

Brussels, 8 June 2010

## **Mediterranean Fisheries: sustainable fishing practices cannot be postponed**

***Over 54% of the Mediterranean fish stocks which have been analysed by scientists are found to be overfished. To remedy this situation, the EU adopted, back in 2006, the 'Mediterranean Regulation' which aims to improve fisheries management in order to achieve sustainable fisheries, protect the fragile marine environment and restore fish stocks to healthy levels. It applies to EU member states around the Mediterranean. To allow Member States time to get prepared for the implementation of this Regulation, a long transition period of 3 years was agreed for a number of its provisions. As of 1 June, the Regulation is fully in force and must be implemented by the Member States concerned. However, Member States so far have largely failed to take all necessary measures to ensure full implementation and the Commission deeply regrets this. The Commission calls on Member States, to urgently take action, through the application of measures based on science and aiming a high degree of sustainability.***

Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki insists that the measures adopted through the Mediterranean Regulation in December 2006 should be fully implemented at this stage: ' I will see to it that the Mediterranean Regulation is strictly implemented. The transition period is over. I call on member states to take action now...' she said.

"Member States have had over three years to get ready and comply with the rules. These are the rules that Member States unanimously agreed to through a compromise in 2006, which had amended the more ambitious Commission proposal. It is difficult to accept that Member States are not willing or able today to implement even the 2006 compromise. I am truly disappointed. ", she added.

Furthermore, Commissioner Damanaki said : "The state of several fish stocks in the Mediterranean is alarming, and fishermen are catching less every year. We need to reverse the worrying trend of unsustainable fishing practices and impoverishment of marine resources and we need to do it now. But for this to happen, everybody must take their responsibilities and abide by the agreed rules.'

The Mediterranean Regulation<sup>1</sup> takes steps towards mainstreaming environmental concerns into fisheries policy and establishing a network of protected areas where fishing activities are restricted to protect nursery areas, spawning grounds and the marine ecosystem. It also sets out technical rules on allowed fishing methods and distance from the coast and provides for protected species and habitats.

The Regulation gives greater possibility for Member States to adapt measures to the precise local situations, but this approach does not work and will fail if member states do not do their homework.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Regulation (EC) 1967/2006 of 21 December 2006

When the Regulation entered into force at the beginning of 2007, it envisaged a long phasing-in period (until 31 May 2010) for some provisions. It would therefore be reasonable to expect national administrations to have had ample time to arrange for the transition and ensure compliance. Yet even now they seem unprepared and the level of compliance with the Regulation appears to be problematic.

Recent inspections by the Commission detected serious violations regarding the minimum mesh size of fishing nets, the minimum size of fish and other marine organisms and other selectivity issues. And this despite the fact that all relevant provisions have been binding since the Regulation came into force 3 years ago. Moreover, Member States have not fulfilled their obligations to submit management plans within the deadlines or designate additional fishing protected areas as required by the Regulation.

It is worth stressing that the Regulation allows a certain number of fishing practices to continue as long as scientific assessments show that the impact on species and habitats is acceptable and they are managed under a national plan.

The European Commission deeply regrets this state of affairs, which is bound to have a direct effect on the state of the stocks and the sustainability of the fisheries. It has strongly urged Member States to act swiftly to rectify the situation and is working closely with them to solve the outstanding problems. In case of serious infringement, however, the Commission will have no choice but to take firm steps to ensure compliance.

Mediterranean fisheries cannot reasonably be managed by the Mediterranean Regulation or by the European Union alone. The involvement of all sea-facing countries is crucial and the EU is very active within multilateral organisations such as the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), so as to improve scientific knowledge and create above all a level-playing field with the overarching aim of promoting sustainability.

**See also**

[MEMO/10/243](#)