

MEDAC advice on the

“Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2026”

During the MEDAC WG1 meeting held on 18 June 2025 in Malta, the analysis of the “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Sustainable fishing in the EU: state of play and orientations for 2026” (FOs 2026) led the MEDAC members in agreeing on the following advice.

The MEDAC takes note that *“European fisheries continue the trend from previous years of gradually improving their sustainability with more fish stocks fished at sustainable levels in 2024 than 2003”*

The MEDAC is pleased that finally it is recognized that *“however, efforts must also be made to tackle pressures other than fisheries that are increasingly affecting fish stocks. Example climate change impact in Mediterranean Sea”*: MEDAC has already called (Ref.:135/2025, Ref.: 130/2025) on the Commission to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the other factors that impact living marine resources and biodiversity, considering that fishing is not the only cause of the deterioration of marine habitats.

- Regarding the 2025 fishing opportunities for demersal stocks in the Western Mediterranean, the objective to achieve and maintain Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) as set out in Article 7, paragraph 2 of the West Med MAP has become fully applicable following a five-year transition period.

Despite this, significant — and at times unsustainable — efforts have continued to be required from fishers in the region: further reductions in fishing effort for trawlers and longliners, lower catch limits for deep-water shrimp and hake, and the implementation of a compensation mechanism to help regain lost fishing days.

The MEDAC underlines that, beyond these constraints, the cumulative impact of these measures has led some operators to exit the sector through fleet decommissioning schemes, resulting in a permanent reduction of EU fishing capacity and severe social consequences.

Therefore, the MEDAC cannot fully endorse the statement that “thanks to EU funding, the sector’s profitability and economic performance for 2025 are projected to be comparable to previous years, despite stricter conservation measures.” In reality, the reduction in fishing days over the past five years has already pushed many operations beyond the threshold of economic viability.

- Once again, the MEDAC strongly recommends that when fishing opportunities require a substantial fishing effort reduction or a shift to low impact gears, the related socioeconomic accompanying measures should be granted.

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- Regarding the Status of the EU fleet MEDAC considers very serious and worrying that the number of fishing vessels, total power and total GT are decreasing. This means that every year fishing companies, cooperatives, workers and maritime traditions are being lost with great damage also to coastal communities.
- About socioeconomic issues, the MEDAC believes that there is a lack of robust socioeconomic data in the Mediterranean supporting the statement that “most national fleets are expected to be profitable in 2025... and several fleet segments in major fisheries will still face challenging conditions, particularly those which are out of balance, depend on overfished stocks and/or use energy-intensive fishing gear.” Paradoxically, these most vulnerable segments are also the least eligible for EU support schemes aimed at environmental transition, resulting in a double penalty: they face the full impact of restrictions without being able to benefit from the accompanying support measures
- Regarding the social dimension, the MEDAC agrees on the importance to look at fishers’ hopes, fears, expectations and needs to better design policies that support sustainable low-impact, thriving, and inclusive fisheries for the long-term.
- For the orientations for 2026 of fishing opportunities, MEDAC supports the Commission statement on its commitment to base on the best available scientific advice STECF, or on decisions taken by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMO - GFCM) including on socio-economic analysis. Once again, MEDAC invites the Commission to consider also causes other than fishing that impact on marine living resources, as it has also been stated in the first paragraph of the Communication.
- Notwithstanding with the importance of the GFCM role in the implementation of the common level playing field, the MEDAC underlines the GFCM lack of socioeconomic information to assess the impact of MAPs at the GFCM level as stated during all the GFCM SRCs, particularly due to the lack of data from non-EU CPCs.
- The MEDAC invites the Commission to take into account the survival limit of the EU fishing fleet in the Med and the socio economic impact of restoring fish stocks at sustainable level and to support the transition towards low-impact fisheries, including of “unbalanced” fleet segments. On the West Med MAP the Commission should carry out an analysis on the effects of the management measures implemented on the stock recovery and on the fishing sector during the transitional period. Then, on the basis of the available data on the impact of the West Med MAP, the MEDAC reiterates the advice Ref.:135/2025 stating that *“The EU MAP should develop management mechanisms to enable the fishing sector to plan fishing activities during the year and in the near future. No further reductions in the fishing days can be managed by the sector, because the break-even point has already been overcome”* and *“Further management measures by GFCM in the EU Western Mediterranean must consider all the effort reductions already in place for the EU fleet. The studies and the next management actions in 2026 should consider the specificities of each GSA (MEDAC Ref. 33/2025 MEDAC Advice on disaggregated data for tailored management)”*.