



Food and Agriculture  
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General Fisheries  
Commission for  
the Mediterranean

# The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea



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# What is the RPOA-SSF?

The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) is a historic political commitment setting out a ten-year roadmap towards the long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability of the sector.

Signed as a Ministerial Declaration in September 2018 by high-level representatives of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries and the European Union, its launch followed a lengthy process of consultation and collaboration between fishery stakeholders, experts and authorities across the region.

It builds on the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines), which were endorsed by FAO and represent the first international instrument dedicated entirely to the small-scale fisheries sector, and adapts them to the context of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

**The RPOA-SSF sets out the specific principles, objectives and – importantly – concrete actions that are needed over the following decade to guarantee a sustainable future for small-scale fisheries in the region.**

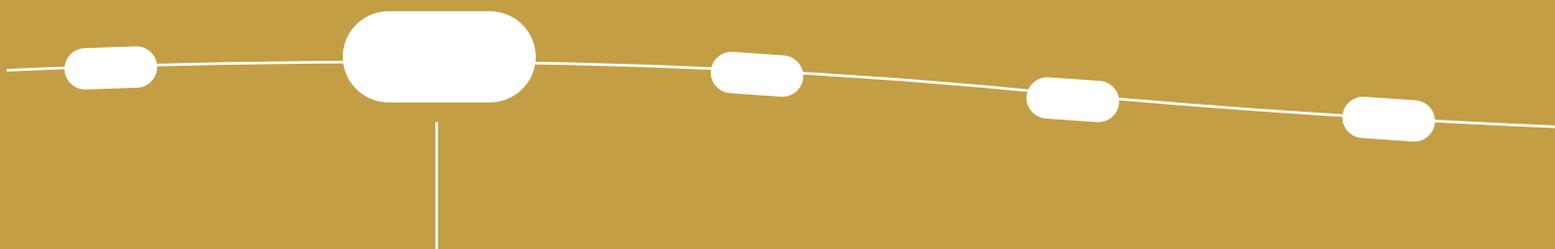
**Its scope goes far beyond traditional fisheries management strategies: it takes a holistic view of the small-scale sector and the vital role it plays in the economic, social and cultural context of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and includes all these dimensions in its strategic aims. The fishers themselves, and the communities they support, are at the heart of the plan.**



# The road to the RPOA-SSF: three historic events

While the signing of the Ministerial Declaration on the RPOA-SSF set in motion a process which will last until 2028, the document itself was the result of several years of hard work by a wide range of actors.

Three key events were instrumental in the collective effort to grow knowledge, build political support, and make real plans for change:



MALTA

**November 2013**

## **First Regional Symposium on Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea**

For the first time in the region, national administrations, international organizations, scientists, non-governmental organizations, fisher communities, stakeholders and civil society sat around the same table to discuss building common strategies to support the sustainable development of the small-scale fisheries sector. This laid the groundwork for a large-scale regional programme.

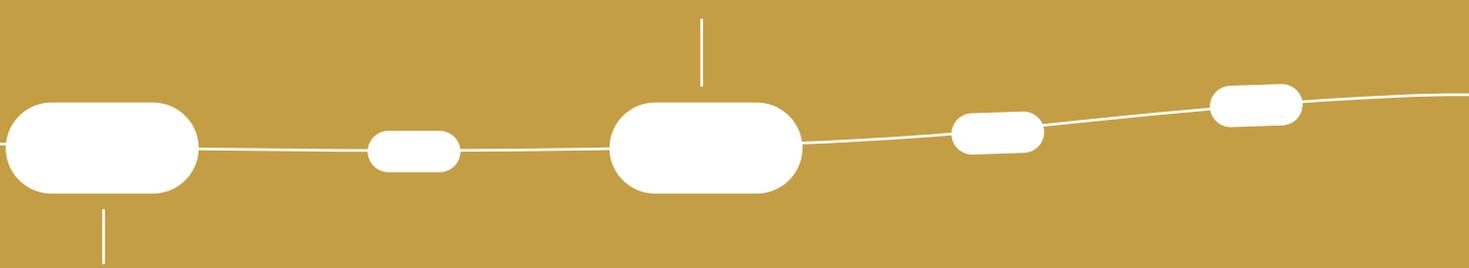
MALTA

May 2016

**Adoption of Resolution GFCM/40/2016/2 for a mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries**

The GFCM adopted this ground-breaking resolution in a concerted effort to reverse stock declines across the region in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14, “Life below water”. The resulting GFCM mid-term strategy had five target areas, of which Target 2 was to “Support livelihoods for coastal communities through sustainable small-scale fisheries”.

