



## EastMed

### Report of the Tenth Coordination Committee Meeting

FAO HQs - Rome, Italy, 26-27 November 2019

The conclusions and recommendations given in this and in other documents in the *Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean* series are those considered appropriate at the time of preparation. They may be modified in the light of further knowledge gained in subsequent stages of the Project. The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of FAO or donors concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or concerning the determination of its frontiers or boundaries.

## **Preface**

The Project “Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean- EastMed is executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by Italy and the EC DG MARE.

The Eastern Mediterranean countries have for long lacked a cooperation framework as created for other areas of the Mediterranean, namely the FAO sub-regional projects AdriaMed, MedSudMed and CopeMed II. This made it more difficult for some countries in the region to participate fully in international and regional initiatives for cooperation on fishery research and management. Following the very encouraging experience of technical and institutional assistance provided to countries by the other FAO sub-regional Projects,

## **EastMed**

The project was born to support the development of regional cooperation and the further development of multidisciplinary expertise necessary to formulate appropriate management measures under the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the principles of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) to ensure rational, responsible and participative fisheries management

The project’s **longer-term objective** is to contribute to the sustainable management of marine fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean, and thereby to contribute to supporting national economies and protecting the livelihoods of those involved in the fisheries sector.

The project’s **immediate objective** is to support and improve the capacity of national fishery departments in the sub-region to increase their scientific and technical information base for fisheries management and to develop coordinated and participative fisheries management plans in the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region.

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## **Publications**

EastMed publications are issued as series of Technical Documents (GCP/INT/363/EC – 041/ITA/TD-00) and Occasional Papers (GCP/INT/363/EC –041ITA/OP-00) related to meetings, missions and research organized by or conducted within the framework of the Project.

Occasionally, relevant documents may be translated into national languages as EastMed Translations (GCP/INT/363/EC– 041/ITA/ET-00)

Comments on this document would be welcomed and should be sent to the Project Headquarters:

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## **Preparation of this document**

This document is the final version of the Report of the 10<sup>th</sup> Coordination Committee meeting of the EastMed Project, organized by the FAO-EastMed Project (Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean) Rome (Italy), 26–27 November 2019.

EastMed, 2019. Report of the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee. GCP/INT/363/EC– 041/ITA/TD-28. FAO, Rome. 33 pp.

### **ABSTRACT**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Coordination Committee meeting of the EastMed project was held at FAO HQs in Rome, Italy, from 26 to 27 November 2019. The meeting was attended by representatives from Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine, by staff of the FAO Regional Projects MedSudMed and AdriaMed, the GFCM Secretariat and the European Commission. After the election of the chairperson, the activities of the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the project were presented, followed by proposals of activities for the 11<sup>th</sup> year from each country. The prolonged activity of EastMed was considered as a sign of the continued importance and relevance of the Project in promoting scientific cooperation and capacity development for sustainable fisheries management in the sub-region. Participants expressed their satisfaction and thanked both the staff of the project and the donors for their contribution. The agreed work plan for the 11<sup>th</sup> year includes training and support in data collection, data analyses, activities aiming at strengthening stakeholders' awareness and activities in promoting regional participation and cooperation. EastMed will continue to support the participation of experts in FAO-GFCM meetings and, in close cooperation with the other Mediterranean regional projects, to find synergies among the various activities in the region.

**REPORT OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE EASTMED  
CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE**

**FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy  
26 – 27 November 2019**

**Opening of the meeting and election of the Chairperson (Agenda Item n. 1)**

1. The tenth meeting of the Co-ordination Committee of the FAO EastMed Regional Project “Scientific and Institutional Cooperation to Support Responsible Fisheries in the Eastern Mediterranean” was held in FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy from 26 to 27 November 2019.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives from Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Turkey and Palestine, by staff of the FAO Regional Projects EastMed and AdriaMed, the GFCM Secretariat and the European Commission. The list of participants is given in Annex I.
3. The meeting was opened by the FAO Fishery Resources Officer and Acting Coordinator of EastMed, Mr Marcelo Vasconcellos, who welcomed the participants on behalf of FAO. He highlighted the good level of participation of countries in the Coordination Committee. Syria was the only country not able to attend due to last minute logistical problems. He also reminded participants that 2019 was the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the project. The Coordinator remarked that the prolonged activity of EastMed was a sign of the continued importance and relevance of the Project in promoting scientific cooperation and capacity development for sustainable fisheries management in the sub-region. He finally thanked the donors for the support to the project and expressed his wishes for a fruitful Coordination Committee meeting.
4. Mr. Alaa Eldin El Haweet from Egypt was elected as chairperson of the meeting.

**Adoption of the Agenda (Agenda Item n. 2)**

5. The Agenda (Annex II) was presented to the Coordination Committee. The Chair invited the participants to offer any comments, but all agreed that the draft agenda reflected their expectations of the meeting. The Agenda was adopted with no changes.

**Report on the Project’s Progress (Agenda Item n.3)**

6. Mr Stefano Lelli, EastMed Fishery Expert, introduced this agenda item and the document “Report on the Intersessional Activities of the Project” EastMed CC10\_02 (Annex III) in which the main activities carried out by EastMed from November 2018 to November 2019 were described. The activities carried out correspond to the prioritized work programme

and recommendations of the 9th Meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee. The presentation highlighted the achievements in relation to EAF pilot studies, the continuous support to training and data collection, stock assessment and socioeconomic data analysis. It was also noted the good level of cooperation with the GFCM and other FAO regional projects, including in the organization of the Summer School in stock assessment, the training in discards/bycatch monitoring, the vulnerability assessment to climate change and the data preparatory meetings for the assessment of sardinella and deep water red shrimp stocks in the sub-region. The Committee was also informed of the synergies established with other FAO projects and units working in the Mediterranean, including with the Interregional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on “Blue Hope in the Mediterranean”.

7. The Committee members thanked the project for the activities carried out in the intersessional period and remarked the importance of all the achievements. Requests were made to make the reports and studies developed in the last intersession available in the website of the project as soon as possible.
8. In relation to the EAF pilots, Turkey informed the Committee that the management plan developed for Gökova will be signed by the General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture of Turkey and that the implementation phase would follow soon. The representative from Lebanon also informed the Committee about the status of the management plan for purse seine fishery. According to him, the management plan was agreed by the Ministry of Agriculture and that work is still ongoing on the legal framework to implement the outcomes of the EAF study. Also the country awaits the results of the stock boundaries work for sardinella, which would have consequences for the management of the fishery. The representative from Palestine reiterate his interest in implementing an EAF pilot also to fisheries in Gaza.
9. The Committee appreciated the actions regarding the training of scientists on stock assessment methods, such as the summer school. Participants highlighted the need for more extended trainings to consolidate the knowledge on new methods and tools, such as data-limited stock assessment methods and R. The representative from GFCM reported on the positive experiences with the training of trainers carried out within the Black4Fish project in the Black Sea. The approach facilitated the transfer of knowledge among experts and enhanced capacities in selected methods. Such an approach could be adapted and attempted in the Mediterranean as a complementary strategy to the Summer School.
10. The representative of GFCM also acknowledged the importance and relevance of the work being carried out in the joint working groups on deep water red shrimp and sardinella, and invited EastMed countries to report on the progress made during the sardinella data preparation meeting during the upcoming GFCM WGSA. She finally invited the project to present the results of the trials with small scale fishing gears in Lebanon in the next meeting of the WGFIT.

