



*European Economic and Social Committee*

NAT/731  
**Multi-annual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks  
in the western Mediterranean Sea**

## **OPINION**

European Economic and Social Committee

**Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multi-annual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea**  
[COM(2018) 115 final – 2018/0050 (COD)]

Rapporteur: **Gabriel SARRÓ IPARRAGUIRRE**

Referral	European Parliament, 15/03/2018 Council, 20/03/2018
Legal Basis	Articles 43(2), 114(1) and 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Plenary Assembly decision	13/02/2018 (in anticipation of referral)
Section responsible	Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
Adopted in section	26/06/2018
Adopted at plenary	11/07/2018
Plenary session No	536
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	165/0/2

## 1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The EESC agrees with the Commission that a multi-annual plan should be adopted for demersal fisheries in the Western Mediterranean that includes measures capable of reversing the overfishing of most populations of demersal species for which data is available. To this end, the Committee considers the use of a fishing effort regime based on fishing days and by management unit (GSA) for trawling to be appropriate and welcomes the possibility of introducing a catch limit (TACs) system in the event of failure of management by effort.
- 1.2 The EESC considers that the plan's objective should be to secure sustainable fisheries from the triple environmental, social and economic point of view. The measures adopted must therefore be proportionate, so that the socio-economic impact is manageable and viable for Mediterranean fishermen. Given the scheduled adoption and entry into force of the proposal (not before mid-2019), it will be difficult to achieve the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) for all populations in 2020. The Committee nevertheless supports the EU's international commitment to reach the MSY by 2020. Its importance as part of the multiannual plan is central, especially for the most over-exploited species at risk of biological collapse. MSY for all populations should therefore be achieved according to a more realistic and reasonable timetable.
- 1.3 While recognising the specific regional features of its fisheries, the EESC considers that the Mediterranean's "particular" character requires that action now be taken on fisheries reform, and recommends that the co-legislators support an appropriate management regime that ensures fairness between European maritime regions and enables the Mediterranean region to fully achieve the objectives of the common fisheries policy.
- 1.4 The Committee acknowledges the considerable reduction in the number of fishing vessels in recent years, but nevertheless regrets that the fishing sector's efforts have not succeeded in reducing real fishing mortality for key stocks. This is due in particular to the structural overcapacity of some fleet segments, especially trawlers, and fishing efficiency gains from the modernisation of fisheries engines, gear and technology.
- 1.5 The EESC urges the Commission to take account of the other factors and human activities that affect the state of fish populations and ecosystems in the Mediterranean, as set out in point 3.5 of this opinion, and proposes that it adopt measures judged capable of reducing their impact on fish populations.
- 1.6 Since the Mediterranean is a semi-enclosed sea with 22 coastal countries, most of them non-EU, the Committee recommends that the Commission make every effort to coordinate measures for managing shared species with the other countries, especially within the framework of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).
- 1.7 Against a backdrop of serious overfishing in the region, the EESC recognises the need to adopt specific spatio-temporal restriction measures for trawls, the main gear used by the fisheries covered by the plan, in order to substantially reduce the impact - when necessary according to scientific reports - on unwanted catches of demersal species, especially juveniles, and on essential fish habitats (spawning and nursery grounds).

- 1.8 The EESC recommends that the co-legislators remove the prohibition on the use of trawls within the 100 m isobath from 1 May to 31 July each year, for the reasons set out in point 4.3 of this opinion.
- 1.9 The Committee recommends that the Commission propose including extraordinary flanking measures to offset the losses fishermen will suffer with the reduced effort and fishing mortality. It would be beneficial to broaden support for temporary cessation and to look again at support for permanent cessation.
- 1.10 Lastly, the Committee recommends that the Commission take account of all the observations made in the general and specific comments contained in this opinion.