The RPOA-SSF emerged as a direct result of this commitment.



ALGIERS

March 2016

**Regional Conference on “Building a future for sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea”**

The Regional Conference built on the momentum to further intensify efforts to support small-scale fisheries. Delegates agreed to identify efficient mechanisms and coordinated strategies with this in mind, calling in particular for a tailored implementation of the SSF Guidelines in the region.

# RPOA-SSF: main objectives\*

The RPOA-SSF divides its aims and actions across nine key topics, with clear targets to achieve within each one by 2028.

The key topics are as follows:



## Scientific research

Science provides the solid foundation for achieving meaningful change: the RPOA-SSF fosters integrated regional research activities to increase knowledge and understanding.



## Small-scale fisheries data

It is impossible to manage what can't be measured, so efforts to collect data of all kinds are being stepped up across the region with the active involvement of the fishers themselves.



## Small-scale fisheries management measures

An environmentally, socially and economically sustainable future requires careful planning, regulation, monitoring and control to create an equitable sector for small-scale fisheries actors and encourage best practices.



## Small-scale fisheries value chain

The RPOA-SSF aims to help small-scale fishers increase the value of their catch and increase their incomes, promoting initiatives such as local cooperatives, certification schemes, direct sales and other forms of value-chain innovation.

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\* The RPOA-SSF is reproduced in full at the end of this summary.



## Participation of small-scale fisheries in decision-making processes

A sustainable future will be impossible to achieve without the support and participation of the small-scale fishers themselves, so their active involvement in key decisions is a vital strategic aim of the RPOA-SSF.



## Decent work

Ensuring decent and safe working conditions and social protection for small-scale fishing communities is key to strengthening the resilience of both the current and potential future workforce.



## Climate and environment

As well as needing particular support to tackle the new challenges posed by a changing climate and disruptions to marine ecosystems, small-scale fisheries have a central role to play in the blue transformation of our region, in everything from marine protection to the circular economy.



## Capacity-building

Education, training and technical and financial support are all required to support small-scale fishing communities in diversifying their activities, increasing their incomes and improving their prospects, particularly in the case of women and young people.



## Role of women

Gender equity is no less important in small-scale fisheries than any other sector, and the RPOA-SSF aims to give women the support they need to play a full role and participate on an equal footing.

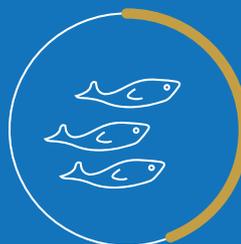
# Small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea in numbers

Today, as it always has done, the small-scale sector dominates the regional fishing fleet in terms of livelihoods and vessel numbers. This is what the small-scale sector looked like when the RPOA-SSF was launched in 2018.

In the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, small-scale fisheries represented



over  
**84%**  
of the fishing  
fleet



**44%**  
of fishing  
capacity



**62%**  
of the total  
workforce  
onboard fishing  
vessels



**24%**  
of the total  
landing  
value from  
capture fisheries

# Why the RPOA-SSF is needed



Fisheries have been at the heart of Mediterranean and Black Sea societies since the distant past, supporting livelihoods in coastal communities, driving local economies, and playing an important role in food security and regional cultures. But today their health and sustainability hangs in the balance, and the next decade could represent a critical turning point in their history.

Small-scale fishers are deeply rooted in local economies, traditions, cultural heritage and values, and they play a pivotal role in social inclusion and cohesion in many parts of the region.

They supply markets with quality products, attract tourists, sustain remote communities and support hundreds of thousands of shore-based livelihoods. In many cases, they're also the primary stewards of the precious marine resources they depend on. But small-scale fishers have too often been excluded from the centralized management processes that have affected their livelihoods and the lives of their communities. Lack of representation can result in their interests being marginalized, potentially undermining issues ranging from their access to fishing grounds at sea, to landing sites and markets on shore, to the financial support and social protection they need in their communities.

Their lack of participation in decisions that affect them can also hamper small-scale fishers' capacity to innovate and their ability to meet minimum compliance requirements for data collection, traceability, monitoring and control.

This results in a sector that can face challenges maintaining safe conditions at sea and receiving decent rewards on shore, and ultimately a sector that faces difficulty attracting young people to refresh its ageing workforce.

It also means that fishery management has frequently lacked the invaluable dimension that small-scale fishers can bring to the table, with their local ecological knowledge built up over generations and their watchful presence on the water.



