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Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS)

Report of the fourth meeting of the ad hoc Working Group on the Black Sea

Tbilisi, Georgia, 9-11 March 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fourth meeting of the ad hoc Working Group of the Black Sea took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 9 to 11 March 2015 at the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection. This was the first time the meeting was hosted in Georgia. The meeting addressed the most salient issues relating to fisheries and aquaculture in the region as well as some institutional and legal aspects relating to the mandate and work of the GFCM in the Black Sea, including the amendment process of the GFCM legal framework and the ongoing establishment of a database with national legislations.

Progress was made towards formulating scientific advice on the main target species, namely turbot, anchovy, horse mackerel and sprat as well as on piked dogfish. The meeting also formulated management advice on selected fisheries for potential further elaboration and adoption by the Commission at its thirty-ninth session. The meeting recognized the relevance of the new GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework as a tool to streamline the operations of the WGBS.

Discussions during the meeting also covered the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Black Sea especially in connection with the functioning of the GFCM Aquaculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform building on the outcomes of the Regional Conference on Aquaculture (Italy, December 2014). The WGBS identified specific actions to take in order to boost cooperation on key issues relating to this platform.

The meeting made considerable progress in enhancing regional cooperation on fisheries and aquaculture-related matters. In particular, the WGBS acknowledged the receipt of requests from Georgia and Ukraine to be granted “cooperating non-Contracting Party status”. This represents a historical milestone for the work of the Commission.

The meeting ended by adopting its work programme, renewing its bureau for another two-year term (on an exceptional basis) and endorsing the conclusions and recommendations to be submitted to the Commission for its consideration at the upcoming annual session. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for March 2016 in either Kiev or Constanta.

OPENING, ARRANGEMENTS OF THE MEETING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The fourth meeting of the Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS) was held in Tbilisi, Georgia, from 9 to 11 March 2015 at the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection. The meeting was attended by 23 experts from Black Sea riparian countries, representatives of the European Union, the FAO representation in Georgia and the GFCM Secretariat. The full list of participants is provided in Appendix B of this report.

2. Ms Maya Bitadze, Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia and representative of the hosting country, welcomed participants. She expressed satisfaction for the organization of the meeting in her country since Georgia was in the process of revising its national plan for environment and environmental resources. In reference to fisheries and aquaculture, which were included in this plan, she recalled the ongoing cooperation between Georgia and both the GFCM

and the FAO. Ms Bitadze indicated that there was a strong need to approach in a concerted fashion all issues relating to the conservation and management of the Black Sea and its resources. To this end, she stressed that cooperation would be of paramount importance and that riparian countries would have to fine-tune and harmonize relevant national policies. Ms Bitadze finished her opening remarks by expressing hopes that the meeting would represent a good starting point for moving forward in these areas under the stewardship of the GFCM.

3. Ms Iamze Mirazanashvili, FAO representation in Georgia, welcomed the organization of the meeting in Georgia and thanked the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Protection for hosting it. She also thanked the GFCM for promoting such an initiative, which was fully consistent with the FAO Programme Framework for Georgia regarding fisheries and aquaculture. Ms Mirazanashvili recalled that the FAO representation in Georgia, which had been operating for 20 years, had supported initiatives to improve the sustainability and management of the Black Sea. In this regard, the FAO Representation in Georgia had been coordinating with the GFCM; in September 2014, there a coordination meeting in Tbilisi considerably contributed to bringing about a concerted approach with the GFCM. Furthermore, she referred to the “BlackSeaFish Project” undertaken by the FAO which had been instrumental in prompting technical and scientific cooperation in the region. In concluding, Ms Mirazanashvili emphasized that there would be room for more synergies, in light of the various ongoing activities, and confirmed that the FAO Representation in Georgia was ready to continue working with the GFCM.