11. With regards to fishing technologies, the representative of DG MARE informed the Committee that the EU is currently preparing a two years projects for the Adriatic and Northwestern Mediterranean that will apply new gear selectivity devices, such as grids, to small scale fisheries and trawls. The project is expected to be presented in the next meeting of the WGFIT.
12. The representative of DG MARE thanked FAO for organizing the meeting and reaffirmed the commitment of DG MARE in continuing supporting FAO Regional Projects. He also informed the Committee that the grant for 2020 was recently finalized and approved by DG MARE and that the administrative issues between FAO and DG MARE should be concluded soon. In his intervention he questioned on the reasons for the project to continue supporting countries with the biological data collection for priority species included in the DCRF. According to DG MARE, countries should be responsible for collecting such mandatory data and it would make more sense for the project to support the collection of data on other species, not included in the priority list for the sub-region. In response to his question, representatives from Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and Turkey reminded the Committee that without the project support they would not be able to collect the required data due to limited financial support.
13. Participants highlighted that due to recurrent delays in the disbursement of funds from EastMed, data collection activities have been interrupted for extended periods in recent years. In some cases countries have been able to maintain some data collection activities, but in other cases the collection stopped completely affecting availability of data for stock assessment. To clarify the situation, a request was made by DG MARE for the project to provide a Table with the data collected by species in each country. The Table was included in the EastMed CC10\_02 (Annex III).
14. The EastMed Coordinator explained that the reasons for delays in implementing project activities in recent years were related to administrative issues, including the need for annual signatures of the EastMed project agreements between beneficiary countries and FAO. He explained that without the signed agreements, FAO cannot implement project activities in the countries. Depending on the country, the process of signature can take several months to be completed causing extensive delays in the implementation of activities. He noted that the Project has been trying some mitigating measures to avoid delays and to ensure that planned activities are implemented, such as obtaining waivers for carrying out sub-regional activities and requesting DG MARE to extend the termination date of the annual grants. He also added that in the project agreement for 2019, FAO informed countries of the multi-annual nature of the project with the intention to avoid the need for annual signatures. The effectiveness of this measure is yet to be tested and will require at least that the 2019 agreements are signed by the countries. He also informed the Committee that an additional solution being discussed between FAO, GFCM and donors

is the possibility of integrating the project under the framework of the GFCM. The integration would be in line with the mandate and capacities of the GFCM, especially in view of the established sub-regional approach, and would create the administrative conditions for a smooth operation of the project. He finally mentioned that, based on discussions with DG MARE, such integration could be done starting in 2021.

15. The representative from Lebanon highlighted the importance of maintaining the support of the project to avoid gaps in data and to ensure that the country can comply with the requirements of GFCM DCRF. Although he welcomed the move of the project under GFCM umbrella possibly in 2021, he highlighted the importance of ensuring the smooth implementation of the project until then.
16. According to the representative from Egypt, the orientation of EastMed changed with time. At the beginning the project did not focus so much on GFCM activities. It started by addressing national requests to improve capacity to manage fisheries in a sustainable way. He considered important to maintain this characteristic of the project in an eventual move to GFCM.
17. The representative from Palestine concurred with Lebanon on the importance of ensuring the good functioning of the project in the next two years. He also expressed his concern that because Palestine is not a member of GFCM, an eventual move of the project to GFCM could leave them without support.
18. The representative from Cyprus was in favor of the move of the project if it solved the administrative issues faced at the moment. On the other hand, he cautioned that if the purpose of the project becomes purely to respond to GFCM requirements, it may overlap with the SRCs mandate. He was of the opinion that the project needs to find an efficient mechanism for dealing with the administrative issues while maintaining its current character. The representatives from Egypt suggested that one way to avoid overlaps would be to ensure that EastMed addresses issues of importance to the countries and not covered by the GFCM.
19. The representative from Turkey saw the integration of the project in GFCM as beneficial as both EastMed and GFCM have the similar overall goal of promoting the sustainable use of shared fisheries resources in the Eastern Mediterranean.
20. Participants concurred that to be successful, the integration should maintain important characteristics of the project, particularly the bottom-up, demand-drive approach to country support and the neutral environment that enables the project to discuss and advance cooperation on technical grounds. A future integration should not change the character of the project but help mitigate the administrative difficulties faced to implement activities.

21. The representative from GFCM highlighted the good experience with the implementation of the Black4Fish Project in the Black Sea. She noted that the project has been managed in way that ensures a bottom-up approach to capacity development and a neutral work environment that has been beneficial for all Black Sea countries, irrespective of their status as members of the GFCM. A similar approach could be applied to the EastMed upon integration.
22. Addressing the general comments expressed by the Committee regarding a possible move of EastMed under the umbrella of GFCM, the Executive Secretary of GFCM remarked that the GFCM has a positive experience in running a similar field project in the Black Sea (Black4Fish). The project has a coordinator and a steering committee which defines the demands for assistance. He highlighted that in principle all the requests received by field projects should be aligned with the mandate of the GFCM, as the objectives are the same, and added that technical activities are open to all members and non-members. Regarding the option to integrate EastMed within GFCM, he clarified that the idea is to have a testing phase for one or two years and later decide whether to go back to the initial status or stay with the new option. He finally noted that the main change would be on the operational management of the project that would continue to run with a coordinator and a Coordination Committee. For the first year, it is expected that the amount of funds from the donors would be the same. Due to the legal and institutional framework of GFCM, having a Secretariat and an autonomous budget, the move of EastMed would result in higher amounts allocated to technical activities and would allow to stabilize the staff in charge of the implementation of the project.

#### **GFCM activities for the next intersessional period (Agenda item 4)**

23. The GFCM Secretariat gave an overview of the work foreseen by the GFCM for the 2019/2020 intersession relevant to the Eastern Mediterranean, dividing it into regular SAC activities and mid-term strategy activities. Thus regular SAC activities included i) the working groups on stock assessment, ii) assessment and management of round sardinella and deep-water red shrimp, iii) the launch of research programmes for red coral and European eel in the Mediterranean, iv) the implementation of priority actions in the RPOA-SSF, v) fishing gear and gear technology and vi) essential fish habitats (EFH) and vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). On the other hand, mid-term strategy activities will cover i) advances towards an adaptation strategy for climate change and non-indigenous species, ii) issues related to bycatch and surveys at sea, iii) the regional survey on socio-economic characteristics of fisheries, iv) data collection on recreational fisheries and v) advancing on the estimation of IUU. The presentation ended with a list of relevant meetings for the coming intersession.
24. The Committee highlighted the relevance of the work on Non-Indigenous Species, especially in view of the rapid expansion and potential impacts of lion fish and puffer fish

in the subregion. Some of the options for mitigation being attempted in Cyprus and Turkey were discussed, such as bounty systems and the identification of potential commercial use for the species. The Committee highlighted the importance of tackling the problem in a concerted way in the sub-region to be effective. The role of climate change on the expansion of NIS was also highlighted. Participants were informed that a dedicated session on adaptation measures to climate change should be held on the next SRC-EM to address this and other implications of climate change to the sub-region.

#### **EastMed Work Plan for the next period (Agenda Item 5)**

25. EastMed presented the document “Tentative Work plan for 2020” (Document FAO EastMed: CC10/03). The draft proposal was based on the previous years` work plans and the priorities identified by the GFCM for the sub-region. The Committee revised the draft work plan and the final proposal is reported in Annex IV. A summary of the planned activities and meetings is reported in the Table 1. The Committee was reminded that the full implementation of the planned activities will depend on the availability of funds for next year.
26. In terms of databases and information systems, the Committee agreed on the continued support of the project to ensure that countries are able to maintain and/or upgrade, if necessary, catch and effort database and software applications. The EU DG MARE requested that options for upgrading the available system should be backed up by appropriate cost-benefit analysis. Regarding electronic licensing systems, Egypt expressed the need to establish a national web based fishing licensing system similar to FLS in Lebanon.
27. The Committee concurred with the planned organization of a seminar of EAF-based experiences in the Mediterranean, in order to inform the next SRC-EM on the merits and contribution of such approach for the implementation of the RPOA-SSF. New pilots on EAF could also be considered, especially in view of the growing interest on aquaculture in the sub-region and the potential interactions between the two sectors. In this regard, the representative from Turkey informed the Committee on the ongoing experiences and planned activities with the re-stocking of groupers and sea cucumbers in the Gökova area. In areas where aquaculture is not yet developed, adequate planning through and ecosystem approach would be beneficial and useful to manage potential conflicts with the fisheries sector. The representative from Lebanon stressed his interest in joining such initiative, building on recommendations produced by EastMed in the past.
28. The representative from the EU DG MARE noted that EU funds cannot be used to support new pilot activities in countries where previous pilots have been already financially supported by EU funds, but instead prioritize funding for EAF applications in countries that have not received funding for that purpose before. EastMed noted that upon request

of countries and availability of funds from other sources, the project will make an effort to launch new pilots.

