

**DECLARATION
OF THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF
FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
VENICE 25-26 NOVEMBER 2003**

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Preamble

1. We, Ministers and the European Commission representative responsible for fisheries, have met in Venice on 25 and 26 November 2003. Our meeting has built on the foundations laid by the diplomatic conferences in Crete in 1994 and Venice in 1996 and the preparatory meetings for this Venice Conference, which gave concrete expression to a new commitment to work together to develop sustainable and responsible fishing in the whole Mediterranean Basin in the framework of the relevant international legal instruments.

Fisheries policy in the Mediterranean

2. We note with satisfaction that since the first diplomatic conference progress has been made that gives cause for optimism regarding the establishment of a multilateral resource-management system permitting the sustainable exploitation of fishery resources in the whole Mediterranean Basin taking into account the protection of the environment.
3. That progress has included a significant improvement in the scientific advice on fisheries management brought about through the work of the Scientific Advisory Committee of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the implementation of regional research programmes. This has resulted in the GFCM adopting a recommendation on the management of certain stocks of demersal species and small pelagic species.
4. We recognise however that there are a number of challenges still to be met:
 - The GFCM must play an active role as the regional organisation responsible for the evaluation and management of fishery resources in the whole Mediterranean Basin.
 - GFCM Members must pursue and intensify efforts to allow the Commission to fulfil its mandate particularly through the timely provision of data and information as well as the active participation of scientists in the work of its Scientific Advisory Committee.
 - The scientific evaluations carried out in the framework of the GFCM and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) concerning demersal species and small and large pelagic species show overexploitation of several stocks and the need to reduce juvenile mortality and to regulate the fishing effort.
 - As regards environmental protection, steps must be taken to preserve the biodiversity and integrity of marine ecosystems in particular as far as unwanted by-catches and discarding practices.

- Illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, which jeopardise the effectiveness of conservation and management measures, must be combated.

Intention to act

5. We set out below the measures agreed at this Conference to meet those challenges.
6. We invite the GFCM to hold an extraordinary session in the first half of 2004, upon deposition of the 16th ratification concerning the autonomous budget, in order to finalise the reform of the GFCM, establishing its budget and its definitive structure, and identifying the measures the Parties wish to implement through the GFCM.
7. We undertake to establish and implement through the GFCM a Mediterranean policy designed to ensure the sustainable exploitation of migratory and shared stocks. To that end, we recommend:
 - (a) Strengthening the scientific evaluation of stocks throughout the Mediterranean and organising the systematic collection and distribution of statistical data on commercial catches and fishing efforts. We invite the GFCM through its Scientific Advisory Committee to draw up concrete proposals on how to achieve that objective and to submit them to the GFCM at the latest at its 29th Session planned for October 2004.
 - (b) Developing resource management and conservation mechanisms appropriate for the specific nature of Mediterranean fisheries, based in particular on:
 - rules on fishing effort,
 - any technical measures considered necessary, including the establishment of zones and/or periods in which fishing activities are prohibited or restricted, including for the protection of spawning and nursery areas as well as the improvement of fishing gears selectivity to limit negative impact on biodiversity.

With a view to the development of those management mechanisms, harmonised at Mediterranean level, we undertake to set up a Working Party. The mandate of this Working Party will be to draw up concrete proposals to be presented to the GFCM at the latest at its 29th Session planned for October 2004.

 - (c) to continue the current FAO Regional Programmes with a view to further develop them and ensure the coverage of the whole Mediterranean Basin.
8. In order to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in the Mediterranean, we invite the GFCM to adopt at its 29th Session planned for October 2004 effective measures based on the FAO International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU). We consider that priority should be given to establishing procedures for identifying vessels carrying out IUU activities (black list), as well as actions to be taken against these vessels, and, furthermore, drawing up registers of vessels authorised to fish (white list).

9. We recognise that the success of a sustainable policy for the management and conservation of fishery resources involves the implementation by the GFCM of an appropriate system of inspection tailored to the specific nature of Mediterranean fisheries.

We take the view that the system of inspection should be based on the following principles:

- (a) It must be in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement establishing the GFCM and relevant existing international law.
- (b) The emphasis must be placed on the primary responsibility of the flag State as well as on the responsibility of the port State and of the coastal State to ensure compliance with management measures.
- (c) Account must be taken of the cost-effectiveness of both the general measures applicable to all fisheries and the specific measures applicable on a case-by-case basis to certain fisheries.

On the basis of these principles, we invite the GFCM to adopt in 2004 the policy guidelines of the control scheme with the aim of progressively develop measures defining in particular the obligations of the Parties, the use of new technologies and mechanisms for inspection at sea and in port.

10. Against the background of closer cooperation between all States benefiting from the biological wealth of the Mediterranean marine environment, we consider that the creation of fisheries protection zones permits the improvement of conservation and control of fisheries and thus contributes to better resource management and to our common commitment to combat IUU fishing.

We consider that, without prejudice to the sovereign rights of States and in accordance with relevant international law, a more detailed examination should be made of the modalities for the creation of fisheries protection zones taking into account the precedents that exist, with a view to employing a concerted and regional approach suited to the needs of the fisheries concerned and based on dialogue and coordination.

In order to progress in this direction, the Mediterranean States shall cooperate at the appropriate regional level.

11. In the spirit of solidarity in the Mediterranean and taking into account the importance of the necessary means to implement management, conservation and control measures, account shall be taken of the particular needs of developing coastal States in the definition and implementation of such measures.

With this aim financial assistance and scientific and technical support shall be granted to the States concerned to contribute to their development.

12. We invite the GFCM to make an annual evaluation of the measures implemented in response to this declaration.