4. Mr Abdellah Srour, GFCM Executive Secretary, also expressed his sincere gratitude to Georgia for hosting the meeting as well as to the FAO representation in Georgia for the cooperative and proactive stance. He noted Georgia’s willingness to engage in the sound management of Black Sea resources and commended these efforts. He then drew the attention of participants to recent developments in the Black Sea achieved by the GFCM through the WGBS, which resulted as of 2011 in enhanced cooperation in the region. Mr Srour underlined the fact that the GFCM, in the capacity of recognized FAO technical body entrusted with managing living marine resources in the Black Sea, recently acknowledged the special nature of this region in the amended GFCM Agreement. This amended agreement included a specific provision on the establishment of a cooperation mechanism for the Black Sea riparian countries. He also referenced the recent deliberations of the GFCM Compliance Committee which called upon the three non-Contracting Parties to request cooperating status so as to formalize the ongoing positive cooperation within the GFCM.

5. The Executive Secretary informed the meeting that Mr Simion Nicolaev, WGBS coordinator, would also act as the representative of the Black Sea Commission. In addition, he reported that he had sent an invitation to the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (FAOSEC) but that he had not received a reply. The meeting had hoped to count on the participation of a representative from FAOSEC to contribute to discussions, in particular with regards to the potential contribution of the BlackSeaFish regional project in undertaking technical and scientific activities in the Black Sea.

6. Mr Nicolaev welcomed Georgia’s decision to host the meeting of the working group he had been chairing since its creation. He quickly recalled the activities of the WGBS thus far and pointed out that this was the first time that the meeting was organized in a riparian country that is not a Contracting Party to the GFCM. He then expressed hopes to see this trend continue in the future so that all six riparian countries could be on par. Mr Nicolaev recapped the achievements of the WGBS, mentioning in particular the most recent ones stemming from the first meeting of the GFCM Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea (SGSABS). He noted the encouraging results with regards to the feasibility of implementing fisheries management plans in the Black Sea. He then reminded participants of the role of the WGBS in reviewing the outcomes of activities undertaken, determining priorities and setting its work plan for the next intersessional period.

7. Mr Nicolaev chaired the meeting and the GFCM Secretariat undertook the task of reporting. He invited the participants to introduce themselves and then introduced the agenda, which was adopted with minor changes (as provided in Appendix A).

REVIEW OF GFCM DECISIONS RELEVANT TO THE WGBS, INCLUDING WITH REGARDS TO THE AMENDMENT PROCESS OF THE GFCM LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

8. Mr Miguel Bernal, GFCM Secretariat, listed the recommendations and resolutions adopted by the GFCM through the WGBS relating to the Black Sea. He referred in particular to the recommendation adopted in 2013 on a set of management measures for turbot as well as on the reduction of cetacean bycatch. On the basis of this recommendation, a proposal was tabled at the thirty-eighth session of the Commission (May 2014, FAO HQ, Rome, Italy) for a Black Sea turbot management plan. . Although this proposal was not adopted by the Commission as a recommendation, it was decided to add it as an annex to the report (as “pending”). The Commission also agreed to further discuss technical aspects relating to the contents of this draft recommendation at an ad hoc meeting to be convened within the framework of the WGBS. In the meantime, the Commission has continued working through the WGBS during the intersession, and technical advice on managing turbot has been provided by dedicated expert groups. This advice would be discussed during the meeting.

9. Mr Nicola Ferri, GFCM Secretariat, provided an update on the amendment process of the GFCM legal framework. This process had already resulted in the adoption of a set of amendments to the GFCM Agreement, which were approved by the FAO Council in December 2014. Mr Ferri drew the attention of participants to Article 9 of the amended GFCM Agreement which stipulates that the Commission should establish specific mechanisms for the Black Sea to ensure the full involvement of the six riparian countries in the conservation and management of Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture. In his view, the ongoing practice of the Commission relating to the WGBS was now fully reflected in the new GFCM legal framework. In reference to the conclusions of the recent GFCM Compliance Committee intersessional meeting (January 2015, FAO HQ, Rome, Italy), he noted that there was a recommendation addressed to the three non-Contracting Parties to formalize their positive cooperation with the GFCM by requesting “cooperating non-Contracting Party” status. He added that the Commission would stand ready to grant this status at its thirty-ninth session.