29. The representative from Italy remarked the interest of Italy to collaborate with countries in the sub-region in activities related to aquaculture. She noted that similar experiences are being supported by Italy in the framework of AdriaMed and MedSudMed projects.
30. With regards to training on stock assessment, as in previous years, the plan is to have the summer school as the main training opportunity. However, upon request of countries and depending on the availability of funds, ad-hoc trainings on specific methodologies could be launched, for instance on data-limited methods. The project should also aim to increase the number of trained scientists. The representative from GFCM informed that such activities are also a priority for the GFCM, and that they are open to collaborate with EastMed and the other regional projects in the implementation of such training activities.
31. The representatives from Cyprus and Greece expressed the interest in organizing training courses on discards and vulnerable species, specially for identification of elasmobranch species in the case of Greece. The training would also be useful for countries planning to organize surveys at sea, such as Lebanon and Egypt. Giving the relevance of the activity to the sub-region, such training should be open for participants from all countries.
32. The Committee agreed with the proposal to dedicate a specific session within the EastMed WG on Data Analysis to progress in the identification of EFH for priority species in the sub-region. The representative from GFCM noted that such information would support the ongoing work of the WGVME and would also be welcomed by the SRC-EM. The Committee noted that there are several ongoing activities at the regional scale on EFH, within the framework of Oceana, IUCN and other organizations, and that the project should consider building on these experiences and engaging these organizations in the work.
33. Regarding the proposed survey on fish eggs and larvae, the representative from Lebanon noted that the results of such surveys would be very useful for the ongoing work on the management plan for sardinella fisheries in Lebanon, which foresees the definition of spawning areas and the evaluation of the current closed season. Egypt also emphasized the importance of fish eggs and larvae survey for better management of sardinella. The Committee recommended to engage all countries in a sub-regional training of experts to standardize methodologies and survey protocol.
34. The representative from Greece expressed the interest in participating in sub-regional activities aimed at studying the species distribution and population dynamics of NIS and the interaction between fishing activities and marine turtles and mammals.

35. DGMARE noted that merging priorities from the EastMed Coordination Committee should be considered prior to the preparation of the grant application. In that respect the time of the meeting of the Coordination Committee should be decided accordingly. The Committee recommended the organization of the next Coordination Committee meeting in early September 2020.
36. Other smaller comments received by the Committee were incorporated in the final work plan which is reported in Annex IV.

### **Adoption of the report**

37. The Committee adopted the work plan. The report, including its annexes, will be edited and finalized by project and published as EastMed document before the end of 2019.

### **Date and venue of the next Coordination Committee meeting (Agenda Item 8)**

38. The Committee agreed to organize the eleventh Coordination Committee meeting in the third quarter of 2020. The meeting could be held in Rome, Italy.

### **Closure of the meeting**

Table 1. Proposed plan of activities for 2020.

ACTIVITIES	Quarter
1. Support to fisheries and biological data collection in Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey and Syria.	–
2. Support to development, maintenance and upgrading of fisheries information systems, including databases and software, in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and Syria	–
3. Support the development and implementation of EAF pilot case studies in the sub-region, including new pilots integrating an ecosystem approach to aquaculture.	–
4. Organization of a Seminar on EAF experiences in the Mediterranean, in collaboration with other Regional Projects and other organizations	1 <sup>st</sup> – 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter
5. Organization of a session within the SRC-EM on vulnerability and adaptation options to climate change in the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with the GFCM	2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter
6. Organization of the Summer School on quantitative fisheries stock assessment, in collaboration with FAO Regional projects, GFCM and JRC	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter
7. Organization of additional ad hoc trainings on stock assessment and R, upon request of countries.	–
8. Support on-the-job training activities for the design of scientific surveys and the analysis of survey data, upon request of countries	–
9. Organization of sub-regional training in the sampling and identification of by-catches, discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species in collaboration with GFCM	–
10. Organization of EastMed Study Group on intercalibration of fish otolith reading	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter
11. Organization of the EastMed WG on Fisheries Data Analysis, including a session on EFH for priority species.	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter
12. Organization of the data preparation meeting for deep water red shrimp in the Central-Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with MedSudMed and GFCM	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter
13. Support the implementation of the adopted work plan for the identification of stock units of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean (FISHBONE), including a final workshop	4 <sup>th</sup> quarter (final workshop)

ACTIVITIES	Quarter
14. Support the participation of EastMed countries in planned meetings and data analysis activities planned under the EU-funded stock identification study for priority species in the Mediterranean (MED-UNITS)	–
15. Support further experimental trials using artisanal fishing gears in Lebanon	–
16. Support the organization of exploratory egg and larvae surveys at sea in Egypt and Lebanon	–
17. Support the pilot testing of LEK protocol for the monitoring of non-indigenous species in relation to fisheries in the eastern Mediterranean	–
18. Facilitate attendance of national experts to the relevant meetings of GFCM and its subsidiary bodies	–
19. Improve the dissemination of project events, results and achievements through the enhancement of project website, the preparation of technical report and publications and the production of other promotional material (e.g. videos)	–
20. 11th Coordination Committee meeting	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter

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## Annex II – Final Agenda

### **Tenth Meeting of the EastMed Coordination Committee Rome, Italy, 26 – 27 November 2019**

FAO HQ, India Room (A327)

#### **Annotated Draft Agenda**

#### **Day 1: Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November, 10:00-17:00**

##### **1. Opening of the meeting and election of the Chairperson**

- Welcome and introduction of the participating countries international organisations and other participants and designation of the chairperson

##### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

##### **3. Report on the Project's progress**

- Presentation of the EastMed Project's 9<sup>th</sup> year activities  
*Information will be given on the progress and achievements of the project since the last Coordination Committee Meeting.*

##### **4. GFCM activities for the next intersessional period**

- Presentation of the GFCM planned scientific and technical activities of relevance to the Eastern Mediterranean sub-region.

##### **5. Project's Programme for the next period**

- Presentation of the work plan for the next period  
*Following the current activities of the project, and taking into account national and sub-regional priorities, the work plan for the next intersessional period will be discussed and finalised.*

##### **7. Any other matters**

##### **8. Date and venue of the next Coordination Committee meeting**

#### **Day 2: Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November, 10:00-12.00**

##### **9. Adoption of the report**

**Coffee breaks:** 11:00 - 11:15 and 15:30 - 15:45

**Lunch breaks:** 13:00 - 14:00

## **Annex III – Report on the Intersessional Activities of the Project**

(November 2018 – November 2019)

### **FAO EastMed Working Document**

#### **Introduction**

This document summarizes the main activities carried out by the Project EastMed from November 2018 – October 2019, including workshops, training, research activities and the technical assistance provided to the countries; as well as the cooperation established with the GFCM, the SAC and Sub-Committees and other relevant institutions.

The activities carried out during the inter-committee period comply with the methodological framework of the project and its mandate for this phase and follows the recommendations of the 8th Coordination Committee meeting of the project (FAO HQs, Rome, Italy 13 – 14 November 2018). This report details main outputs of the activities of the project and the results achieved with direct reference to the following project components:

- 1) Institutional strengthening.
- 2) Staff training and development.
- 3) Data collection and analysis.
- 4) Increased participation and Cooperation.

