



SMALL-SCALE FISHERS' FORUM

Connecting fishers and scientists in the process of the Rapa Whelk Research Programme *Information Meeting*

Istanbul, Türkiye, 28 April 2023

Report

Executive summary

The information meeting “Connecting fishers and scientists in the process of the Rapa whelk Research programme” was organized in the framework of the [SSF Forum](#) and the [GFCM research programme on Rapa whelk](#) on 28 April 2023 in Istanbul, Türkiye. The meeting was attended by 37 attendees, from 12 different provinces, and were made up of fishers, ministry representatives, scientists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and members of the GFCM Secretariat. Overall, the meeting aimed to continue enhancing interactions between scientists and rapa whelk fishers in the Black Sea through continued dialogue on rapa whelk management and monitoring, as well as the promotion of knowledge sharing through the discussion of recent developments and study results. More specifically, the meeting focused on informing Turkish rapa whelk fishers about the biology of the species, as well as the rapa whelk surveys being carried out and the first outcomes of the socioeconomic study, conducted as part of the research programme, with a view to collecting fishers’ feedback on study outcomes and on emerging scientific advice. During the meeting, the participants were introduced to the GFCM workflow and the purpose and scope of the SSF Forum. Overall, participants engaged in productive discussions and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss and exchange on these topics.

Summary of discussions and key issues

Overview of the GFCM rapa whelk activities

Through the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture, Black Sea riparian countries agreed to enhance multilateral cooperation and implement actions to improve the sustainability of resources, particularly with regard to data collection, scientific evaluation and implementation of an ecosystem-based fisheries management framework in the Black Sea. The research programme on rapa whelk (stemming from Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/9 on a regional research programme for rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea [geographical subarea 29]), adopted in 2018, has formed an integral part of the GFCM advisory process for this species, contributing data collection and technical assistance activities that feed relevant working groups, and ultimately progressively producing scientific advice for decision-making within the GFCM.

Socioeconomic survey of rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea

The GFCM Secretariat noted that the GFCM research programme on rapa whelk was established due to the socioeconomic importance of rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea and the need to ensure their long-term economic sustainability. In order to contribute to the overall efforts, a socioeconomic study was foreseen under Work Package 5 (Socioeconomic Elements) that aims to develop the dataset for rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Romania, and Türkiye) and establish a benchmark capturing the socioeconomic impact of rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea. This phase anticipated carrying out a socioeconomic survey in 2023 to capture a snapshot of the economic status of the rapa fishery in the Black Sea during the reference year (2022). The information collected through this socioeconomic study is foreseen to serve as baseline information, facilitating understanding of the socioeconomic impacts of the management measures and facilitating consideration of economic issues by fishery managers when taking decisions.

The GFCM Secretariat prepared a first draft of the questionnaire and survey plan based on the "FAO Handbook for Fisheries Socio-economic Sample Survey", to be further refined in consultation with relevant experts and stakeholders. Country focal points from Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye expressed their eagerness to collaborate with this study, and it was agreed that the study be piloted by the GFCM experts in a few select sites with select fishing cooperatives in Istanbul in order to better refine and adapt the study to the realities of rapa whelk fisheries in the region. The most up-to-date version of the survey and the sample schemes were then shared with the experts in each country. The implementation of the survey was conducted in Türkiye between February and April 2023.

Main conclusions and way forward

Giving a voice to the fishers on the way forward

In the first part of the meeting, fishers were informed about the methodology and results of the rapa surveys conducted in the western and eastern Black Sea and rapa biology. Then, the first results of the socioeconomic study conducted with the participation of fishers were presented. Finally, participants were invited to provide feedback, particularly fisher feedback on the outputs of the socioeconomic study and their opinions on the current developments in rapa fisheries were received. In order to ensure their contribution, all fishers participating in the meeting were given the floor and ensured an opportunity to provide their thoughts and comments.

In general, the fishers agreed that the socioeconomic surveys were efficient and well implemented; they were also satisfied with the purpose of the study. The experts from the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the BS4F Project Focal Point for Türkiye expressed their appreciation for the positive way in which the fishers expressed their demands and suggestions. They provided necessary information and responses to these questions and demands and shared information about existing legislation. Overall, general satisfaction was expressed with the opportunity to exchange questions, requests and experiences in a productive way.

In particular, the fishers expressed the following remarks about the current legal regulations on rapa fishing:

- The Ministry banned fishing within 500 meters from the coast and fishers think that this regulation negatively affects the rapa catch of fishers in terms of landing volume, especially in the eastern Black Sea (Rize-Trabzon area). Since the depth increases rapidly in this region, the area where rapa can be fished remains within the prohibited area.
- Rapa fishing in the Samsun region lasts about 50–60 days a year. It is the expectation of the fishers in the region that the free time for fishing with beam trawl should be between June 1 and July 15 and

between September and December as they think that the fishing ban is in place during the most productive period for rapa whelk.

- There is a need for new fishery management that includes territorial rights (restriction of fleet mobility).
- With the implementation of quota practices, it was suggested that fishing could be carried out in a shorter time period, in a way that was more economically efficient.
- In order to ensure the effectiveness of monitoring, control and surveillance, rapa fishing between sunset and sunrise is banned by the ministry in Türkiye. Fishers in the region asked for this ban to be lifted as they noted that fishing was more productive during the night.

In addition to the above, participants provided the following remarks and conclusions:

- During the haul, smaller vessels tow the beam trawl more slowly, therefore they catch less.
- Rapa fishing is a profitable fishery and by increasing selectivity, it would be possible to fish more productively, therefore, ecosystem-friendly fishing gear trials should continue.
- Data collection by the statistics institute is quite inadequate. To improve data collection, pilot vessels can be selected to record daily data.

During the meeting, all participants also concluded that it would be useful to continue the socioeconomic study for rapa at regular intervals. In addition, participants agreed that socioeconomic studies for other priority species of the small scale fisheries in the Black Sea would also be useful.

Agenda

1. Welcome, introduction of participants, and introduction to the SSF Forum
 - Welcome by the BlackSea4Fish Project Coordination
 - Introduction of participants
 - Presentation of the GFCM workflow and introducing the purpose and scope of the SSF Forum to the stakeholders
2. Overview of the Rapa Whelk Research Programme
 - Progress and the aim of the programme and the studies planned to be carried out in the future: areas where fishers are expected to contribute
 - Discussion
3. Rapa Whelk socio-economic study outputs
 - Western Black Sea, Türkiye - sharing the aim and the results of the socio-economic study carried out with the participation of fishers
 - Eastern Black Sea, Türkiye - sharing the aim and the results of the socio-economic study carried out with the participation of fishers
 - Receiving fishers' feedback and discussion
4. Presentation of the conclusions and closure

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