The RPOA-SSF was launched in direct response to these shared challenges.

By bringing small-scale fishers into decision-making processes and developing management systems better adapted to local needs, it aims to transform their communities into positive drivers of change at a time when their future – and the long-term sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea ecosystems – is at stake.

# MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON A REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BLACK SEA

The Ministerial Declaration on a Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea introduces the objectives and principles on the basis of which Ministers and High-level representatives from Mediterranean and Black Sea countries agree to support the sustainability of small-scale fisheries.

You can read the full text of the Ministerial Declaration here:

[www.fao.org/gfcm/rpoa-ssf](http://www.fao.org/gfcm/rpoa-ssf)

The document details, through the 59 paragraphs of the RPOA-SSF, the concrete actions to be implemented through 2028.



# REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE BLACK SEA

The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) is composed of the following actions:

- 1 | Adopt, as soon as possible, a characterization of small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, reflecting their socio-economic relevance and specificities on the basis of a set of indicative criteria (vessel size, gear used, duration of fishing trip, non-vessel based fishing activities, etc.).



## A. Scientific research

- 2 | Initiate an integrated regional research activity in order to collect accurate, valid and complete data on the value and socio-economic impact of small-scale fisheries.
- 3 | Develop scientific studies to strengthen knowledge about the interactions between small-scale fisheries and marine ecosystems and their impact on marine resources. When relevant, involve fishers in scientific monitoring activities, taking into account their traditional knowledge and ensuring that they are informed of the results of these studies.
- 4 | Develop scientific studies to strengthen knowledge about the interactions between recreational fisheries and small-scale fisheries.
- 5 | Design and implement pilot and innovative projects covering all aspects of small-scale fisheries.
- 6 | Consider the assessment of small-scale fisheries within forecast studies on adaptation to climate change, including its carbon-binding potential.



## B. Small-scale fisheries data

- 7 | Using all appropriate tools, develop information and data collection systems that involve small-scale fisheries actors in the collection of regional-level data on fleets and fishing activities, including the record of all catches.
- 8 | Establish national fishing fleet registers that record small-scale fishing vessels.
- 9 | Integrate the traditional ecological knowledge of small-scale fishers into fisheries management.



## C. Small-scale fisheries management measures

- 10** | Implement, where appropriate, fisheries management plans which establish specific rules designed to ensure, in particular, preferential access for sustainable and low-impact small-scale fisheries along the coastal band.
- 11** | Taking into account management measures and their impact on the resources, facilitate equitable access to living marine resources that should be based on sustainable fisheries and their socio-economic role.
- 12** | Support investments in small-scale fisheries to, among others, improve selectivity, preserve biodiversity, minimize bycatch and interactions with vulnerable species and predators and promote energy efficiency.
- 13** | Guarantee good and fair access to landing sites and ensure they are adequately equipped to facilitate small-scale fishing activities (fully serviced docking areas, moorings, refrigerated warehouse, drinking water service, ice machines, etc.).
- 14** | Promote the reduction of incidental catches by, *inter alia*, improving the selectivity of gear, training fishers and strengthening rescue and first aid centres.
- 15** | Encourage small-scale fisheries to be fully equipped with efficient communication, navigation and onboard catch preservation equipment, in accordance with flag state requirements; develop small-scale fisher training programmes for optimal use of such technologies.
- 16** | Encourage the traceability of small-scale fishing vessels by using technologies based on radio frequencies, satellites or internet applications.
- 17** | Promote traceability of gear used by small-scale fishers, in particular through the marking of fishing gear.
- 18** | Promote, where appropriate, participative surveillance of fishers, in particular in the identification of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices.
- 19** | Strengthen control and surveillance of all fishing activities, including other commercial and recreational fisheries, both at sea and on land, making efforts to avoid IUU fishing practices.
- 20** | Promote the restoration and conservation of essential fish habitats for small-scale fisheries, potentially including the construction of artificial reefs, according to the GFCM Practical Guidelines for Artificial Reefs in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and in respect of the environment; the use of unsuitable materials and dumping of waste shall be strictly avoided.
- 21** | Prepare best practice guidelines to extend and share successful experiences at the regional level.



