

Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/3
on reducing incidental bycatch of seabirds in fisheries in the GFCM area of application

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

RECALLING that the objective of the Agreement for the establishment of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM Agreement) is to ensure the conservation and sustainable use, at the biological, social, economic and environmental level, of marine living resources in the GFCM area of application;

RECALLING the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and particularly its Plan of Implementation;

RECALLING the 2003 Declaration of the Ministerial Conference for the Sustainable Development of Fisheries in the Mediterranean (2003 Venice Declaration);

REAFFIRMING the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and recalling the precautionary and ecosystem approach to fisheries management;

TAKING into account the International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA-seabirds) adopted by the FAO;

CONSIDERING that some seabird species are listed under Annex II on endangered and threatened species of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), and that a regional action plan has been implemented by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA);

CONSIDERING the need to develop a common regional strategy to understand and possibly reduce the effect of fisheries on seabirds, including on the basis of information collected through unified protocols;

RECOGNIZING that the longline fisheries are mainly responsible for seabird bycatch in the Mediterranean and that some mitigation measures should be developed to reduce seabird bycatch;

HAVING regard to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) Recommendation 07-07 on reducing incidental bycatch of seabirds in longline fisheries;

CONSIDERING that synergies on issues of reciprocal interest shall be sought between ICCAT and the GFCM;

TAKING into account the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) on incidental catch of seabirds;

ADOPTS, in conformity with Articles 5 b), 8 b) and 13 of the GFCM Agreement, the following recommendation:

1. Contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) should develop mechanisms to ensure that incidental catch of seabirds in fishing activities is monitored, recorded and kept to the lowest level as possible, in particular for species under Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol of the Barcelona Convention.
2. The SAC and the GFCM Secretariat shall assist in developing mechanisms to enable CPCs to monitor and record data on seabirds and fishing interactions, including regular reporting to the GFCM

Secretariat, either within the national annual reports to the relevant GFCM subsidiary bodies or in accordance with the relevant data reporting requirements of relevant GFCM recommendations in line with the technical manual of the GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF).

3. Any event of incidental catch and release shall be recorded by the vessel owner/master in the logbook (or any equivalent document developed by a CPC to this specific end) and reported to national authorities for notification to the GFCM Secretariat.

4. The SAC shall evaluate, on the basis of available information, and in close cooperation with relevant international scientific committees, the risk of seabird incidental catch and mortality in different types of Mediterranean fisheries, taking into account also areas and seasons, and to compare the effects of bycatch among them. In addition, the SAC shall advise on the most adequate mitigation measures, also in comparison with the relative effect caused by anthropic disturbances other than fishing activity.

5. The SAC, in close cooperation with scientific committees of other international organizations, and in line with the FAO IPOA-Seabirds, shall advise on the technical details, feasibility, likely effectiveness and side effects, in particular, with regard to the following options for the mitigation of seabirds bycatch in the Mediterranean fisheries:

- Setting of demersal and/or pelagic longlines only at night (one hour after dusk and one hour before dawn);
- Prohibition to set demersal and/or pelagic longlines one hour after dawn till noon;
- Use of bird-scaring lines and wrap scares, in case of longlines setting during the day;
- Setting of a minimum bait weight;
- Use of thawed baits conditioning only instead of frozen baits;
- Ensuring that discards and excess baits are not rejected at sea during setting or hauling operations;
- Setting of a minimum distance to set bottom-set nets from seabirds breeding areas.

6. The SAC shall provide, also on the basis of the work done under the relevant international scientific committees and in line with the FAO IPOA-Seabirds, a unified protocol for the collection of information on seabirds incidental catch in fishing activities with high risk of interaction with seabirds in the Mediterranean.

7. The GFCM shall, upon reception of SAC advice, consider adopting additional measures for the mitigation of incidental catch of seabirds, whenever it is considered to endanger the survival of seabird populations, while taking into account the socio-economic impact on fisheries.