, etc.) in order to improve yield per recruit.

9. To date GFCM has not systematically reviewed the extent to which its recommendations have been implemented by Members. Over recent years, it has however progressively clarified its medium-term objectives and priorities, and has identified coordinated approaches although recognizing that management measures may vary among sub-regions and type of fisheries.

10. In 1999, the Commission assigned priority to the management of transboundary and highly migratory fisheries, and in particular of those targeting shared demersal resources. GFCM has also confirmed its intention to regulate fishing through direct control of fishing effort and adjustments to fleet capacity, backed simultaneously with technical measures such as closed areas, closed seasons or limitations on day at sea. Elements of the precautionary approach to these fisheries are progressively promoted together with adapting methodologies on fisheries management based on the ecosystem to the specificities of the region. These decisions have been reinforced through the declarations of Diplomatic Conferences on Fisheries Management in the Mediterranean.

11. Since 2001, the Commission has devised major tools to contribute monitoring fishing effort, which include:

- establishing a list of shared stocks and priority species;
- agreeing upon Geographical Sub-Areas (GSAs) as basic physical units for managing fisheries;
- adopting the concept of Operational Management Units (OUs) for measuring effort and capacity of specific fleet segments targeting multi-species assemblages in each GSAs;
- adopting biological and socio-economic limit reference points for priority fisheries; establishing economic indicators such as capital investment, employment, production factors for monitoring OUs;
- reviewing the regulatory fisheries framework at Mediterranean level;
- launching an inventory of OUs and related vessel register;
- devising on the issue of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and
- initiating the mapping of essential nursery and sensitive fish habitat.

12. In 2003, the Commission further explicited its wish to better take due consideration of the mixed nature of most fisheries and to fine tune assessment methodologies of multispecies fisheries. Efforts are also under way to increase the participation of the industry to the scientific work of the Commission.

13. Activities so far initiated mainly concentrated in the areas covered by the FAO sub-regional projects and especially where concentration of shared fisheries occurs, including in the Gulf of Lions; the Gulf of Gabès; the Sicily channel; the Alboran Sea and the Adriatic Sea. The northern Aegean Sea, the Levant and the Western Black Sea were seldom covered.

14. For the Commission to consolidate recent initiatives, and extend them over its whole area of competence, it is believed that the following actions should be pursued in the medium-term:

- a) monitor the status of shared, straddling and high sea fisheries through cost-effective stock assessment methods, especially on a multispecies fisheries;
- b) timely share data and information related to Operational Units exploiting priority shared and transboundary fisheries and consider establishing a system of either log books or spot check of landing in port for gathering data on Catch per unit effort by vessel day fished in each fleet segment concerned at subregion levels;
- c) agree on optimal levels of fishing effort/fleet capacity for selected OUs in each GSAs and on an equitable allocation or sharing of fishing opportunities among and within Operational Units for achieving a sustainable fishing effort on concerned fisheries;
- d) analyse regulatory frameworks, including relevant international instruments and plans of action (IPOAs), to promote harmonization, as relevant, and regularly review

institutional and administrative schemes, especially for research, to upgrade resources and capacities to cope with commonly agreed tasks;

- e) design schemes intended to ensure sustainable exploitation of priority shared and transboundary fisheries at agreed levels, taking due consideration of socio-economic parameters and ecosystem implications, and formulate sub-regional or area specific management plans;
- f) promote joint schemes and rules, as appropriate, to combat IUU fishing,
- g) enforce management plans, and evaluate impact of implementation; and
- h) increase communication to improve coordination.

15. GFCM member countries have not yet completed the above sequence of activities for any of the Mediterranean fisheries. Work has progressed most for large pelagics (and in particular for bluefin tuna), and least, probably, for small pelagics. In this sequence of activities, GFCM members have a primary role as a regional group of partners but also through acting in their individual capacities. A strengthened GFCM Secretariat supported by the FAO regional projects would further assist in some of the essential tasks. GFCM's contribution would be essentially normative - not operational. This fact is important to note as activities 1, 6 and 7 are the most costly and fall almost exclusively on Member individual capacities.

16. The challenge confronting GFCM is therefore to complete this sequence of activities for as many of the Mediterranean fisheries as possible; that is to close the fisheries management cycle. Cross-border partnership arrangements amongst national fishery management authorities and further development of sub-regional and/or basin approaches may help GFCM overcome this challenge.

17. In parallel with activities designed to close the "fishery management cycle" for priority fisheries, GFCM could pursue strengthening programmes which are of benefit for the management of most Mediterranean fisheries. These include activities for:

- streamlining and harmonising access regime and allocation schemes for joint or similar fisheries;
- establishing shares of the total fleet capacity for concerned fisheries with representatives of all nations and fisher communities who are exploiting them;
- promoting joint research programmes and exchange of information through institutional co-operation to develop consensus on joint fishery management measure and to increase cost efficiency in research with and among fisheries and non-fishery research organisations with interest in the Mediterranean;
- harmonising methodologies for statistical data collection, analysis and reporting to respond to GFCM needs, including: agreeing on minimum technical standards, establishing the register of fishing vessels and developing a digital Atlas for Mediterranean fisheries; and,
- upgrading national capacities in the above tasks.