## D. Small-scale fisheries value chain

- 22** | Promote the creation or reinforcement of cooperatives, producers organizations or other collective organizations, in order to improve market access for small-scale fisheries products and to increase the availability of local food within coastal communities.
- 23** | Establish regional plans for small-scale producer organizations in order to increase their profitability and improve the quality and traceability of their products.
- 24** | Enhance the promotion of direct sales of fresh fish in accordance with the national regulations.
- 25** | Organize information and/or awareness campaigns for consumers on the importance of responsible consumption of local products, on the role of short value chains in guaranteeing freshness and on the consumption of less-known and underutilized species, with a view to increasing the diversity of catches.
- 26** | Promote the creation of certified seafood labels and fishery product brands that can encourage operators and consumers to buy locally and sustainably sourced seafood; encouraging the creation of affordable certified brands should promote responsible small-scale fisheries and raise consumer awareness on these local fisheries.
- 27** | Encourage the first processing of landings by the fishers themselves, their cooperatives or their producer organizations in order to expand the shelf life of products.
- 28** | Ensure traceability of small-scale fisheries products, guaranteeing that the local products introduced in the market are of good quality and environmentally sustainable.



## E. Participation of small-scale fisheries in decision-making processes

- 29 | Associate small-scale fisheries in the creation and implementation of marine development strategies and local development strategies.
- 30 | Integrate small-scale fishers in a participative approach to the designation and management of marine protected areas, in order to enable the commitment and compliance with rules of all stakeholders, engagement in conflict resolution processes and sustainable management through an integrated ecosystem-based management, in line with scientific recommendations.
- 31 | Ensure that marine spatial planning at the national and regional level takes into account small-scale fisheries and that they are specifically represented throughout the entire process.
- 32 | Promote participative management systems, such as co-management bodies, where fisheries management measures and accompanying socio-economic programmes may be established and implemented.
- 33 | Where necessary, at the national level, reinforce the analysis of legislation and institutional mechanisms which ensure the recognition of relevant small-scale fisher organizations and their inclusion in all activities regarding the sustainable development of the sector.
- 34 | Establish roadmaps and/or plans that would enable positive synergies between small-scale fisheries and other related marine economies and initiatives, in particular coastal and ecological tourism, marine biotechnology, marine protected areas and aquaculture.
- 35 | These plans should result in concrete benefits for responsible small-scale fisheries, such as shared infrastructure, suppliers and/or workers, direct selling opportunities, multi-purpose activities, supply of fish fry to aquaculture, collection of marine organisms for marine technology, better monitoring and understanding of marine ecosystems for sustainable fisheries.
- 36 | Organize supporting structures with the aim of addressing competing situations that may occur between small-scale fisheries and other interacting sectors.
- 37 | Encourage good cooperation between small-scale fisheries and recreational fisheries.



## F. Capacity-building

- 38** | Establish a regional platform to engage and promote cooperation among small-scale fisheries associations (including women's associations) in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. This platform is expected to build on and reinforce existing subregional and national platforms in order to set up a participatory mechanism for knowledge sharing, collaboration, stakeholder involvement, representation of small-scale fisheries actors in decision-making processes and dissemination of best practices.
- 39** | Reinforce capacity building of small-scale fisheries and give specific priority to financial assistance, in order to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes and ensure a level playing field, in particular through the following actions:
- a. create and reinforce technical and financial support (direct/indirect incentives, bank loan schemes, etc.);
  - b. assist small-scale fishers and women's organizations in simplifying their access to institutional funds, in order to ensure their transition towards long-term selective and sustainable fisheries;
  - c. support the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries organizations and their networks;
  - d. ensure access to consultancy services; and
  - e. facilitate education and training opportunities for men and women of the fisheries sector, such as summer universities, aimed at developing fisheries-specific skills, policy knowledge (fisheries, environmental) and, in particular, knowledge of innovative solutions and technology developments.
- 40** | In the context of local community development, implement regional diversification schemes that help small-scale fishers (including women of the fisheries sector) to diversify their activities (for example, entrepreneurship and leadership training, nautical and ecological tourism, recycling waste found at sea, marine scientific sampling missions).
- 41** | The above measures shall be applicable to small-scale fishers and their families, and particular attention shall be given to women and young fishers.
- 42** | Develop a regional programme aiming to provide support and technical assistance, in particular to developing countries, in order to build capacity within small-scale fisheries.
- 43** | Encourage local and national administrations to disseminate and communicate information on fisheries policy developments, including on innovation and technology.
- 44** | Encourage professional training opportunities for fishers, aiming to facilitate the generational turnover.



## G. Decent work

- 45 | Promote decent work, the improvement of working conditions as well as social protection for all small-scale fisheries workers.
- 46 | With the assistance of the GFCM, organize by 2019 a conference to address the issue of social development, employment and decent work in relation to small-scale fisheries.



