

SMALL-SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

Stakeholder-policy interface – From data collection to management: how does the decision-making process work?

The objective of this workshop was to discuss the importance of data collection by small-scale fishers and how the information they provide feed into decision-making processes for fisheries management. GFCM fishery officers explained the process at the regional level and their partnership with fishers, WWF showcased collaborative work with fishers to understand constraints faced by the European small-scale fisheries sector in applying for funding, and comments and questions were shared by workshop participants.

Summary of key issues and conclusions

Collaboration with fishers for data collection is essential for research and management decisions. While there in the past were more top-down approaches, the importance of fisher participation for having the correct data and making appropriate decisions is nowadays widely recognized. This includes **using local ecological knowledge (LEK) for adaptive ecosystem-based management**, which is a powerful regional approach when bringing together the voices and people from different countries and locations.

The GFCM plays a critical role in fisheries governance in its area of application, having the authority to adopt binding recommendations for fisheries conservation and management and for aquaculture development. The GFCM decision-making process consists of a number of steps and processes, including systematic data collection and analysis, technical and scientific committees, working groups, and research programmes on specific fisheries. The process is supported by the provision of trainings and guidance, and information and decisions are disseminated including through the GFCM website. GFCM values and pays special attention to the involvement of all relevant stakeholders and the engagement of fishers is essential for having the necessary information for decision-making.

There must be mutual trust between fishers and data collectors for collaboration to work. Trust is also needed in a broader context to ensure compliance with regulations: a holistic approach must be taken to data collection and fisheries management through partnerships and working together. Moreover, there needs to be two-way communication and dialogue; fishers do not want to be just sources of data but also want to learn and discuss.

Approaches and methods for engaging with fishers in data collection have been developed over the years including, for example, participatory mapping and detection of changes in species composition and abundance. **New technologies, including use of mobile phones, can facilitate both data collection and communication but one needs to ensure that technologies are also suitable for small-scale fishers.**





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When making funds available for fishers, there is a need to ensure that the procedures and requirements are accessible to small-scale fishers. This can only be understood by talking to fishers and have them explain their situation and challenges. By discussing with fishers and collecting their views, WWF proposed changes to the procedures for European fishers to apply to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) that were more suitable to their needs and possibilities. There may be a need to look into similar schemes in other countries to ensure that the funding is effectively available to small-scale fishers.

Fishers have lots of knowledge on their environment and ecosystems and we need to listen to them!