#### **Project Component 1 - Institutional Strengthening**

*The objective of this component is to strengthen the capacity of the fisheries departments/agencies in the Eastern Mediterranean countries to undertake the basic elements of fisheries monitoring and management. Particular attention is given to the development and strengthening of fisheries information systems in selected countries and to support actions for mainstreaming the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Through this component the project has also supported the identification of options for the diversification of fisheries activities in selected countries. The activities under this component contribute to Targets 1 and 5 of the GFCM Mid-term Strategy and to action (b) of the Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration.*

- ***Support the development and implementation of fisheries management plans according to EAF framework (GFCM Strategy Target 5, Output 5.1)***

In an effort to mainstream the ecosystem approach to fisheries management, since 2016 EastMed has been supporting three EAF pilot studies in Eastern Mediterranean countries. Pilot studies were the following: the small-scale fisheries in Gökova Bay, Turkey; the small-scale purse seine fisheries for small pelagics in Lebanon; and the demersal fisheries of Egypt. Following the overall FAO methodology for EAF implementation, draft fisheries management

plans were prepared for the three pilot studies, two of them awaiting endorsement of national authorities and one (Egypt) already in process of implementation. During the intersession the project has worked with fisheries authorities of Egypt to technically support the operationalization and implementation of the management plan, including the set up and operation of fisheries advisory committee for the fishery. With a view to support actions to address some of the priority areas identified in the draft management plan for Gökova (Turkey), the project facilitated the engagement of Turkey in the FAO Interregional Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) on “Blue Hope Initiative in the Mediterranean Sea”. The objective of the TCP (involving Turkey, Algeria and Tunisia) is to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders to develop integrated, multi-sectoral investment plans using the FAO Blue Growth (BGI) framework. The second interregional meeting TCP was held in Akyaka (Gökova Bay), Turkey, April 8-12, 2019. The meeting aimed to take a deeper-dive on the interests and opportunities identified and discussed at and since the inception meeting (October 2018), for the purpose of further elaborating inclusive, feasible and sustainably bankable projects. The meeting focused on two objectives: i) Continuing to gather the necessary contextual information to prepare the investment plans and ii) brainstorming and developing the technical needs and enabling conditions (to later be validated) for the investment plans. The Project co-organised this meeting and chaired the session on Fisheries management to sustainably enhance fisheries production. In the framework of the same TCP, the Project travelled to Istanbul, Turkey on 8-9 October 2019 to participate in the “Pescatourism dialogue in the framework of the Blue Hope Technical Cooperation Programme” aimed at finding in Turkey a reasonable way of merging the fisheries sector with the touristic market to limit excessive exploitation of the resources and also to create an alternative source of income for fishermen, their families, and also other people traditionally associated with the fisheries sector. In this occasion the Project assured an active role in the upcoming activities of the TCP. Building on the experience acquired in previous initiatives, Turkey has initiated the process for a new EAF pilot under the guidance of the EastMed project. The aim of this initiative is to prepare the ground for a transition to an EAF-based fisheries management in Gökçeada Island (GSA 22).

➤ ***Support for the IT infrastructure in Palestine (Palestine Strip) and Lebanon***

As part of this component, the project has been also providing IT and laboratory equipment following specific request from the participating countries and based on the availability of resources. In the intersession period the project supported the procurement of two laptop computers to instrument the fisheries laboratory in Palestine for the analysis of fisheries, socio-economic and biological data collected with the support of the project. The project has also initiated the procurement of a Solar System that can provide continuous electricity supply to the laboratory in Palestine.

The project continued to support the maintenance and upgrade of the web licensing system (FLS) in Lebanon through a local service provider. The work involved fixing software bugs, upgrading the license card printing and adding new data fields required by the DCRF.

➤ ***Assessment of vulnerability and adaptation options to cope with climate-related impacts on fisheries in Eastern Mediterranean***

In the framework of the GFCM mid-term strategy towards the sustainability of fisheries in the Mediterranean, and with the objective to advance in the development of a regional strategy to cope with the effects of climate change on fisheries, a roadmap was established by GFCM

which foresees the implementation of vulnerability assessment case studies in each of the Mediterranean sub-regions. In the Eastern Mediterranean work is currently ongoing for the assessment of the vulnerability of small-pelagic and demersal fisheries in the sub-region. The work involves the preparation of a scoping report detailing the current ecological, socio-economic and institutional situation of the fisheries as well as the main climate-related drivers of change to the fisheries. In a second step the different pathways of impact of climate on fisheries are identified and their relative importance assessed by means of a risk assessment. The results of the assessment will be presented for validation and as basis for identifying adaptation options during an expert meeting planned to be held in early 2020, possibly back-to-back to the SRC-EM.

## **Project Component 2 - Staff Training and Development**

*The objective of this component is to develop technical capacities of national experts on different aspects related to fisheries monitoring, assessment and management. Through this component the project organizes or facilitates the participation to training courses, on-the-job training, and technical workshops on issues of relevance to the fisheries departments.*

### **➤ *Summer School in Summer School in Quantitative Fisheries Stock Assessment***

The Project organised, together with the other FAO Mediterranean Projects (AdriaMed, MedSudMed and CopeMed II), the GFCM and the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the third Summer School in Quantitative Fisheries Stock Assessment (Summer School). The Summer School was held in the Institute of Anthropic Impacts and Sustainability in marine environment of the Italian Research Council (IAS-CNR) in Capo Granitola, Trapani (Italy), in two consecutive modules from 8 – 19 July 2019. The First Module was dedicated to data preparation for stock assessment and covered basic procedures for preparation of the input data to be used in stock assessment methods, such as standardization of indices, data raising, age slicing, and the estimation of biological parameters. In the second Module students explored some of the most common stock assessment methods currently in use to estimate the status of stocks and to produce scientific advice to fisheries management.

The activity was preceded by a long preparatory phase that included the setting of school contents, dissemination of information, selection of lecturers and participants, a series of logistic and formal arrangements at the IAMC-CNR of Capo Granitola. A total 49 trainees from all around the Mediterranean region enrolled in the summer school, including 23 participants from the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **➤ *EastMed Study Group on intercalibration of fish otolith reading (Sardinella aurita)***

The EastMed Study Group meeting on inter-calibration of fish otolith reading was held at the COISPA Tecnologia & Ricerca – Stazione Sperimentale per lo Studio delle Risorse del Mare (Torre a Mare, Bari, Italy) on 1-5 July 2019. The meeting was attended by researchers from Cyprus, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine Egypt and Italy and was chaired by Dr Pierluigi Carbonara, co-chair of the ICES Workshop on ageing validation methodology of *Mullus* species (WKVALMU) and of the ICES Working Group on Biological Parameters (WGBIOP). Age data has been recognized as one of the fundamental data-input to obtain reliable stock

assessment. Therefore, a Study Group was established in 2018 aiming at carrying out, on a regular basis, training and inter-calibration exercises for age determination by otolith reading of demersal and small pelagic fish of the eastern Mediterranean. The end goal of the study group is to enhance the quality of the biological data used in stock assessment, including the preparation of reliable age/length keys for the priority species in the sub-region. The collective exercise of the otolith exchange program is meant to assess precision in the age estimation and to inter-calibrate readers, specifying the interpretation differences, progressing in the implementation of quality assurance in the labs. The Countries involved focused their attention on the ageing schemes and ageing criteria for a correct age determination of *Sardinella aurita* otoliths, and under the supervision of Dr Pierluigi Carbonara, a handbook on the age determination of *Sardinella aurita* was drafted (“*Age reading handbook of the round sardinella, Sardinella aurita*”). As a further step, the Group agreed to prepare a publication on this matter that could focus on the ageing of the species in the whole EMed.

➤ ***Joint EastMed-GFCM training course on data collection on fishing discards.***

A joint meeting with GFCM was carried out to take stock of the progress in the assessment of discards, by-catch species and incidental catches of vulnerable species in Lebanon, 18 to 20 September 2019. Overview on the main technical and organizational aspects, achieved samples, spatial coverage and monthly activities were discussed in order to identify data needs and gaps. Proposals for data submission procedures (e.g. GFCM discards data entry sheets) were put forward and priorities towards the implementation of future activities for the collection of biological data were identified. During the same mission, operational technical and administrative aspects on the experimental MEDITS-like trawl survey that is expected to be carried out in Lebanese waters in the second quarter of 2020 were thoroughly discussed with the MoA and other concerned institutions.

### **Project Component 3 - Data Collection and Analyses**

*The objective of this component was to assist eastern Mediterranean countries to improve/develop national fishery data collection programs, including catch, effort, biological and socioeconomic data, fishery-independent surveys and to support the analysis and use of the data collected for scientific advice to fisheries management. The component also aimed at supporting coordinated and cooperative activities in fisheries research, which, in their turn, would support fisheries processes at sub-regional level under the framework of the GFCM.*

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Egypt***

The EastMed project has been providing technical and financial assistance to Egypt since 2013 to improve the fisheries data collection system, including catch and effort data collection system, biological sampling and socio-economic surveys, in line with GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). The socio-economic data collection was discontinued in 2018 when GFCM started to cover the collections of such data for the Mid-Term Strategy. In terms of biological data collection, the first pilot study was completed at the end of 2012, with subsequent routine monitoring and sampling which covered the period from 2013-2017. Due to extensive delays in resolving administrative issues between Egypt and FAO, the EastMed support to biological data collection was interrupted for part of 2018 and 2019 and only recently resumed with the collaboration of the GFCM. The sampling for biological parameters has been

conducted in five ports including Maadia, Port Said, El-Arish, Damietta and Kafr el Sheikh, in which the Administration has port offices. Five labs for the processing of biological samples were also set up in these ports with the support of the Project. The sampling covers a total of 10 species of demersal and small pelagic species, including deep water red shrimps, *Aristomorpha foliacea* and *Aristeus antennatus*.