## H. Role of women

- 47 | Support projects dedicated to enabling women to undertake small-scale fishery activities.
- 48 | Secure equal participation of women in decision-making processes for policies directed towards small-scale fisheries.
- 49 | Encourage the development of better technologies appropriate to the work of women in small-scale fisheries.



## I. Climate and environment

- 50 | Involve the knowledge and expertise of small-scale fisheries actors in the development of policies and plans addressing climate change in fisheries, in particular adaptation and mitigation plans, including within the framework of nationally determined contributions set forth by the Paris Agreement.
- 51 | Assist and support small-scale fishing communities affected by climate change or natural and human-induced disasters.
- 52 | Promote innovative solutions for the valorization and utilization of non-indigenous species.
- 53 | Encourage small-scale fishers to actively participate in the circular economy, for instance, by establishing plans for the disposal and recycling of recovered nets in order to reduce the impacts of ghost fishing; such plans may include rewarding schemes for collecting marine litter.
- 54 | Involve small-scale fisheries in the designation and management of marine protected areas to promote the use of sustainable fishing practices, in line with their environmental conservation objectives, and to raise awareness about the benefits of healthy oceans for productive fisheries.



## J. Role of the GFCM

- 55** | The GFCM shall provide technical assistance to developing states for the development of participative and cooperative management plans for small-scale fisheries.
- 56** | The GFCM shall establish, at its forty-second session, a timetable indicating short-term and mid-term targets for the implementation of the actions listed in the RPOA-SSF.
- 57** | The GFCM shall steer and coordinate actions to ensure the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, and provide an annual report on the implementation of the actions set forth in the RPOA-SSF, reflecting reports provided by riparian countries.
- 58** | The GFCM is invited to closely work with relevant organizations for the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, where appropriate through existing memorandums of understanding.
- 59** | The GFCM shall organize a mid-term conference in 2024 to evaluate progress in the implementation of the RPOA-SSF.

# About the GFCM

The GFCM is a regional fisheries management organization, operating under the framework of FAO, whose authority extends over all marine waters of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Its main objective is to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture. It plays a critical role in fisheries governance, taking binding decisions for the management of stocks across the basin.

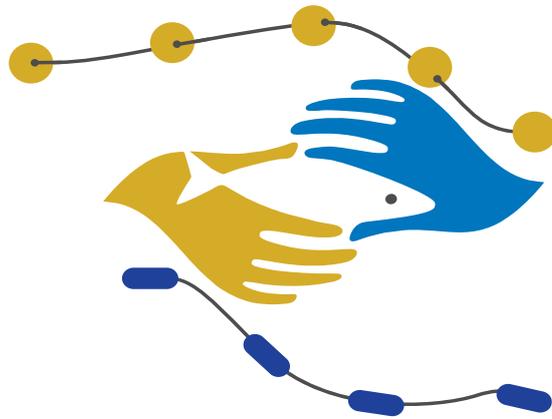
The GFCM works across five subregions, each covered by a technical unit. The technical units promote cooperation and facilitate dialogue on key challenges, providing countries with strategic and technical assistance to meet their commitments to the GFCM.

## Friends of Small-Scale Fisheries

On the occasion of the signature of the RPOA-SSF in 2018, the GFCM, together with the Black Sea Advisory Council (BISAC), the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies – Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari (CIHEAM-Bari), Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), launched the Friends of Small-Scale Fisheries (Friends of SSF) platform.

Friends of SSF is a regional network which fosters transnational collaboration and builds synergies between the key stakeholders working to build a sustainable future for small-scale fishers in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and for the marine ecosystems upon which they depend.

The network actively promotes the implementation of the RPOA-SSF by gathering data and increasing knowledge, developing projects and initiatives, sharing best practices, and ensuring that detailed and reliable information on small-scale fisheries is made available.



The Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (RPOA-SSF) is a historic political commitment setting out a ten-year roadmap towards the long-term environmental, economic and social sustainability of the sector. Signed as a Ministerial Declaration in September 2018 by high-level representatives of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries and the European Union, it sets out the specific principles, objectives and –importantly– concrete actions that are needed over 2018–2028 to guarantee a sustainable future for small-scale fisheries in the region.

This booklet summarizes the aims of the RPOA-SSF and gives an overview of the process leading to its creation. It also includes some background on the current state of the region’s small-scale fishing sector, and explains why the plan is so urgently needed.

The full text of the RPOA-SSF is included at the end of the document.



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