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**Concept note for a project to support the start-up and functioning of the
Aquaculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform (AMShP)**

BACKGROUND

1. This document reports the concept note to develop a project proposal to support the start-up and functioning of the GFCM Aquaculture Multi-stakeholder Platform (AMShP). It has been prepared based on the actions identified during the Ad hoc meeting to launch the AMShP held in Izmir, Turkey, on 12–13 December 2013.

2. The outcomes of such meeting are extensively reported in the conclusions (Ref. GFCM:XXXVIII/2014/Inf.7), which report the background and rationale of all the information related to the nature, scope, mission, terms of reference and contents of the strategic areas. The conclusions also call for a project to support the AMShP, more specifically under the item “Prepare a concept note for a project proposal, including fundraising options for the support of the platform activities”.

3. This concept note is the result of a joint undertaking between the GFCM Secretariat, the CAQ Bureau and Working Groups coordinators and the AMShP Steering Committee. It presents key elements to develop a proposal for a 48-month project as outlined hereafter. The implementation of such project would occur within the remit of the GFCM Framework Programme (FWP) and thus be subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

SUGGESTED ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

4. The Commission is invited to review this document and, in particular, to:

- Provide further guidance as appropriate;
- Endorse the proposed concept note to be used as a basis to develop the project proposal for the GFCM Aquaculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform (AMShP);
- Support initiatives to raise extrabudgetary funds.

CONCEPT NOTE FOR A PROJECT TO SUPPORT THE START-UP AND FUNCTIONING OF THE AQUACULTURE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM (AMSHP)**INTRODUCTION****General and sectorial context**

In the GFCM area, capture fisheries and aquaculture play an important role in terms of contribution to economic development and also provide central sources of food and employment for coastal communities. In the Mediterranean Sea, whilst the production of capture fisheries has remained stable in the early 1990s and many stocks have quickly become fully exploited or overexploited, marine and brackish aquaculture has experienced a significant increase in production, contributing in meeting rising demand for aquatic products.

Aquaculture in marine and brackish environments in the Mediterranean and Black Sea is mainly characterized by the production of fish and mollusc. According to SIPAM¹, the total marine and brackish water aquaculture production in the GFCM member countries (excluding aquatic plants, freshwater aquaculture and marine and brackish aquaculture from Atlantic areas) has increased from roughly 540 000 tonnes in 1990 to around 1 400 000 tonnes in 2010. At the same time, the total aquaculture volume of all GFCM Members (*all environments*) reached a total of 1 961 767 tonnes, equal to a value worth some 5 500 billion US\$.

The aquaculture industry in the GFCM area is not a homogenous sector: it consists of various segments, depending on the rearing system and environment, and encompasses a wide range of technologies, farmed species, level of intensity, farms' scale and ecosystems. Marine and brackish aquaculture are now at a different stage of industry maturity, depending on multidimensional factors and could be broadly clustered into three groups according to their level of development in the different countries: 1) countries with a large and/or organized marine aquaculture sector, which are influenced by economic factors and markets conditions and thus need timely and reliable information; 2) countries with marine aquaculture at its infancy, which are more in need of technical assistance to drive the development of aquaculture; and 3) countries with no or not significant marine aquaculture, which would require technical assistance to assess their potential to develop aquaculture should they decide to invest in this sector.

However, the current level of development of aquaculture has been raising several regional and country-specific concerns encompassing economic, environmental and social aspects which could put at stake the sustainability of the sector.

The challenging endeavour ahead calls for a renewed approach to cooperation and communication. In this respect, the GFCM has acknowledged for the need to facilitate dialogue among decision-makers, administrations, researchers, farmers, farmers' organizations and industry. Promoting the role of aquaculture for food security and economic growth is one of the five main components of the GFCM Framework Programme (FWP), aimed at constructing a regional vision of the management of marine capture fisheries and aquaculture in the GFCM area.

¹ SIPAM-FAO statistics as of 3/3/2013. Data are regularly updated for fine-tuning by the countries through the SIPAM national focal points.

Problems and issues to be addressed

Although considered as a growing and promising sector, Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture is currently beset by a number of governance, environmental, economic and social shared regional concerns that could affect the long-term sustainability of the sector and that raise a series of challenges.

