Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/3
on reducing incidental bycatch of seabirds in fisheries in the GFCM Competence Area

The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),

RECALLING that the objectives of the Agreement establishing the GFCM are to promote the development, conservation, rational management and proper utilization of living marine resources;

RECALLING the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development of 2002 and particularly its Plan of Implementation;

RECALLING the Declaration of the Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development of the Fisheries in the Mediterranean held in Venice in 2003;

REAFFIRMING the principles of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and recalling the precautionary and ecosystem approach to fishery management;

TAKING into account the International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (IPOA Seabirds) adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

CONSIDERING that some seabirds species are listed under Annex II on endangered and threatened species of the SPA/BD Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), and that a regional action plan has been implemented by RAC/SPA;

CONSIDERING the need to develop a common regional strategy to understand and possibly reduce the effect of fisheries on seabirds also on the basis of information collected through unified protocols;

RECOGNIZING that the longline fisheries is mainly responsible for seabirds bycatches in the Mediterranean and to reduce seabird bycatch some mitigation measures should be developed;

HAVING regard to ICCAT Recommendation 07-07 on reducing incidental bycatch of seabirds in longline fisheries;

CONSIDERING that synergies on issues of reciprocal interest shall be sought between ICCAT and GFCM;
TAKING into account the SAC advice on incidental taking of seabirds;

ADOPTS, in conformity with the provision of Article III paragraph 1 (b) and (h) and Article V of the GFCM Agreement, that:

1. Contracting Parties and Cooperating non-contracting Parties of GFCM (CPCs) should develop mechanisms to ensure that incidental taking of seabirds in fishing activities is monitored, recorded and kept to the lowest level as possible in particular for species under the Annex II of the SPA/BD protocol of the Barcelona Convention.

2. SAC and the GFCM Secretariat will assist in developing mechanisms to enable the CPCs to monitor and record data on seabirds and fishing interactions including regular reporting to the GFCM-Secretariat, either within the national annual reporting to SAC or through the Task 1;

3. Any event of incidental taking and release shall be recorded by the vessel owner/master in the logbook (or any equivalent document as developed by a Contracting Party to this specific end) and reported to national authorities for notification to GFCM Secretariat, the first time being no later than June 2013.

4. The SAC is invited to evaluate on the basis of available information, and in close cooperation with relevant international scientific committees, the risk of seabirds incidental taking and mortality in different types of Mediterranean fisheries, taking into account also areas and seasons, and compare the effects of bycatches among them. In addition, SAC shall advice on the most adequate mitigation measures also in comparison to relative effect caused by anthropic disturbances due to other than fishing activity.

5. The SAC, in close cooperation with scientific committees of other international organisations, and in line also with the FAO International Plan of Action for Reducing the Incidental Catch of Seabirds in Longline Fisheries (FAO-IPOA Seabirds), is requested to advice on the technical details, feasibility, likely effectiveness and side effects, in particular, of the following options for the mitigation of seabirds' bycatches in the Mediterranean fisheries:

- Setting of demersal and/or pelagic longlines only at night (one hour after dusk and one hour before dawn);
- Prohibition to set demersal and/or pelagic longlines one hour after dawn till noon;
- Use of bird-scaring lines and wrap scares, in case of longlines setting during the day;
- Setting of a minimum bait weight
- Use of only thawed baits conditioning instead of frozen baits;
- Discards and excess bait shall not be rejected at sea during setting or hauling operations;
- Setting of a minimum distance to set bottom-set nets from sea-birds breeding areas.
6. The SAC is invited to provide, also on the basis of the work done under the relevant international scientific committees, and in line with the FAO-IPOA Seabirds, a unified protocol for the collection of information on seabirds bycatches in fishing activities with high risk of interaction with seabirds in the Mediterranean.

7. The GFCM shall, upon reception of SAC advice, consider adopting additional measures for the mitigation of incidental taking of seabirds whenever is considered endangering the survival of seabirds populations while taking into account the socio-economic impact to fisheries.