10. Mr Nicolaev commented in particular that cooperating non-Contracting Party status would be the first step towards greater cooperation in the Black Sea so that Georgia, the Russian Federation and the Ukraine could be more involved in activities.

11. The Executive Secretary provided some additional background information on the working methods of the GFCM consistent with the legal framework of the Commission. He noted that significant progress had been made on fisheries management in the Black Sea thanks to the WGBS. In order to continue moving forward, similar initiative should be reinforced. The GFCM would stand ready to provide technical assistance, including to the three non-Contracting Parties.

OVERVIEW OF INTERSESSIONAL ACTIVITIES RELEVANT TO THE BLACK SEA

12. Mr Nicolaev presented an overview of the WGBS intersessional activities on the basis of the priorities identified by the Commission at its thirty-eighth session and the corresponding adopted work plan. In his presentation, he touched upon a number of technical assistance needs that might arise for activities such as data collection, improvement of gear selectivity, stock assessment and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. He also quickly reviewed aquaculture-related activities in the Black Sea and encouraged a more practical approach within the framework of the WGBS in order to advance on issues relating to aquaculture development. He finally stressed the opportunity to enhance cooperation with the Black Sea Commission, building upon the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concluded between both organizations in 2012.

13. Participants expressed their gratitude for the work carried out by the WGBS during the intersession and recognized the added value. It was pointed out however that there was a need to devise a more harmonized system through which the six riparian countries could annually report to the WGBS. The incidence of IUU fishing was identified as one of the main challenges in the region. Furthermore, it was agreed that the WGBS would be the ideal forum where all stakeholders, including universities and academia, could be given a possibility to contribute to joint actions.

Outcomes of fisheries activities

14. Following the chair's overview, the GFCM Secretariat detailed the outcomes of WGBS intersessional activities. The work undertaken was considered to be productive and fruitful and it was underlined that enough scientific information was available for the Black Sea riparian countries to take necessary actions in working towards the sustainability of fisheries in the region, including through the adoption of management plans for the most important fisheries in the Black Sea. Among others, the main scientific findings for turbot, anchovy, horse mackerel, sprat and piked dogfish were presented. The case of turbot was also examined in light of the management requirements emanating from the Commission, which could be now transposed into a formal decision based on the views of the WGBS. Specific mention was made to the case of IUU fishing in the Black Sea, as it was often the topic of intense discussions during WGBS intersessional activities. Before concluding, the Secretariat explained the rationale behind the new GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF), how the framework had been elaborated and what would be the road towards its adoption and progressive implementation. Given the importance of data for the functioning of the WGBS and the implementation of its work plan, the DCRF would be a pillar for effective data collection and analysis in the future, especially in light of its subregional approach.

Second meeting of the Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea (SGSABS)

15. The conclusions of the second SGSABS meeting reported the status of the Black Sea turbot (*Psetta maxima*) population as both "overexploited" and "in overexploitation". Similarly, the Black Sea anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus ponticus*) population was found to be "in overexploitation". The Black Sea horse mackerel (*Trachurus mediterraneus ponticus*) stock was reported as "overexploited" whereas the piked dogfish (*Squalus acanthia*) population was considered to be depleted at the Black Sea scale. In contrast, the Black Sea stocks of sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*) were deemed to be sustainably exploited. The SGSABS advised the implementation of a recovery plan for both turbot and piked dogfish as well as the reduction of fishing mortality for both anchovy and horse mackerel.

