

Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/4
on the incidental bycatch of sea turtles 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;

CONSIDERING that Mediterranean sea turtles are listed in 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);

HAVING regard to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) Recommendation 10-09 on the bycatch of sea turtles in ICCAT fisheries;

RECOGNIZING that also some other types of fishing operations carried out in the GFCM area of application can adversely affect sea turtles and that there is a need for implementing measures to mitigate these adverse effects;

NOTING the importance of harmonizing conservation and management measures with other organizations responsible for managing international fisheries;

EMPHASIZING the need to improve the collection of scientific data regarding all sources of mortality for sea turtle populations including but not limited to data from fisheries within the GFCM area of application;

TAKING into account the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) on the use of de-hooking devices by longliners;

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) shall ensure the implementation of fisheries management measures that strongly mitigate or eliminate the risk of incidental catch of sea turtles in fishing operations and/or the mortality associated with those incidental catches.
2. Specimens of sea turtles accidentally caught in fishing gear shall be safely handled and released unharmed and alive, to the extent possible.

3. Any kind of vessels of CPCs shall be prohibited to take on board, transship and land sea turtles, unless otherwise required to rescue and to secure assistance for the recovery of harmed and comatose animals and provided that the competent national authorities concerned have been duly and officially informed in advance.
4. The SAC shall provide, in 2011, information useful for fishers on the procedure to identify comatose turtles and release them when they are safe.
5. Any event of incidental catch as well as releasing or discarding shall be recorded by the ship-owner/master in the logbook (or any other equivalent document developed by a CPC to this specific end) and reported to national authorities for notification to the GFCM Secretariat within the annual national reports to the SAC.
6. CPCs shall ensure that incidental catch of sea turtles in fishing activities is monitored and recorded. To this end, the SAC annual national reports shall contain information on the interactions of the fishing fleets with sea turtles in GFCM fisheries by gear type and characteristics: times, soak duration, depths, locations, target species, sea turtle species and disposition status of sea turtle specimen(s) (i.e. discarded dead or released alive).
7. CPCs are strongly encouraged to facilitate cooperation between scientists and fishers to collect this information.
8. CPCs shall require, that:
 - a) to the extent practicable, fishing vessels using purse seines for small pelagic species in the GFCM area of application avoid encircling sea turtles and release encircled or incidentally entangled sea turtles; and
 - b) to the extent practicable, fishing vessels using surrounding nets without purse line for pelagic species, including on fish aggregating devices, avoid encircling sea turtles and release encircled or incidentally entangled sea turtles.
9. With a view to meeting the requirements of paragraph 2, fishing vessels using longlines and bottom-set nets in the GFCM area of application shall carry on board safe handling, disentanglement and release equipment, capable of releasing sea turtles unharmed and in a manner that maximizes the probability of their survival.
10. The GFCM Secretariat shall compile, not later than 2013, the data collected under paragraph 4 as well as, in close cooperation with ICCAT and other appropriate international bodies, the available information from the scientific literature and other relevant sea turtle bycatch mitigation information, and report it to the SAC for its consideration.
11. The SAC shall provide advice, if possible in 2013 and not later than 2014, on the characteristics of devices, fishing gear and fishing operations or other approaches to mitigate/eliminate sea turtle bycatch and to release them alive.
12. The SAC shall identify current gaps in scientific knowledge and experiments, including socio-economic aspects, with a view to overcoming them and obtaining more robust and implementable results. If necessary, the SAC shall provide the protocol and the sampling design to carry out these additional studies under the responsibility of the CPCs.
13. Guidelines shall be produced by the SAC in 2012, then published, widely distributed and made available on the GFCM website in order to mitigate sea turtle bycatch, including information on already existing kits for de-hooking turtles and the provision of training materials on the use of this equipment.
14. Upon receipt of advice from the SAC, the GFCM shall consider, if necessary, additional measures to mitigate sea turtle bycatch in fisheries which have been considered most relevant

15. As appropriate, the GFCM and its CPCs shall, individually and collectively, engage in capacity-building efforts and other cooperative activities to support the effective implementation of the present recommendation, including entering into cooperative arrangements with other appropriate international bodies.