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**Report from the Outcome of the Debates of the 42nd and 43rd Sessions of
the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)**

Executive Summary

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) is a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO), established under the provision of Article XIV of the FAO Constitution in order to rationally manage fisheries and sustainably develop aquaculture in all marine waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. Fifteen out of its 24 contracting parties, plus the European Union, and four out of its five cooperating non-contracting parties are currently FAO member countries in the Europe and Central Asia region. At its last two annual sessions, in 2018 and 2019, the GFCM adopted a number of management measures for both the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. Thanks to the adoption of a mid-term strategy for the years 2017-2020, the GFCM currently contributes to accelerating progress at the regional level towards meeting the targets set out in the context of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14.¹

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¹ SDG 14 is to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

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I. General background information

1. The GFCM was established in 1949, pursuant to Article XIV of the FAO Constitution, and came into force in 1952. In 2014, the GFCM amended for the fourth time its constitutive agreement, with a view to modernizing its institutional and legal framework and furthering its role in the Europe and Central Asia region. This role is of primary importance, given that 15 out of the 24 contracting parties to the GFCM,² as well as four out of its five cooperating non-contracting parties,³ are FAO member countries in the Europe and Central Asia region.

2. The fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions are currently regulated by the GFCM as a result of the power of the commission to adopt binding recommendations with a view to promoting the conservation and sustainable use – at biological, social, economic and environmental levels – of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture. The implementation of these recommendations is facilitated by the GFCM Secretariat, which backstops the commission's four statutory committees, namely the Scientific Advisory Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ), the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC), the Compliance Committee (CoC), and the Committee on Administration and Finance (CAF).

3. The main challenges affecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions include the overexploitation of main commercial species, interactions among fisheries/aquaculture and other human activities, and the incidence of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Significant efforts are currently being made by the GFCM to promote the subregional approach for cooperation in the field of fisheries and aquaculture. Following the successful showcase of the establishment and operationalization of the subregional technical unit in Burgas, Bulgaria, the GFCM is enhancing the subregional approach by the establishment of the subregional technical unit for the western Mediterranean in Spain, which would be housed in premises offered by the city of Malaga, Spain.

II. Relevant outcomes of the GFCM Sessions

4. The 42nd Session of the GFCM was held at FAO headquarters in Rome, from 22 to 26 October 2018.

5. A total of eleven binding recommendations were adopted, dealing with the following issues: multiannual management plans for European eel, for deepwater red shrimp fisheries in the Levant Sea and Ionian Sea, and for demersal fisheries in the Strait of Sicily; conservation of sharks and rays; international joint inspection and surveillance in the Strait of Sicily; regional research programmes on blue crab in the Mediterranean and on rapa whelk fisheries in the Black Sea; further emergency measures for small pelagic stocks in the Adriatic Sea; access to information and data related to monitoring, control and surveillance; and regional marking of fishing gear.

6. The GFCM decided to launch a second Performance Review process, which responds to the call made by both the FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and the United Nations General Assembly to ensure that all RFMOs carry out periodic, independent reviews of their performance in order to respond to the many challenges with which they are confronted that arise from such issues as long-term overexploitation of resources, environmental degradation and climate change, among others.

7. The commission also decided to organize in June 2019 the second conference on Mediterranean fisheries and aquaculture, including social development for small-scale fisheries and progress on the Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration, and to celebrate the International Day for the Fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing. The conference called upon countries and stakeholders with

² These 15 are Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey. The European Union is also a contracting party to the GFCM.

³ These four are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The GFCM also enjoys close cooperation with the Russian Federation.

vested interest in the sustainability of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea and their fisheries to assess progress made towards the implementation of the Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration and to renew commitments towards achieving the targets therein.

8. The GFCM approved its budget, which amounted to USD 2 537 241 for 2019. In addition, the GFCM has been granted extrabudgetary funds amounting to approximately USD 7.7 million. It also endorsed the new bureaus of the SAC, the Working Group on the Black Sea, and the CAF. Finally, the commission elected its new chairperson and vice-chairpersons.

9. The 43rd Session of the GFCM was held in Athens, Greece, from 4 to 8 November 2019.

10. A total of eight binding recommendations were adopted, including on a set of management measures for the use of anchored fish aggregating devices in common dolphinfish fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea and for sustainable trawl fisheries targeting giant red shrimp and blue and red shrimp in the Strait of Sicily; on management plans for the sustainable exploitation of blackspot seabream in the Alboran Sea, for the sustainable exploitation of red coral in the Mediterranean Sea, and for sustainable demersal fisheries in the Adriatic Sea; and on information on access agreements.

11. The GFCM examined the findings in the report of the second GFCM performance review, carried out by the independent performance review panel, in line with the criteria adopted by the commission at its previous session. The panel had appraised significant progress by the GFCM in different areas since its first performance review, although it stressed that weaknesses still existed in GFCM performance. The commission agreed to prepare a short analytical summary of the report and to distribute it among the Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-Contracting Parties (CPCs) ahead of all relevant intersessional meetings. This course of action would contribute to the formulation of advice relating to the follow-up on the second GFCM performance review, to be validated at the intersessional meeting of the commission on the post-2020 strategy and submitted to the next annual session of the commission.

12. The intersessional meeting on the strategy post-2020 will be held in June 2020 to assess the progress made in relation to the different mid-term strategy targets and to compile the views of CPCs and partners. In addition, in light of the growing role of the GFCM in the Black Sea, the commission decided to organize the Black Sea Conference, which will be held in Georgia in 2020. Finally, following the successful outcomes of the Forum on Fisheries Science in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (Fish Forum) and of the High-level Conference on MedFish4Ever Initiatives, as well as the positive achievements at the subregional level, the GFCM decided to organize the Second Fish Forum in Turkey and a conference to follow up on MedFish4Ever initiatives in Greece in 2021.

13. The GFCM approved its budget for 2020 and 2021, amounting to USD 2 611 142 yearly. It endorsed the new bureaus of the CAQ and the Working Group on the Black Sea. The commission also agreed to renew the mandate of the Bureau of the CoC for an additional two years.