16. The representative of Georgia pointed out that the quota system in place in her country for Black Sea anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus ponticus*) signaled a sustainable exploitation of this species in the waters under Georgian jurisdiction. In response, the GFCM Secretariat clarified that the stock assessment for Black Sea anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus ponticus*) was performed on the basis of available information from the riparian countries, including Georgia; thus, the advice stemming therefrom referred to the entire stock at the regional level.

17. In the ensuing discussions, the representative of the EU sought clarifications regarding the need for a recovery plan to reduce direct and indirect fishing mortality for piked dogfish. In particular the representative wondered how such plan could be formulated given that the species concerned was not a target species. He invited participants to take action in addressing this problem after three consecutive years of the Subcommittee on Stock Assessments (SCSA) issuing advice to create a recovery plan. Alternatively, he suggested embedding conservation measures for piked dogfish within the draft management plan for turbot pending before the Commission.

18. The representative of Turkey commented on the proposed anchovy otolith exchange with Georgia, which had a twofold proposed objective: i) to assist in the catch identification of the two anchovy sub-species (Black Sea and Azov Sea anchovy); and ii) to facilitate the harmonization of fish age-reading among the Black Sea riparian countries. He confirmed that the action was initiated and that support from the GFCM to facilitate the exchange would be desirable. He then invited the other Black Sea riparian countries to join in this activity and proposed working towards the formulation of a management plan to define possible measures to reduce anchovy fishing mortality. Participants welcomed this idea and agreed on possibly convening an expert meeting during the intersession in light of the importance of the subject.

19. The representative of Georgia suggested that scientific surveys for stock assessments in the Black Sea should be carried out by range countries which share the same resources) in accordance with national legislations in place regulating permits. Participants expressed support for carrying out joint surveys which would foster a regional and cooperative approach. The meeting agreed that all

national experts should be involved to the maximum extent possible in developing sound scientific advice.

20. The representative of Ukraine highlighted the importance of hydro-acoustic surveys, mentioning that these could be tailored to those locations where target species were found in specific seasons (e.g., anchovy in the southeastern Black Sea in the winter).

21. The representative of Bulgaria mentioned that ambitions in conducting hydro-acoustic surveys should be matched with a feasible and practical approach since past experiences with joint undertakings had proven to be challenging, even if limited to two countries only. The aspects of timing would also pose a major challenge if these surveys were to be carried out twice a year and the related financial impact should not be overlooked.

22. Participants recognized the need for a cooperative approach and a common methodology in establishing regional surveys and stressed the important role of the GFCM acting through the WGBS as a platform for cooperation. The GFCM Secretariat recalled that the report of the last meeting of the SGSABS included clear elements and guidance for the coordination and harmonization of surveys in the Black Sea; these were intended to facilitate the task of coordinating surveys. The group added that technical equipment (e.g., research vessels and sampling equipment – offered by Bulgaria and Turkey) and personnel (e.g., experts and technicians – offered by the representatives of the other Black Sea riparian countries) should be collected in order to advance in this task.

23. In addition to those reported above, other issues were raised such as challenges in harmonizing surveys and the use of the resulting information for the assessment of the main stocks in the area given the characteristics of Black Sea stocks and ecosystems, including widely-distributed stocks, the lack of precise information on stock boundaries, and environment- related migration patterns. Participants acknowledged these challenges but stressed that fisheries-independent surveys were also required to provide a sound stock assessment advice on the main stocks in the region.

24. Since the need for carrying out joint surveys at sea was affirmed, participants agreed that a conceptual note on a regional pilot survey should be elaborated and presented at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission (May 2015). The WGBS chair would coordinate this work in close coordination with the GFCM Secretariat and would aim to submit a draft concept note to the attention of riparian countries by April 2015. The implementation of this survey, subsequent to the adoption of the concept note by the Commission, could be carried out subject to the availability of funds.