➤ ***Support on fisheries data collection in Lebanon***

The EastMed project has been providing technical and financial assistance to Lebanon since 2012 to improve the fisheries data collection system, including catch and effort data collection system, biological sampling and socio-economic surveys, in line with GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). In 2015, the project supported the development of a sampling strategy and design for the collection of catch and effort data by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Financial support was then provided for the collection of data since 2015. Apart from this, biological sampling and socio-economic data have also been supported by the project in the past years. During the 9th Coordination Committee meeting of EastMed (FAO HQs, Rome, Italy, 13 – 14 November 2018), Lebanon requested the support of the Project for the continuation of the ongoing data collection activities on catch, effort, biological and socio-economic variables. Since then, agreement was reached with the GFCM that the collection of socio-economic variables in Lebanon will be carried out with the support of the GFCM grant for the Mid-term strategy. Therefore, since 2018 the Project is supporting the biological sampling of priority species through a Letter of Agreement with the National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS-L) and the collection of catch and effort data through an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Due to extensive delays in resolving administrative issues between Lebanon and FAO, the EastMed support to data collection was interrupted for part of 2018 and 2019 and only recently resumed. The support being provided by the project will assist Lebanon in continuing the data collection, so that it could assess better the status of the fisheries resources and monitor the situation of fisheries.

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Turkey***

Since 2018 the Project has been supporting a biological sampling program for the priority species in the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey, in line with the Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). Based on the advice of national scientists from universities and experts from Ministry of Food Agriculture and Livestock (MoFAL) a scheme for the biological data collection was agreed for this pilot project. The Ministry is facilitating the implementation of the fisheries dependent data collection with the assistance of the officers in provincial directories and in Mediterranean Fisheries Research Production and Training Institute (MEDFRI). The species covered by the sampling are *Sardinella aurita*, *Engraulis encrasicolus*, *Sardina pilchardus*, *Mullus barbatus*, *Aristaeomorpha foliacea* and *Aristeus antennatus*. In 2019, biological data of the blue crab *Callinectes sapidus* in lagoons and lakes in GSA 22 and 24 will be also collected.

➤ ***Support to fisheries data collection in Palestine***

During the 9<sup>th</sup> EastMed Coordination Committee meeting it was agreed to continue supporting ongoing data collection activities on catch, effort, biological and socio-economic variables in

Palestine (Palestine Strip). Data has been collected along the coast of the Palestine Strip in four landing sites (Palestine City, Dar al Balah, Khan Yunes and Rafah). The first pilot study was completed at the end of 2013, and continued on a regular basis from 2014 to 2019, with some interruptions in the last two years due to delays in administrative procedures. The partnerships that have been concluded between the scientific community and the experts in Palestine with the support of the project, will facilitate the implementation of the fisheries dependent data collection.

**Table 1.** Biological data collection for priority species supported by EastMed

Species	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Small pelagics</b>							
<i>Sardinella aurita</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey
<i>Engraulis encrasicolus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey
<i>Sardina pilchardus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon	Egypt Palestine Lebanon Turkey	Palestine Lebanon Turkey
<b>Demersal</b>							
<i>Mullus surmuletus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine
<i>Mullus barbatus</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine Turkey	Palestine Turkey
<i>Saurida undosquamis</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine
<i>Upeneus molucensis</i>		Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Nemipterus randalli</i>		Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine	Palestine
<i>Pagellus erythrinus</i>			Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon
<i>Lithognathus mormyrus</i>			Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon
<i>Merluccius merluccius</i>	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	
<i>Metapenaeus stebbingi</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine
<i>Parapenaeus longirostris</i>	Egypt	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Egypt Palestine	Palestine
<i>Aristaeomorpha foliacea</i>					Egypt	Egypt Turkey	Turkey
<i>Aristeus antennatus</i>					Egypt	Egypt Turkey	Turkey

➤ ***Support surveys using artisanal commercial fishing gears in Lebanon***

Lebanon has a restricted continental shelf and fishing activities are concentrated close to the shore. In 2012, EastMed in collaboration with the CANA project "Establishing monitoring and sustainable development of the Lebanese sea" conducted a study to evaluate the potentiality of

offshore fishing grounds for the local artisanal fishery. A preliminary survey was carried out in the area between Tyre and Naqoura (South Lebanon), using both monofilament gillnets to target hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) and Spanish traps designed to catch the striped soldier shrimp (*Plesionika edwardsii*). The results of the survey showed the occurrence of potentially exploitable resources on the Lebanese upper slope. During 2017 the EastMed project supported fishing trials using experimental deep water-resistant trammel nets along with Spanish traps to target *Plesionika edwardsii*. Trammel nets were used to assess abundance and distribution of demersal species in the deeper shelf and upper slope, which represents a potential area of expansion of fishing activities in Lebanese waters. Building upon the results of these trials, another set of trials with nets and traps specifically designed for the Lebanese situation were conducted in 2018 and 2019 with the immediate objective of testing the feasibility and efficacy of some commercial fishing gears in targeting commercially relevant species over the continental shelf and upper slope while minimizing unwanted by-catch (especially of sharks). The general long-term objective is to increase the array of métiers available for small-scale fisheries in Lebanon. This is fully consistent with the “Ministerial declaration on a regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea” signed in Malta, on 26 September 2018, paragraphs 25, 26, 30, 31 and with the actions 2, 3 and 5 of the “Regional plan of action for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea” (RPOA-SSF) in the section “Scientific research”. So far three types of cages (two targeting demersal fish species and one targeting Norway lobsters) and a trammel nets were tested, and a new set of gillnets was sent to Lebanon in the framework of a collaboration between EastMed and the Italian Institute IRBIM-CNR. Operations started on 25 September 2018 extending until the second quarter of 2019 with twenty fishing trials performed in South and Central Lebanon. The results of the trials are reported in the “Final Technical Activity Report – Biological data collection and experimental fishing survey. Lebanon 2018-2019”.

➤ ***Organization of the EastMed Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis and Joint EastMed/GFCM Data preparation meeting on round sardinella in the eastern Mediterranean Sea***

The EastMed Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis was held in FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy, from 21 to 25 October 2019. The WG was attended by experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus and Italy. The objectives of the working group were to facilitate and support the analysis of fisheries biological data collected in the Eastern Mediterranean countries, with a view to assess the status of priority stocks in the subregion. As agreed during the GFCM Subregional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (SRC-EM), a joint session was also organized with the GFCM for a Data Preparatory Meeting on round sardinella. The joint session was run on the 14 and 15 October inside the Sub-Group on Stock Assessment and was facilitated by an external stock assessment expert, Dr Ricardo Amoroso. Data on catches and length frequency distributions (LFDs) were collated for all involved countries (Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus), potential sources of bias in datasets were identified and strategies for the optimization and improvement of sampling schemes. The group also did some preliminary trials with a simulation framework developed to test the performance of different candidate data-limited assessment methods, including LBSPR, catch curves and VIT. Data prepared during the WG and the preliminary analysis conducted will be presented in the GFCM WG on Stock Assessment in December 2019. Experts also advanced in the preparation of data and preliminary assessments of demersal stocks, including *Mullus barbatus*, *Metapenaeus stebbingi*, *Saurida undosquamis*, *Pagellus erythrinus* and *Lithognathus mormyrus*.

