

EC Seminar "State of Fish Stocks and the Economics of Fishing Fleets"

15 July 2016, Bruxelles

Speech of the President Giampaolo Buonfiglio

As generally expected, stock assessment data in the Mediterranean show that serious over exploitation of resources continues, with F values much higher than Fmsy, confirming the trend seen in recent years.

Faced with this situation, during last year's seminar on this issue, MEDAC stated grave concern and proposed a specific initiative to the Commission involving a change of pace for the Mediterranean in order to deal with what is rapidly appearing to be an emergency, even with regard to the objectives set by the reform to the CFP.

It is clear that the management model applied so far in the Mediterranean, including fishing effort management, the reduction of fleet capacity and technical measures, has not achieved the expected results and it is necessary to supplement the CFP with innovative approaches and measures for the basin.

In this context, time is not an independent, negligible variable, considering on the one hand the seriousness of the data and on the other hand the long timeframe for the development, approval and implementation of the new tools established by the reformed CFP: multi-annual stock management plans.

Therefore, the keywords are now innovation and acceleration, in order to reverse the trend and attempt to avoid having to implement emergency measures that could have an unsustainable socio-economic impact.

On this basis, since July 2015 dialogue has been intensified with DG MARE and with the Commissioner, Mr Vella, whose sensitivity to the issue made it possible to organise a high-level seminar in Catania at the beginning of February this year, with the participation of all Mediterranean Member States. During the seminar the situation was examined and possibilities for innovations to and acceleration of the CFP in the Mediterranean were discussed, without forgetting the need to increase dialogue and joint action with non-European areas of the basin through the GFCM.

Several concepts emerged from the seminar in Catania: the need to broaden the vision through an ecosystem approach that also considers other sources of impact, spatial planning, the intensification of control activities, evaluation of the possibility to introduce TACs and quotas through the GFCM for certain species targeted by monospecific (or less multi-specific) capture systems, greater responsibility and awareness by fishers and much more.

The problem is how this can be translated into measures and actions rather than remaining just good intentions.

I believe that the first concrete signal came with the recent GFCM recommendation in the Strait of Sicily, which sees the permanent closure of three areas totaling 2000 square kilometers, and the temporary closure



of the Gulf of Gabès with a 3-year plan. It is hoped that this will be followed by the establishment of other Fisheries Restricted Areas in the same area, towards the south-west shore and that this plan will be implemented as soon as possible to guarantee the sustainable management and the profitability of the fisheries.

I think that other developments can be identified in the proposed regionalised of discard management plans for different target species, submitted by Member States for the Western Mediterranean, Adriatic and South Eastern Mediterranean in view of the rapidly approaching entry into force of the landing obligation on 1st January 2017. These proposals have substantially implemented the concepts put forward by the MEDAC and contain commitments by the MS involved concerning pilot projects on the improvement of fisheries strategies to limit by-catches by improving gear selectivity and the closure of nurseries, with fear, repeatedly expressed, that this will encourage a black-market of unwanted catches, as well as the construction of stations for the discards supply chain on land where feasible and requests for *de minimis* exemption where not this is not feasible.

In recent months the MEDAC has also produced opinions on the management of small pelagic species in the Northern Adriatic (Italy, Slovenia and Croatia) as well as for swordfish fisheries and demersal species in the Sicily Channel, achieving good levels of internal agreement, and we also feel we have provided useful contributions to the work of DG MARE.

These are some initial, important steps which may yield concrete results if due continuity is assured. Where the acceleration of the process is concerned, (adopting new management plans or modifying existing ones) this is beyond the scope of stakeholders and can only be dealt with in a political and institutional framework, as with the possibility of intensifying the schedule.