Components of a GFCM short-term work programme for fisheries management

18. The breakdown of the medium-term programme into short term activities is essentially a function of the availability of staff and budgets at national and Commission levels. It is believed that the priority is to secure GFCM core activities and to consolidate as a priority those undertakings which serve as foundation for the various component of the fishery management cycle, including especially joint fisheries assessment and monitoring methodologies and related statistical standards.

19. The Reference Framework for 2005-2006 is expected to be updated by the 7th session of SAC (Rome, 13-16 September 2004) for consideration by the 29th session of the Commission

(Rome, 13-16 October 2004). Without prejudging of the results of these two statutory sessions, a tentative list of meetings and activities for 2005 as identified by the SAC Sub-Committees and Working Group is provided in Appendix C.2 of document GFCM:ES/2004/3.

20. It is therefore the Secretariat views that salient component of the work programme for capture fisheries in the short-term will mainly consist on pursuing, consolidating and extending current activities as guided by the Reference Framework for the mandate of SAC for 2003-2004. Indeed, major priorities remained those already summarized in paragraph 11 above.

21. Overall, it is assumed that, as the Commission moves further into effort limitation for specific Operational Units, the amount of work will increase almost by the same proportion as will the number of fisheries involved. Similarly, a better understanding of environmental influences on recruitment or the monitoring of biodiversity, by-catch and discard through implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries management will induce additional research needs to lead to useful forecasts. The SAC will thus be called upon to support and monitor the work of a growing number of ad hoc meetings and the work load of Committee members will grow considerably.

22. Notwithstanding the above and in addition to it, a number of priorities that the Commission may wish to confirm, are recalled below.

23. The priority for dealing with the industrial sector is to enforce the binding decision taken through GFCM Resolution 95/2 and thereby establish a joint list of fishing vessels of 15 m OAL, or longer, and makes it accessible to fishery managers in all member countries through the Secretariat.

24. With regard more specifically to large pelagic species, there is a need to monitor the implementation of those ICCAT recommendations which have been endorsed by the Commission especially GFCM Resolution 95/1 on management measures for bluefin tuna. There may be also a need for GFCM to concentrate efforts on those tuna and tuna like fisheries which could only be managed efficiently through effort control, taking due consideration of their socio-economic dimension. ICCAT would continue to ensure the leading role for fisheries managed through quota systems. The adaptation of the guidelines expected from the joint GFCM/ICCAT ad hoc working group on tuna farming could be adapted to serve as minimum standards or otherwise management measures. The formalization of the cooperation, especially the normalisation of joint analysis and decision-making, with ICCAT for tunas and billfish in the Mediterranean would enhance the coordination of these initiatives.

25. For demersal and small pelagic fisheries, priority is with the implementation of GFCM Recommendation 2002/1. However, for large, distinct stocks, management via effort control means that the emphasis in data collection should shift away from single stock assessment towards assessment of the Operational units and their technical and socio-economic performance. The formulation of sub-region wide effort limitations management measures, require also specific means, through surveys and other tools, to complete and update the set of socio-economic indicators identified by SAC and perform catch assessment surveys.

26. In regard especially to small pelagic fisheries, more information is needed of the potential markets for current production as well as on the stability and resilience of these resources; their interactions with demersal resources (through predator-prey relationships), and, on their oscillations in abundance and species replacements. Some action may need to be designed to ensure that precautionary management rules are designed and implemented. In cases where pelagic species are exploited jointly with demersal species, as in the Gulf of Lions, such management measures will have to address both types of species.

27. For smaller demersal species, particularly those exploited by coastal, small-scale fisheries, the approach will have to progressively be local and/or area-based, treating as well the species assemblage as the management target and promoting eventually co-management schemes.

28. It is suggested that with the support of the FAO Regional projects work continues in priority on the fisheries in the Gulf of Lions, the Adriatic, the Sicily Channel, the Gulf of Gabes, the Alboran Sea and be expanded to the Aegean Sea and the Levant.

DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF AQUACULTURE

Issues in Mediterranean aquaculture

29. Aquaculture is a traditional activity in the Mediterranean basin, although it is not evenly distributed. Four countries account for over 83% of the production volumes and values. However, in recent years, the number of countries with substantial aquaculture production has increased. There is no reason to expect drastic changes in this scenario in the medium term. However, aquaculture, like capture fisheries, will be exposed to a growing competition from non-Mediterranean suppliers.