➤ ***Organization of the joint MedSudMed/EastMed/GFCM data preparation meeting on deep water red shrimp in the central-eastern Mediterranean Sea***

The MedSudMed/EastMed/GFCM data preparation meeting on deep water red shrimp in the central-eastern Mediterranean Sea was held in GFCM headquarters, Rome, 14 – 18 October 2019. The meeting was attended by experts from Italy, Malta, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia. Building on the results of previous data preparation and survey data analysis meetings, the group progressed in various different fronts: in the definition of biological parameters and assumptions; in the analysis of standardized survey indices (for GSAs currently covered by fishery-independent surveys); the mapping of fishing grounds and fishing effort; the identification of possible assessment methods for each GSA according to the data available; and in the assessment units (GSA-based at the moment). The group also agreed to update the existing “Background Technical Document in Support of the Management Plan for bottom trawl fisheries for deep-water blue and red shrimp, *Aristeus antennatus*, and the giant red shrimp, *Aristaomorpha foliacea*, in the Eastern-Central Mediterranean (GSA 12 – 16, 19 – 27)” and to publish the compiled information into either an FAO Technical Paper or a GFCM Studies and Reviews. A workplan for the use of composite models for the estimation of fishing grounds was elaborated, including for GSAs that currently lack this type of information (GSAs 24 to 27). The next joint data preparation meeting will be held in September 2020, before the planned benchmark assessment.

➤ ***Study of transboundary population structure of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean***

The Project organized a five-day workshop in COISPA (Bari, Italy) on 1-5 July 2019 with three major objectives. First to identify an ageing scheme and ageing criteria for age identification through calcified structures of round sardinella. Secondly, to outline the project **MED\_UNITS** on advancing fisheries assessment and management advice in the Mediterranean by aligning biological and management units of priority species. The project is implemented by a consortium of European research institutes and universities. EMed countries assured their contribution – following protocols detailed by Dr Spedicato (COISPA) to the project under the supervision and coordination of EastMed. Third and with reference to the **FISHBONE** project on the definition of stock boundaries of *Sardinella aurita* in the EMed, to define concrete steps to kickstart data collection and sample handling were discussed and defined, including HRs to be involved and funds to be allocated. FISHBONE is based on four major pillars: i) a general review of environmental information already available, ii) the analysis of genetic markers, iii) the analysis of otolith shape and iv) the analysis of body morphometry and meristics, demographic indices and life history traits. Task coordinators presented detailed protocols for data collection (including webinars) and first findings related to the task they are responsible for.

#### **Project Component 4 - Increased Participation and Cooperation**

*The objective of this component is to promote sub-regional cooperation and collaboration for fishery research, monitoring and management and will support Government staff to attend and fully participating in GFCM (and other) regional meetings*

➤ ***Organization of the 9<sup>th</sup> EastMed Coordination Committee Meeting***

The ninth meeting of the Coordination Committee of the FAO EastMed project was held at FAO HQs, Rome, Italy, from 13 to 14 November 2018. The meeting was attended by delegations from Cyprus, Egypt, Palestine, Syria and Turkey, by staff of the FAO Regional Projects EastMed and AdriaMed, the GFCM Secretariat, the European Commission and staff of the EastMed project. After the opening of the meeting and election of the chairperson, the activities during the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the project were presented, followed by the proposals of activities for the 9<sup>th</sup> year from each Country. The participants expressed their satisfaction with the project and thanked both the staff of the project and the donors for their contribution. The agreed work plan for the 9<sup>th</sup> year includes training and support in data collection, data analyses, activities aiming in strengthening stakeholders' awareness and activities in promoting regional participation and cooperation. EastMed finally, will continue to support the participation of experts from the project's area at the meetings of the FAO-GFCM and other relevant regional/international organizations. The EastMed project, in close cooperation with the other Mediterranean sub-regional projects, will continue to find synergies among the various activities in the region

➤ ***Participation at GFCM meetings including the 21<sup>st</sup> session of SAC and the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission***

During the intersession the project participated and supported experts from the Eastern Mediterranean countries to participate in the following meetings of the GFCM:

- GFCM Working Groups on Stock Assessment (WGSA) of Demersal and Small Pelagic Species, 19-23 November 2018, Rome;
- FishForum on Fishery Science, December 2018, FAO HQ, Rome;
- Working Group on Small Scale Fisheries (WGSSF), 7-8 March, Pogdorica, Montenegro.
- Subregional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (SRC-EM); Joint session on the assessment of deep-water red shrimp in the eastern central Mediterranean; Subregional Committee for the Central Mediterranean (SRC-CM), March 18 - March 22, FAO HQ, Rome, Italy.
- 21<sup>st</sup> session of the GFCM SAC (24-27 June 2019, Cairo, Egypt)
- 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the GFCM Commission, 4-8 November 2019, Athens, Greece

➤ ***Coordination among the sub-regional projects, with the GFCM and the donors including Italy and the EU***

In order to strengthen international and regional cooperation the project is interacting closely with the FAO sub-Regional Projects, AdriaMed, MedsudMed and CopeMed II throughout the year with several co-ordination meetings. These meetings were held in order to consolidate and envisage common activities. In this respect the project also participated to in the Coordination Committee of AdriaMed, MedsudMed and CopeMed II where synergies were identified. Training activities were coordinated among all the Projects, in order to avoid duplication or overlapping of activities. In order to improve the visibility of the regional projects in the

Mediterranean, a promotional video was prepared highlighting some of the achievements of the projects in past years.

Cooperation was further sustained with the GFCM Secretariat and the GFCM subsidiary bodies. EastMed continued to support the activities of the GFCM by providing scientific contributions for discussion and by funding the participation of several experts from the Eastern Mediterranean countries to GFCM and other international activities (see above).

The Project has also maintained regular communication with the donors (EU-DG-MARE and MIPAAF-Italy) during the occasion of GFCM intersessional meetings or in specific meetings. One of this coordination meetings with DG-MARE was held on the 14th October 2019 in Brussels to present progress on the implementation of activities and discuss plan of activities for the future.

#### ➤ ***Project communication***

Technical documents have been prepared and the ones published are available online through the website. Hard copies have also been distributed to participating countries. Posters were prepared, and presentations were given to several meetings, in which the publications were distributed. In addition, a video about the FAO Mediterranean regional projects was elaborated to enhance the visibility of the project activities in past years to a wider audience.

The project web site ([www.faoeastmed.org](http://www.faoeastmed.org)) has been improved and active links have been created with the websites of the other sub-regional projects and GFCM. It is continuously updated with new information, and on the home page a new section on upcoming events was developed.

During the intersession the following documents were produced:

- Carbonara P., Ali A., Fahim R. M., el Gazzar H. M., Erkan S., Hanafy H. M., Lteif M., Madi A., Jemaa S., Kiliç S., Khalaf G., Öztürk S., Thasitis I., Tirasin M., Casciaro L., Lelli S. 2019 - Age reading handbook of the round sardinella, *Sardinella aurita*. In prep.
- Ünal, V., Derya Yıldırım, Z. & Mümtaz Tıraşın, E. 2019. Implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries for the small-scale fisheries in Gökova Bay, Turkey: baseline report. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 646. Rome, FAO. (68pp, 1.9MB).
- Aly, W.E., El-Haweet, A.E.A. & Megahed, A.S. 2019. Implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries for the demersal fisheries of the Mediterranean coast of Egypt: baseline report. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 645. Rome, FAO. (28pp, 800KB).
- Nader, M. R.; El Indary, S.; Abou Dagher, M.; Vasconcellos, M.; Majdalani, S.; Dimech, M. and I. Lahoud. In prep. Implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries for the purse seine fisheries in Lebanon: Baseline report. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper T656. 39 pp.
- Pinello, D.; Dimech, M.; Megahead, A. and H. El Gazzar. 2019. Assessment of the commercial chain of bivalves in Egypt. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular FIAP/C1196 (E). 51 pp.

- Pinello, D.; Salah, A.; Mohamed, A.; Hussin, S.; Madi, A.; Salah, J.; Jawhar, S.; Nassar, H.; Nassar, A.; Üstündağ, E. and M. Kanyılmaz. In prep. A sub-regional analysis of the socio-economic situation of the Eastern Mediterranean fisheries. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Circular.
  