These challenges comprise, among others:

- The need for a **better definition/harmonization of aquaculture legal frameworks**;
- **Environmental and social concerns**, including the need to adopt allocated zones for aquaculture (AZAs) and to better integrate aquaculture into coastal zone management and spatial planning;
- The need to **improve aquaculture biosecurity in the region**, especially with regard to fish diseases and health management, the establishment of transnational exchange of information and communication on fish disease outbreaks, the responsible use of drugs and vaccines and the use of **risk assessment as a management tool for disease prevention**;
- **The lack of availability of market data for aquaculture products** and competition with imported farmed and captured products;
- **The absence of a marketing strategy (i.e. vision, strategic objectives and action plans)** due to the lack of timely collection of statistics on marine aquaculture in order to monitor, assess and forecast aquaculture production and production capacity;
- **The need to involve farmers' organizations** in regional sector development and in the identification of regional strategies;
- **The need to improve the public image of aquaculture and aquaculture products** through the introduction of certification systems and the set-up and harmonization of traceability systems;
- **The need to strengthen institutional and scientific cooperation**, including sharing knowledge and data to harmonize common procedures;
- **The need to promote risk assessment and management capabilities** at the administrative and enterprise level for the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector;
- **The lack of cooperative and harmonized industry-driven R&D**;
- **The need to follow and monitor sustainable aquaculture development** through the use of a system of indicators.

Bearing in mind the specific differences and peculiarities of each Mediterranean and Black Sea subregion and country, these concerns should be properly addressed in order to effectively respond to the sustainability challenges of aquaculture in the region and to respond to the needs for food security, employment, social welfare, economic growth and environmental conservation in the GFCM area.

These challenges require the implementation of an effective and harmonized regional strategic approach to ensure the sustainability of aquaculture taking into account regional and local specificities, as well as disparities, strengths and weaknesses of Member countries and considering the need to establish a participative process to involve stakeholders. It is widely recognized that this participation is a prerogative for the success of the sector in the region and for a more effective and coordinated development of aquaculture.

THE NEED TO SET UP THE AQUACULTURE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM (AMSHP)

Although there is a renewed international and national interest to foster aquaculture development and a general agreement on the future and strategic role of aquaculture for sustainable development, scarce attention and poor efforts and tools have been dedicated, at appropriate levels, to ensure that the development of aquaculture be indeed undertaken in a sustainable manner.

In the context of aquaculture development in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the GFCM is expected to play a renewed role in coordinating the efforts of its Members towards aquaculture sustainability in the region. This would require institutional, harmonized guidelines and technical capacity-building to promote better governance.

In recent years, challenges for the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea have drawn the attention of the GFCM, which has launched a series of initiatives addressing the sustainability of coastal and marine aquaculture in its economic, social and environmental dimensions as well as governance. As a result, an in-depth reflection has started to identify new working methods supporting the development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and Black Sea and to consolidate the work of the GFCM Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ).

At its thirty-seven session (Croatia, May 2013), recognizing the need to urgently tackle environmental and socioeconomic concerns in order to ensure the sustainable development of aquaculture in its competence area, the GFCM decided to set up a regional aquaculture multi-stakeholder platform (AMShP) to enhance dialogue and facilitate visioning, priority-setting and consultation.

Finally the CAQ organized a series of initiatives including an ad hoc meeting to launch the AMShP (Turkey, December, 2013), which was attended by a wide range of stakeholders (administrations, farmers, researchers, NGOs) who discussed the main priorities for aquaculture in the region and agreed on the following key features for the platform: thematic forums and strategic areas; nature and scope; main challenges to be addressed; objectives and beneficiaries; benefits for the countries; functioning and general approach; strategic approach and *modus operandi*.

RATIONALE FOR A PROJECT TO SUPPORT THE START-UP AND FUNCTIONING OF THE AMShP

This concept note builds on the consensus from the meeting held in Turkey and the technical discussions that followed. It proposes a project which attempts to address the aquaculture challenges ahead by establishing the Aquaculture Multi-stakeholder Platform (AMShP). The AMShP aims at bringing together institutional decision-makers and administrations, aquaculture industry and farmers, as well as research institutions in order to cooperate on aquaculture priorities and needs in the region. The Mediterranean aquaculture platform will also allow sharing knowledge, mobilizing human and financial resources, cooperating in research activities as well as formulating and encouraging R&D coordination and projects of common interest.

In particular, the platform will act as a consultative body in the form of a regional hub providing a meeting point and a work space to share information, foster dialogue and target all the challenges considered and translated into *strategic areas*² for aquaculture development. The AMShP is based on four **thematic forums** articulated in **strategic areas**, taking into consideration priorities for aquaculture development in the region. These thematic forums and strategic areas will then be translated into a plan of actions with objectives to be achieved via a series of activities. The most salient expected outputs include, among others, the following: (i) enhanced and strengthened cooperation; (ii) organization of

² The Strategic areas for aquaculture development in the Mediterranean and Black Sea identified as a result of the preliminary work on the platform are the following: a) Spatial planning and allocated zones for aquaculture; b) Aquaculture and environment interactions; c) Disease management and aquatic animal health; d) Governance and regulatory frameworks; e) Quality and safety of products, markets and consumers; f) Research, knowledge sharing and technology transfer; g) Sustainable feed production and management; h) Technology innovation and diversification; i) Social responsibility; and l) Empowering aquaculture farmers' organizations

training and national capacity-building; (iii) preparation of guidelines; and (iv) support and coordination in the preparation and implementation of a research programme.

