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MEDAC advice relevant for the GFCM SRC-Adriatic Sea (SRC-AS)

During the online meeting of FG on Adriatic Sea (AS), held on 14 April, MEDAC members raised up the following concerns related to the topics relevant for the GFCM SRC-AS meeting:

- DEMERSALS

Background – The scientific expert Giuseppe Scarcella (Italian CNR) provided an overview of the general improvement of demersal species in the Adriatic Sea, while the stock status of the Deep-water rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*) and Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*) requires significant fishing mortality reduction in some areas of the Adriatic GSAs.

The MEDAC, considering the scientific results, highlighted the following considerations in view of management decisions to be adopted in 2026:

- The positive results in the stock assessment were due to the halving of the fleet.
- About the closure of the area off Civitanova (Italy) for the protection of Norway lobster:
  - The decision didn't respect the agreement reached in collaboration with the stakeholders[1]. The temporal closure was extended to 7 months, without taking into account that this was an addition to the already existing annual seasonal closure, meaning that fishing was prohibited in the area for almost the entire year.
  - While usually supporting spatio-temporal closures for a sustainable fishery management, but in this decision no socioeconomic aspects were considered, even though the impact is not negligible. Spatio-temporal closures should be assessed case by case with a true bottom-up approach.
  - Moreover, this closure extension was decided despite to the positive data of 2025 shown by Giuseppe Scarcella. Considering the improvement of the stocks, it should be assessed the effectiveness and, therefore need, for this measure.
  - Further decisions to be taken related to the Norway lobster management for 2027, must integrate proper understanding of the impact of climate change on this species.
- Fishers do not understand the reasons behind more restrictive management measures when stocks are recovered.

[1] Medreact rejects this statement because the MEDAC was never consulted on the 'agreement' reached by some stakeholders on the closure of the Civantova area.

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- The MEDAC acknowledges the positive results of stock assessments allowing a reversal of the trend with respect to the fleet reduction seen in the recent years. Further studies should be done to understand the controversial trend of the fishing mortality for one species only (*Parapenaeus longirostris*). This is urgent to take management decisions for 2027 that are as closely aligned as possible with the true stock status, especially considering the huge socioeconomic impact on fishing communities that has occurred to date in order to achieve the current results for almost all the species.

- VULNERABLE SPECIES AND SPATIAL MANAGEMENT

Background – The scientific expert Prof. Sandro Mazzariol (University of Padova – It) provided information on the Participatory identification of Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in the Northern Adriatic Sea (Veneto), as tools for habitat conservation and the sustainability of the fisheries sector.

The MEDAC recognizes the wide and active involvement of all the relevant stakeholders in the project as best practice for the protection of vulnerable species, such as Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*).

The stakeholders' involvement for the SCI identification with a bottom-up process included the following steps:

- Identify the relevant stakeholders
- Identify the possible conflicts between fishery sector and vulnerable species:
  - What do we know
  - What do we don't know
  - What do we need to fill knowledge gaps
  - Who should we involve?
  - Which were the previous efforts?
- Identified an area to protect species based on current literature
- Identify main gaps & threats for species conservation
- Define conservation measures to reduce threats
- Dialogue between research and stakeholders and stakeholders as part of the management to agree on the best way to adopt the following fishing limitations:
  - Technical stops, gears modifications and sharing of protocols
  - Biological stops
  - Weekly limitations
  - Spatial limitations.

The MEDAC highlights the participatory identification of Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in the Northern Adriatic Sea as best practice to be replicated in other VMEs and EFHs identification process to assure shared management decisions based on scientific evidence, LEK and the highest level of compliance and effectiveness.

The MEDAC also highlights the need of fisheries management measures and sub-regional collaboration supporting data collection for vulnerable species that are target catch such as commercial shark and ray species in the Adriatic.