- CNRS/MoA/EastMed. In prep. Final Technical Activity Report – Biological data collection and experimental fishing survey. Lebanon 2018-2019
- EastMed. In prep. Report of the round sardinella EastMed Study Group Meeting. COISPA, Bari, Italy 1 to 5 July 2019
- EastMed. In prep. Report of the EastMed Working Group on Fisheries Data Analysis and Joint EastMed/GFCM data preparatory meeting on round sardinella in the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

## **Annex IV – Work plan for the 10<sup>th</sup> Year of the Project**

### **FAO EastMed Working Document**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this document is to offer to the members of the Coordination Committee (CC) elements for discussion on the draft proposal for the Work Plan of the EastMed project for the upcoming year.

The project has been operative since September 2009 with a mandate of five years which was further extended after the end date of the project. The activities proposed in this document are based on the priorities indicated by the countries, taking into account the objectives of the project, the recommendations received during the previous Coordination Committee Meetings and the outputs of the activities carried out during the previous years. The activities proposed are aligned with GFCM work plan, including the outcomes of the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Session of the GFCM (Rome, October 2018 and Athens, November 2019), with the SAC work plan for 2019/21 and are consistent with the GFCM mid-term strategy (2017-2020) for the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries (Resolution GFCM/40/2016/2). They also pursue the goals defined by the Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration and includes collaboration with the GFCM. Moreover, efforts have been made, in coordination with the other Mediterranean Regional Projects, to identify tentative common activities in order to avoid any overlap as well as to find synergies and strengthen the coordination among the activities of the Regional Projects.

The final work plan will take into account the recommendations of the 10<sup>th</sup> Coordination Committee meeting, in accordance with the priority expressed by the countries on each activity and directly linked to the available budget of the project.

#### **WORKPLAN**

In order to facilitate the presentation of the work plan for the next period, all the proposed activities were organized into the 4 components of the Project:

- **Institutional Strengthening**
- **Training Staff and Development**
- **Data Collection and Analyses**
- **Increased Participation and Cooperation**

#### **Institutional Strengthening**

##### **1. Support to national fisheries information systems and databases**

In the short run, the project will continue to provide assistance to secure reliable catch and effort database and software applications in Egypt (SAMAC) and in Lebanon (FLOUCA). Meanwhile, the Project will support a cost/benefit analysis to define the best option(s) to

replace systems currently in use. Among other things, the project can support the upgrading of the systems to integrate other sources of fisheries data being collected on a routine basis by countries, such as socioeconomic data, discards etc.. The setting up of similar databases and information systems for Egypt, Palestine and Syria is also envisaged, in view of the requests received during the Tenth Coordination Committee. A future sub-regional integration or at least the possibility of interacting of the different country-based platforms should be taken into account.

In Lebanon, the project will also continue to support the upgrade of the web licensing system. Taking advantage from the Lebanese experience, the project will support Egypt in transitioning from the old, outdated licensing system to a new one. Based on specific request from the participating countries and depending on the availability of funds, the project will also continue to provide IT to make the databases and information systems functional and also basic laboratory equipment needed to perform the analysis of biological data for the assessment of priority stocks.

## **2. Support the development and implementation of the fisheries management plans in the Eastern Mediterranean**

In the past years the project supported the practical application of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) in selected case studies in Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. In the next intersession the project could support implementation of activities to facilitate the operationalization of the adopted management plans. In view of the refreshed interest of Italy in collaborating with Eastern Mediterranean countries in the field of aquaculture, the project will consider supporting the jumpstart of new EAF/EAA-based pilot studies in this sector. The development of capacity to address interactions among aquaculture and capture fisheries is considered by Countries an area of priority that could be addressed through the ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture in pilot studies. In Turkey the project will continue to work in collaboration with the Blue Hope Technical Cooperation Programme to develop integrated, multi-sectoral investment plans for Gökova using the FAO Blue Growth (BGI) framework. In case of available funds other than the EU contribution, the project could also take into consideration to support the implementation of a new EAF pilots in countries that already received support in this area. Moreover, as agreed in the last Coordination Committee, the project intends to support Syria and Palestine in taking steps towards the management of fisheries in line with the EAF principles, if possible, through pilot case studies. During the 2019 meeting of the SRC-EM, the sub-committee stressed the importance of bottom up approaches for managing small-scale fisheries and highlighted the good example of the management of Gökova Bay (Turkey) based on an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. The SRC-EM agreed that there was a need to share this and similar experiences to contribute to the effective implementation of RPOA-SSF. A dedicated session on this topic was proposed to be held in the SRC-EM in May 2020. With a view to contribute to this session, the project could organize a Seminar on EAF-based fisheries management to evaluate the progress, constrains and opportunities

for the implementation of such approaches in the Mediterranean Sea, with a particular focus on small-scale fisheries. The Seminar could be organized in collaboration with the other Regional Projects and partner organizations in the Mediterranean. The results of the Seminar will also contribute to global efforts of FAO to develop good practices for EAF implementation.

3. **Support the assessment of the vulnerability of fisheries to climate change and the identification of potential adaptation options for selected fisheries**

Following the recommendations of the “Expert meeting on climate change implications for Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, Rome, 4–6 December 2017”, and with the endorsement of the GFCM, the vulnerability of fisheries to the effects of climate change will be assessed in specific case studies in each sub-region of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. In the Eastern Mediterranean work is currently ongoing for the assessment of the vulnerability of small-pelagic and demersal fisheries in the sub-region. The work involves the preparation of a scoping report detailing the current ecological, socio-economic and institutional situation of the fisheries as well as the main climate-related drivers of change to the fisheries. During the next intersession, the different pathways of impact of climate on fisheries will be identified and their relative importance assessed by means of a risk assessment. The results of the assessment will be presented for validation and as basis for identifying adaptation options during an expert meeting planned to be held in early 2020, possibly back-to-back to the SRC-EM (May 2020, Lebanon). This action will complement and support the GFCM in the development of a regional strategy to cope with the effects of climate change and invasive species on fisheries.

**Staff Training and Development**

4. **Support training in stock assessment and other fisheries data analysis methods**

A general need for training on stock assessment has been indicated in several cases by the countries participating in the project. The project will support training sessions organised in collaboration with other FAO Regional Projects, such as the Summer School in Quantitative Fisheries Stock Assessment. The project could also support ad-hoc trainings on methodologies for stock assessment, socioeconomic data analysis, basic knowledge of R upon request of countries and complementary to the objectives of the Summer School. In view of current data limitations in some of the countries, special attention will be given to stock assessment methodologies appropriate for data-limited situations.

5. **Support training in the sampling and identification of by-catches, discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species**

In the past years, the EastMed project in collaboration with the GFCM organized different training activities on data collection on by-catches and discards. The training aimed at improving the understanding of the importance of monitoring discards and bycatches

especially for species in which stock assessments are currently conducted and vulnerable groups such as elasmobranchs. Based on the interest shown by the Countries (in particular Cyprus, Greece and Palestine), the project can support further training activities in the sampling and identification of by-catches, discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species, upon request of the countries. The possibility of holding the meeting in one of the partner countries will be evaluated.

6. **Organization of EastMed Study Group on intercalibration of fish otolith reading for further training and standardization of age reading for priority species in Eastern Mediterranean**

The EastMed Study Group on intercalibration of fish otolith reading was established in 2018 aiming at carrying out, on a regular basis, training and inter-calibration exercises for age determination by otolith reading of demersal and small pelagic fish of the eastern Mediterranean. The end goal of the study group is to enhance the quality of the biological data used in stock assessment, including the preparation of reliable age/length keys for the priority species in the sub-region. The project can support the organization of the Study Group in 2020 to follow up on the ongoing otolith exchange program. In particular, in view of the upcoming round sardinella benchmark assessment and as a follow up on the activities implemented in 2019, the following actions are expected: i) finalisation of the handbook for round sardinella aging, ii) completion of a minimum set of data to have a preliminary age-length key before the benchmark assessment and iii) use length modal progression in monthly LFD to corroborate growth estimates in the first year (in view of difficulties encountered in the determining first ring due to false rings). The project can consider including additional species, such as hake, red mullet and priority NIS in the program of work of the Study Group.

7. **Support the execution and data analysis of surveys at sea with standardized methodologies**

The project can support the organization of training courses and on-the-job training activities for the design of scientific surveys and the analysis of survey data. Such activities, to be organized in collaboration with the GFCM, will prepare scientists in the Eastern Mediterranean countries to implement the GFCM demersal and acoustic surveys according to the Mid-Term strategy (2017-2020). The GFCM is organizing a trawl survey in Lebanon in 2020 and of the ongoing discussion with Egypt for a trawl survey in the near future. Upon request of countries, EastMed can support training activities, together with GFCM and other regional partners (EU MEDITS), to facilitate the execution of these surveys and to enhance the capacities of national experts also through exchange programs.