## 2. **Gist of the Commission proposal**

- 2.1 The European Commission has presented a proposal for a regulation establishing a multi-annual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea, covering fishing for blue and red shrimp, deep-water rose shrimp, giant red shrimp, hake, Norway lobster and red mullet by fleets - mostly trawlers - from Italy, France and Spain.
- 2.2 The overall objectives of the proposal are to achieve the MSY for the populations indicated, to take a precautionary and ecosystem-based approach, and to facilitate implementation of the landing obligation, all with the aim of ensuring that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long term and managed in a way that secures economic, social and employment benefits.
- 2.3 The reason for presenting it is that the European Commission considers that neither Council Regulation (EC) No 1967/2006<sup>1</sup> nor the national management plans have worked well enough: according to the European and international scientific community, more than 80% of the assessed stocks are overfished in this subregion, at levels far beyond fishing mortality ranges consistent with achieving the MSY target.
- 2.4 The proposal puts forward a series of measures, among them establishing fishing mortality objectives ( $F_{MSY}$ ), conservation reference points, emergency measures and a maximum number of fishing days, with a substantial reduction of effort in the first year. In the event that these measures do not work, it proposes adopting TACs and, by means of delegated acts, a wide range of technical conservation measures. It also proposes a spatio-temporal closure, for the entire geographical scope of the proposal, prohibiting trawls from operating within the 100 m isobath from 1 May to 31 July each year.

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<sup>1</sup>

[Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006 concerning management measures for the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the Mediterranean Sea.](#)

### 3. General comments

- 3.1 In view of published scientific research on the matter, the EESC acknowledges the scale of the problem relating to overfishing and the ensuing major ecological crisis and agrees with the need to adopt additional management measures that can reduce fishing effort and mortality in order to restore the main stocks of overfished demersal species in the Western Mediterranean.
- 3.2 However, the Committee considers that this must be done in a proportionate way, without jeopardising the viability of Mediterranean fishermen who have, over recent years, already seen a substantial reduction in the number of fishing vessels and consequently of jobs.
- 3.3 Similarly, the EESC considers that given the situation of stocks and the planned date of adoption and entry into force of this proposal (not before mid-2019), it will be difficult to achieve the MSY for all populations in 2020. The EESC calls for special attention to be given to the most over-exploited species at risk of biological collapse (e.g. hake or red mullet) so that these objectives are not missed. MSY for all populations should therefore be achieved according to a more realistic and reasonable timetable.
- 3.4 The Committee also considers that, once again, when analysing the state of stocks and putting forward measures to improve them, the European Commission seems to overlook the other factors and human activities that have an impact on them: these include climate change, acidification, pollution, oil- and gas-related activities, maritime transport, marine waste, poor management of coastal activities, etc. In consequence, the Committee considers that the fisheries sector cannot be held solely responsible for the state of fish stocks, and a fully-fledged ecosystem approach should be applied, taking account of all the factors and activities mentioned above.
- 3.5 At the same time, the EESC is in favour of recognising the importance of trawl gear in the Mediterranean from the socio-economic point of view. Some 75% of catches of demersal species are by trawls. They must therefore be properly regulated (spatio-temporal measures) and made more selective. Trawls are the only fishing gear allowing large quantities of species such as deep-water rose shrimp, blue and red shrimp, Norway lobster, mantis shrimp, blue whiting, *Phycis* spp, dogfish, shortfin squid, cuttlefish and baby squid, among others, to be caught in the Mediterranean. More selective, lower-impact techniques, however, exist for certain species, using pots, creels, gillnets and trammel nets for example.
- 3.6 The EESC recognises the importance of effectively protecting essential fish habitats and sensitive habitats in deep-water areas, in particular where scientific advice indicates concentrations of juveniles or spawning areas for demersal species such as hake, Norway lobster or shrimp. These zones, important for the recovery of stocks, must be permanently or temporarily closed to fishing, in line with Article 8 of the CFP, on the establishment of fish stock recovery areas. The Committee supports introducing several zones into the plan, such as the Ebro delta, the Gulf of Lion and the Carloforte depths.

3.7 The Committee considers that the European Commission is once again proposing excessive use of delegated acts. Many of the measures it is putting forward fall within the scope of co-decision (Articles 13, 16 and 18).