The implementation of knowledge management and sharing practices through modern instruments matches with the modernization process undertaken by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, which will be an additional asset to guarantee the success of the AMShP. In this regard, an IT cloud-based platform, delivering a rich set of instruments to facilitate these tasks, has been established within the context of the first GFCM FWP.

The AMShP embodies the major outcomes and results achieved by the AquaMed project as well as the GFCM aquaculture projects InDAM, SHoCMed, LaMed, and MedAquaMarket, including SIPAM. The project will be implemented within the remit of the first GFCM FWP 2013–2018 which is expected to help the GFCM to effectively support its Members in their efforts to develop sustainable aquaculture.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

Project impact

In the long term, the positive impact of AMShP activities in the region will include: i) better aquaculture spatial planning and regulatory frameworks, with aquaculture well integrated in the coastal area and in harmony with the ecological services provided by ecosystems; ii) synergy among sectors rather than conflicts among users through the effective adoption of the AZA approach; iii) better assessment and forecast production also due to enhanced information on aquaculture production statistics thus improving the sector's market strategy, involving farmers and farmers' organizations; iv) improved aquaculture biosecurity for fish diseases and health management; v) enhanced communication with the society at large and more positive public image of aquaculture and aquaculture products; and vi) efficient utilization of research outputs and knowledge transfer, including better technology as well as diversified and efficient aquaculture based on improved scientific cooperation and efficient experts networks.

General objectives

The overall objective of the project is to make the AMShP operational, functional and self-sustainable. Particular attention will be given to the provision of basic knowledge for producing regional guidelines on the main common priorities for aquaculture practices and management. Consequently an expected project outcome will be the harmonization of standards, policies and legal frameworks in the GFCM area as a means to improve management for a growing aquaculture and to ensure more equitable terms for market competition while minimizing potential harmful environmental externalities.

Provisional activities for the first year of implementation

The activities listed hereafter will be carried out under the coordination of the GFCM Secretariat, the CAQ Bureau, the WGs coordinators and the AMShP Steering Committee. All available information from studies and projects (i.e. InDAM, SHoCMed, LaMed, MedAquaMarket, SIPAM and AquaMed), and other relevant initiatives will be synthesized and the existing networks of experts will be strengthened to enable a better coverage in terms of stakeholders and geographical participation. Stakeholders who are not yet involved in the Mediterranean aquaculture platform, in particular farmers or farmers' organizations, will be involved too. The first year of the project will also serve to define priority activities for years 2, 3 and 4 in terms of guidelines, training and national capacity-building while they will also address communication strategies and knowledge transfer.

The provisional work programme for the first year of the project foresees the following activities:

- Identify the needs to be addressed and organize a planning meeting of the AMShP Steering Committee
- Conduct a review and make a synthesis of existing regional initiatives, projects and programmes dealing with Mediterranean and Black Sea aquaculture and update the information available at the national and regional levels;
- Establish liaison with relevant aquaculture stakeholders to ensure a better representativeness of the sector and geographical areas;
- Define criteria and guidelines for to the implementation of working priorities and aquaculture activities in the GFCM area, within the thematic forums and strategic areas (SAs)
- Develop a synthesis of data and information collected through a regional survey;
- Prepare action plans, follow-up and guidelines for aquaculture development;
- Develop communications and knowledge transfer strategies;
- Identify IT functional requirements for each thematic forum and strategic area objectives and preparation of a roadmap.

Strategy

The strategy aims at creating a working environment where key actors, institutions, farmers/organizations and enterprises including experts have a common interest in producing results and developing activities and advice in areas that are considered as strategic for aquaculture development in the region. This approach should replace the traditional discussion forum where stakeholders were called but had limited possibilities to express their opinion or provide advice. It is expected that the work towards clear and effective outputs and the use of modern IT tools will facilitate the achievements of the AMSHP objectives.

The work within the different strategic areas and fora will be supported by the different networks established by the platform itself. At the national level, the participation of national research institutions involved in brackish and marine, farmers and farmers' organizations and other stakeholders interested in aquaculture development aquaculture, will be of a strategic importance..

Implementation

The GFCM Secretariat in collaboration with relevant party organizations and regional aquaculture stakeholders will implement the project.

Project duration

48 months in 2014–2018. The project will be executed on the basis of output-oriented yearly phases assessed by the project stakeholders, the CAQ and its Bureau, the AMShP Steering Committee, and the coordinators of the CAQ subsidiary bodies (WGSC, WGSA, WGMA, WGBS and SIPAM), so as to adjust and develop the following phases.

Funding

The implementation of the project will be subject to available extrabudgetary resources. It will be supported by ad hoc funding mechanisms (e.g. through multilateral trust-funds settings). Potential donors include GFCM Members, non-Members, international organizations and private foundations/entities.