### **Data Collection and Analyses**

8. **Support the continuation of fishery and biological data collection programs for priority species in Eastern Mediterranean countries**

The project can continue to support ongoing data collection activities on catch, effort, biological in Palestine (along with socio economic variables), Lebanon and Turkey. For 2020 the project will also support for the first time the collection of catch, effort and biological data in Syria. In terms of biological data collection, particular attention will be given to the priority species identified by the GFCM for the eastern Mediterranean region, including round sardinella and deep-water red shrimps (*Aristeomorpha foliacea* and *Aristeus antennatus*) and blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) in Turkey. In Palestine, the collection of discard and bycatch data will also continue as well as data on other vulnerable species, such as marine turtles. Moreover, with the objective to contribute to the GFCM-SAC Work Plan for 2019-2021 the project could support the compilation of information on the presence, abundance and distribution of priority Non-Indigenous Species. For those NIS species without commercial value (and therefore not covered in fisheries catch statistics), such as *Pterois miles* and *Lagocephalus sceleratus*, the use of participatory approaches and LEK questionnaires could be used as an option for the collection of data.

#### **9. Organization of an EastMed WG on fisheries data analysis**

The project will support the organization of the EastMed Working Group on fisheries data analysis in order to support national experts in data preparation and preliminary stock assessment for priority species in the sub-region. The WG will also provide an opportunity to advance in the work plan for sardinella and deep water red shrimps, working in close collaboration with the GFCM. Moreover, with a view to contribute to the GFCM-SAC Work Plan for 2019-2021, the WG could dedicate a session to initiate the compilation of available information and the identification of information gaps for the mapping of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) for some of the priority species in the subregion. On this regard, the representative of the GFCM informed the Coordination Committee Members that information could be collated from different sources (e.g. the EU funded project Protomedea, IUCN, Oceana, Greek researchers, and possibly Ali Cemal Gucu for Turkey). This information can be compiled during the next intersession to make it fully ready by the Working Group on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems that is scheduled for 2021. Advancement in this task should be also presented at the occasion of the next SRC-EM (2nd quarter of 2020).

#### **10. Progress towards the assessment of the population structure of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean (FISHBONE project)**

During the EastMed Study Group meeting on inter-calibration of fish otolith reading, held in Bari, Italy, 24 – 27 July 2018 a roadmap for the assessment of the population structure of the round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean was developed by experts from the region. The group recognized the need to adopt a holistic approach with multiple perspectives to improve information on stock structure for resource management that capture different ecological and structuring processes acting at contrasting scales. On this

basis, the group agreed to focus the analysis of stock boundaries of sardinella on four major pillars: i) a general review of environmental information already available, ii) the analysis of genetic markers, iii) the analysis of otolith shape and iv) the analysis of body morphometry and meristics, demographic indices and life history traits. A calendar of the activities was elaborated (reproduced below). More in detail, during the Data preparatory meeting held in Rome on 21 and 22 October 2019, the Group decided to meet again during the WGSASP in Rome, December 2019, to take stock of the analysis of sample quality and to obtain preliminary results of the analysis by the benchmark assessment. The EastMed project intends to actively involve Syria already in the last month of 2019 and will support the implementation of the agreed activities for 2020. It intends also to maintain its support to the MED\_UNITS project, the EASME-funded study on stock identification of a number of priority species.

Year	2019				2020				
	Quarter	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
Tasks									
Detailed protocols									
Selection of personnel									
Training									
Sampling									
Fisheries data compilation									
Genetic analysis									
Intermediate Workshop									
Statistical analysis									
Populations assessment									
Final workshop									
Final report									

**11. Continue to support experimental trials using artisanal fishing gears in Lebanon with a view to identify alternative fishing opportunities for small-scale fisheries**

In 2017 the project supported for the first time, exploratory fishing trials using deep water-resistant experimental trammel nets along with Spanish traps for *Plesionika edwardsii*. The number of trials were limited and the nets were not specifically designed for commercial use but instead for a first evaluation of available resources in offshore areas of Lebanon. In 2018 and 2019 different designs of traps and deep-water trammel nets are being tested to evaluate their technical-economic performance. For 2020 the project intends to support one additional year of data collection with the designed gears (already provided in the framework of a collaboration with IRBIM-CNR) to evaluate their performance and discuss the opportunities for using them on a commercial scale by fishers. Similar activities could be implemented in Syria in the near future. As a first step, as agreed during the ninth coordination committee of the Project, the visit of experts from Syria to Lebanon could be supported to share experiences with the trials and to elaborate a detailed plan of work to be initiated in 2020/21, depending on the availability of funds.

**12. Support activities on the identification of spawning and nursery areas of round sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean by conducting egg and larvae surveys at Sea**

There are important gaps in knowledge of the spawning and nursery areas of sardinella stocks in the Eastern Mediterranean. Identifying spawning, nursery and feeding areas, as well as understanding the migratory and dispersal patterns, provides important information for effective evaluation of the resources and effective fisheries management. The project received in 2018 preliminary proposals to conduct eggs and larvae surveys from Egypt and Lebanon but no consensus was reached on the propose methods. Upon the agreement of the coordination committee, and based on the availability of funds, the project could support the collection of eggs and larvae data in 2020 using a reliable, standardized and cost-effective methodology. The outcomes of this study could contribute to the proposed activity on stock boundaries of sardinella in the Eastern Mediterranean.

**13. Organization of a joint GFCM/EastMed/MedSudMed Working Group on deep water red shrimp in the Central-Eastern Mediterranean**

The deep-water red shrimps (*Aristeus antennatus* and *Aristomorpha foliacea*) are priority species for the eastern and central Mediterranean. A benchmark assessment for the species is planned for 2021. Specific management plans were recently adopted by GFCM for the fisheries targeting the species in the Ionian and Levant Seas (GSA12 to16, 19 to 27). With a view to support the ongoing assessment and management efforts for the species, a working group is planned to be organized in 2020 to support the data preparation and preliminary assessment of the species. Following the positive experience with the organization of a data preparation meeting for the species in 2018 and 2019, the project can support the organization of the working group jointly with MedSudMed and GFCM in 2020. Finally, in case the assessment of round sardinella will not be fully completed during the benchmark meeting (May 2020), it has to be defined how and when assessment can be completed.

**Increased Participation and Cooperation**

**14. Strengthening the cooperation with the other FAO Regional Projects**

The existing cooperation with the other FAO sub-regional projects AdriaMed, MedSudMed and CopeMed II will be further strengthened. In this context, synergies are foreseen with the projects. Training activities will be coordinated among all the projects, in order to avoid duplication or overlapping of activities. The participation of other experts from the projects in training courses organized by EastMed and vice versa will be foreseen. The preparation of common informative material that can improve the visibility of the projects is foreseen.

**15. Support Government staff to attend and fully participating in GFCM meetings**

The Project will continue to strengthen the international and regional cooperation at Mediterranean level with the GFCM and its related bodies (SAC, Sub-Committees, Working Groups), according to budget availability, through the support to the preparation of scientific contributions for GFCM events, the participation of experts from the EastMed countries in GFCM events and through support to the countries to be compliant with the GFCM requirements.

**16. Support the organization of the Co-ordination Committee meeting**

The project should organize the meeting of the Co-ordination Committee, where lessons learned and possible recommendations regarding requirements and priorities will be discussed, also in the light of a possible follow-up project supporting the development of national and regional capacity for fisheries management in the Mediterranean

**17. Disseminate Project's results and develop fishery information systems through the use/development of databases, web pages and technical papers**

The contents, and consequently the EastMed portal ([www.faoeastmed.org](http://www.faoeastmed.org)), will continue to be updated and further developed in order to make it always easily accessible in areas of interest to website users. The Project will continue to disseminate the project's results through the preparation of technical documents, meeting reports, brochures and posters. The availability of smart tools that advice subscribers when a new contribution is uploaded on the website was suggested and will be further investigated.