#### 4. **Specific comments**

4.1 The Committee notes the advice of the STECF opinion (17-02) on the relative inefficiency of fishing effort management in effectively reducing fishing mortality, and that drastic reductions would be needed to reconstitute stocks at sustainable levels. The EESC also wishes to encourage a shift to a catch limit (TACs) management approach, reflecting scientific advice, which is the only approach allowing real control of fishing mortality.

4.2 The EESC considers that recital (5) concerning the objectives of the common fisheries policy (CFP) should mention social and economic, as well as environmental, sustainability.

4.3 Regarding recital (26), linked to Article 8, the Committee proposes that the reference to the adoption of management measures based on TACs be retained as a long-term aim in multi-species Mediterranean fisheries. It would be helpful for the STECF to be able to report on the main stocks that may be covered by precautionary TACs scientific advice for the MSY.

4.4 Recital (28) and Article 11(1) propose to prohibit trawls from operating within the 100 m isobath from 1 May to 31 July each year. The EESC considers this measure to be disproportionate and unjustified. EU and national legislation already contain sufficient guarantees to prevent trawls being used on vulnerable seabeds. There are also areas of the Mediterranean where the shelf is flatter and shallow, and the proposed closure would make it impossible for many trawlers to operate. The Committee advocates establishing specific closure areas which are duly justified on scientific grounds, such as those being proposed by the fisheries sector itself in several EU countries.

4.5 With regard to recital (37), linked to Article 19 which refers to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and proposes temporary cessation measures, the EESC urges the Commission to include permanent cessations that could be financed by the current EMFF and the one to come into force after 2021, as a reduction in the fishing effort and capacity will be demanded, in turn requiring compensation for vessel owners and workers.

4.6 As mentioned in point 3.3, the Committee considers that, realistically, it is difficult to achieve the  $F_{MSY}$  ranges for the stocks concerned by 2020 at the latest, as proposed by Article 4(1), without an unmanageable socio-economic impact on the fleet. The multi-annual plans have been presented with considerable delay with respect to the entry into force of Regulation (EU) 1380/2013 on the common fisheries policy, for reasons that have nothing to do with the fisheries sector. For this reason, the Committee believes that unachievable objectives cannot now be expected to be met.

4.7 Turning to Article 7(1), the Committee considers the use of a fishing effort regime based on fishing days and by management unit (GSA) for trawling to be appropriate. On the other hand, the Committee does not support differentiation according to vessel length categories as set out

in Annex I, or by effort groups according to catch species, whether blue and red shrimp and giant red shrimp in deep waters or red mullet, hake, deep-water rose shrimp and Norway lobster on the continental shelf and upper slope. The EESC thinks it would be better for management of all trawlers to be carried out by management units (GSA), with no differentiation by vessel length or sea depth: this would be artificial because for all practical purposes no such differentiation exists. Trawlers may catch species from both the continental shelf and deep water in the course of a single fishing trip. It is also important for each GSA to be managed independently, with specific measures to restore the stocks of each GSA regardless of the situation of species in other, different GSAs.

- 4.8 Concerning the baseline indicated in Article 7(4), the Committee is of the view that, in order to avoid reaching a point of no return for company profitability, consideration should be given to a minimum threshold of days beyond which no further reduction should be made.
- 4.9 The Committee agrees that, in general terms, only a working day of 12 hours per fishing day, five fishing days per week or equivalent should be allowed, as set out in Article 9(3). The EESC does, however, recommend that certain exceptions be allowed for distant fishing grounds or for Mediterranean high seas, in cases that are duly justified and with specific authorisation, so as to allow an increase in travelling time (but not in fishing hours), as already occurs in some countries.
- 4.10 The EESC considers that, in Article 9(5), the possibility should be left open of exchanging capacity in the different management areas in cases where this is made possible by an improvement in the state of the resources (in accordance with the criteria already established in the respective legislation in terms of overall capacity ceilings).

Brussels, 11 July 2018

Luca Jahier

The president of the European Economic and Social Committee

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