30. The following major trends appear from an analysis of the evolution of aquaculture production volume and value in the GFCM area:

- the supply of freshwater finfish species, and production techniques are rather stable;
- there is a relative saturation of mussels production and to a lesser extent of oysters, and a fast rise of new relative high value species like scallops and clams; and,
- the fast rise of the production of cultured seabass and seabream has led to a rapid decrease in the retail price of these two rather high value species and, recently, a stabilisation of the activity. The future of aquaculture in the GFCM member countries will be significantly influenced by the need to safeguard environment, to develop and stabilise markets, to maintain and upgrade product quality standards, and to improve the information flow and the institutional set-up.

GFCM strategy for management and development

31. Since its establishment in 1996, the overall objective of the GFCM aquaculture Committee and its networks is to promote sustainable forms of aquaculture in the Mediterranean, bearing in mind environmental quality and product quality as top priorities. Emphasis is on ensuring a synergy of action between networks, produce guidelines for planning and producers sector, maintain a constant monitoring of the situation, improve the efficiency of production systems, and enhance market development. The activities of the networks are directed towards this end and include: information exchange, workshops, exchange of scientists, joint training and research programmes, and establishment of common databases.

32. The thematic networks, TECAM, SELAM and EAM should receive support from the SIPAM network, for the creation and maintenance of specialised databases and ad hoc working groups such as on diversification, nutrition, diseases, genetics and technology, economics, marketing, and planning, etc.

33. The networks activities are for the time being implemented by pooling financial resources between the institution operating the network, FAO Fishery Department's Regular Programme and the national institutions which are hosting the events, but funding contributed by CIHEAM and FAO is limited and with the evolution of the networks the demands of the various groups are expected to grow considerably, beyond the limits of presently available financial resource. The SIPAM network is assisted by the Government of Tunisia which hosts the Regional Centre and covers its running expenses, but additional resources are needed to help in improving programming and in speeding up the collection and analysis of data and the establishment of functional national networks.

34. Funding support for the networks on a permanent basis through GFCM would allow a fuller development of a programme of work in which more events and a larger participation in them could be assured. The capability for implementation is proven for the TECAM and SELAM networks, but a definition of the future of the EAM network in terms of partnership would be

timely as recommended at the Fourth session of the Committee on Aquaculture (Alexandria, Egypt, 7-9 June 2004).

35. In order to promote responsible aquaculture development, more inputs should be provided for implementing the GFCM regional action plan formulated in 1999 pursuant to the Consultation on the Adaptation of Article 9 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to the Mediterranean. In order to facilitate this process it would seem to be of particular importance that those responsible for aquaculture in the public administration be familiar and up-to-date with the conditions confronting the aquaculture producers in subject matters such as:

- under SIPAM: data and information collection and analysis (production; markets; etc.);
- under TECAM: biological and technical aspects (disease; biodiversity concerns; product quality; etc.);
- under EAM: environmental aspects (impact of effluents; eco-system integrity; red tides; etc.); and,
- under SELAM: socio-economic and legal aspects (laws and regulations; social and economic impacts of aquaculture; farm operations, marketing and planning of public sector activities and public sector policy implementation; etc.).

36. In order for the GFCM to reach its objectives in aquaculture, the Commission will need to consider how to put the activities of the networks on a more secure footing in the long run. At the moment the networks are supported through assorted ad hoc arrangements which provide little long-term guarantee for their continuation, as proven in recent years. Strengthening the networks under the new GFCM structure in terms of institutional arrangements and financial support is of utmost importance.

37. Furthermore, at the Fourth session of the Committee on Aquaculture an updated regional project proposal was presented and discussed. The Committee acknowledged that the updated proposal listed objectives and outputs that focused attention on specific activities considered of relevance to the region. It was suggested however that the document encompassed a series of activities that were a good base for establishing the future programme of CAQ and that they should be tackled as individual activities rather than globally under a single project.

38. The strategy for the sustainable development of the Mediterranean aquaculture industry aims at (i) creating long-term secure employment and development in rural and coastal areas, (ii) assuring the availability to consumers of products of high quality standards, (iii) creating a responsive and strong market for farmed products, and (iv) ensuring an environmentally sound industry.

39. The subject areas to be covered during the short- and medium-term work programme through the Networks and ad hoc working groups will also include:

- Enhance ecological sustainability of bluefin tuna farming in the Mediterranean;
- Harmonise aquaculture certification and eco-labelling schemes in the Mediterranean;
- Establish proposals for regionally binding organic aquaculture regulations and labels for Mediterranean aquaculture products;
- Establish measurable criteria for the sustainability of aquaculture production systems in the region;
- Establish a regional approach to the marketing of specific aquaculture products in the Mediterranean; and
- Enhance application of aquaculture codes of conduct and practice in the Mediterranean.