25. Regarding the submission of relevant information by the six Black Sea riparian countries to the WGBS, the meeting proposed preparing a standard format national report to be submitted ahead of the meeting in a narrative form. This would be consistent with GFCM practice and, most importantly, it would enable the GFCM Secretariat to steer more efficiently the discussions at the WGBS while helping the riparian countries to have a more harmonized approach. Based on the national report to the SAC, a standard format national report was adopted (Appendix C). It was stressed that the report shall be narrative in nature. Data requested through recommendations or by the SAC should be submitted through existing channels (e.g., the DCRF or *ad hoc* data calls). The Black Sea riparian countries would be expected to submit only this national report to the GFCM since it would then serve as the report to be subsequently submitted to the SAC. For the case of Turkey, which also carried out fishing activities in the Mediterranean, the SAC would still require a report on its fishing activities in the Mediterranean.

26. At its next meeting, the WGBS would assess the benefits of submitting a national report format and, as appropriate, would consider coordinating with the Black Sea Commission towards the possible harmonization of reporting formats used by both organizations.

27. In concluding the discussion on the outcomes of the SGSABS, the WGBS endorsed the subregional group's advice and provided a series of recommendations towards the management of the main stocks in the Black Sea. These are included in the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

Ad hoc WGBS meeting on the management of turbot fisheries, including progress in the fight against IUU fishing

28. The ad hoc WGBS meeting on the management of turbot fisheries, entrusted with the responsibility of providing technical advice on the management of turbot fisheries – concluded that measures that offer potential to facilitate the fight against IUU fishing should be a priority in any management plan. To this end, the meeting outlined a number of key elements for the reduction of IUU fishing as well as a number of priority actions to improve the management of the fishery.

29. Participants acknowledged that the discussions and conclusions of the ad hoc WGBS meeting on the management of turbot fisheries addressed an important part of the issues highlighted in the pending recommendation on turbot (included in Appendix M of the report of the thirty-eighth session of the Commission). Participants agreed that the fight of IUU should be identified as a top priority for turbot management and endorsed the conclusions of the abovementioned meeting (including elements for the reduction of IUU fishing and priorities to be included in a turbot management plan). These conclusions are reproduced in Appendices D and E of this report.

30. In reference to the fact that unreported and illegal catches are one of the main challenges for the management of turbot fisheries in the Black Sea the representative of the EU pointed to the roadmap for combatting IUU fishing in the Black Sea (approved by the thirty-seventh session of the Commission). In his view, there were a series of measures therein, which, when combined with control plans, would represent a first step in better managing turbot fisheries and tackling its alarming stock status in the Black Sea.

31. A number of uncertainties that could undermine the proper management of turbot were highlighted. For example, the uncertainty in stock delimitation and spatial dynamics, the lack of information on absolute levels of IUU fishing, the lack of precise information on market aspects such as the absolute levels of export/import in the different riparian countries and the lack of an accurate estimate of numbers of vessels dedicated to the turbot fishery.

32. In light of the above, it was proposed that in the event measures to fight IUU fishing (as outlined in Appendix D) would not prove sufficient to resolve the drastic situation of turbot population subsequent to their adoption, additional and/or alternative measures would be required. In that respect, participants also mentioned the possibility of considering the use of effort control (e.g. reduction of fishing days or number of vessels) or landing control (e.g. quotas) as additional measures to be adopted in the event that management objectives were not achieved by reducing IUU fishing only. With regards to landing control though some participants expressed concern that quotas could actually contribute to increase IUU fishing.

33. Also, and without prejudice to any measure taken to reduce IUU fishing, participants suggested attempting to carry out a regional assessment of the extent of IUU fishing. In that respect, the upcoming meeting of the GFCM working group on IUU fishing (Marrakech, Morocco, April 2015,) was mentioned as a forum in which methodological aspects towards the assessment of IUU fishing could be discussed. Subsequently, an agreed methodology would have to be defined and adapted to the Black Sea context.

34. Furthermore, following on from the discussions that took place, the meeting motioned for a revised draft recommendation on a management plan for turbot. This would be based on both the technical work carried out during the intersession and the elements outlined in Appendices D and E. Such recommendation would be tabled at the upcoming thirty-ninth session of the Commission.

GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework: outcomes of the DCRF workshop, proposed roadmap

35. The WGBS was introduced with a final draft of the DCRF to be presented and discussed at the seventeenth session of the SAC. The draft included two different parts - one on the structure of data collection and another on common practices for data collection. The draft also included details on a total of seven tasks covering all data requirements identified by the SAC.

36. Participants welcomed the DCRF and expressed readiness in working on its basis for the collection and submission of data to the Secretariat. It was suggested that technical assistance might be

needed on both a regional and national basis for the Black Sea riparian countries to be in a position to progressively adapt to the DCRF. The Secretariat informed the meeting that a number of actions were already planned within the GFCM Framework Programme; if deemed necessary, dedicated activities could be incorporated into the WGBS work programme.

Outcomes of aquaculture activities

Ninth session of the GFCM Committee on Aquaculture (CAQ), the Regional Aquaculture Conference

37. The GFCM Secretariat recapped the outcomes of the ninth session of the CAQ (Marrakech, Morocco, February 2015) that are relevant to the Black Sea. The presentation focused in particular on progress made in the functioning of the GFCM Aquaculture Multi-Stakeholder Platform (AMShP); the collection of aquaculture data through SIPAM; and the work related to the functioning of the CAQ and its reorganization within the context of the GFCM amendment process. The Secretariat also presented the main outcomes of the Regional Aquaculture Conference *Blue Growth in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea: developing sustainable aquaculture for food security* (Bari, Italy, December 2014).

38. With regards in particular to the Regional Aquaculture Conference, emphasis was placed on the results of this important event which addressed a wide range of topics and issues thereby laying the groundwork for the sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. To this end, it was indicated that the aquaculture multi-stakeholder platform would boost cooperation via national mirror-platforms on key strategic areas such as governance (including simplification of administrative processes), aquaculture product marketing, technological innovations and research and development.

39. Participants praised such initiatives as they would offer an important forum to experts and stakeholders from the region to share their experiences, discuss the challenges ahead and explore potential synergies and opportunities for cooperation.

40. In the ensuing discussions, the representative of Bulgaria provided a brief overview of the national authorities in charge of aquaculture and confirmed that there was a genuine interest in further developing the sector. Investments were forthcoming and Bulgaria was committed to increasing marine aquaculture production in the future.

41. The representative of Turkey listed the species farmed in his country on the Black Sea side. He explained that there was capacity to further develop the aquaculture sector, both inland and marine, and specific efforts were underway to farm sturgeon. He noted that aquaculture in Turkey had grown considerably over the past ten years, reaching 233 000 tonnes in 2013 (which contributed to a 38% of the total fishery production). There are 2 353 fish farms with a total production capacity of 463 000 tonnes. The main farmed species are rainbow trout (55%), sea bass (29%) and sea bream (15%). In addition to technological constraints, he pointed to administrative burdens that presently affect the aquaculture sector. However, the Turkish government was very supportive of the private sector, in recognition of the fact that the global trend in aquaculture production is steadily increasing and that the demand for farmed products will increase accordingly. For the future, the main priority for Turkey was to use its resources sustainably and benefit from present potentials at optimum levels in both fisheries and aquaculture for the benefit of the community. Such goal will be reliant on environmentally friendly practices and sustainable farming techniques.

42. The representative of Ukraine reported that the annual volume of fish aquaculture production in his country was about 22 000 tonnes. This was less than commercial catch in inland water bodies which amounted to about 45 000 tonnes. The artificial reproduction system for restocking valuable freshwater and marine fish species is the most performing and effective aquaculture system in Ukraine. Species farmed in this country included herbivorous fish (silver and spotted silver carp), Acipenseridae species (Russian sturgeon and Starred sturgeon), Scopthalmidae and Pleuronectidae species, Mugilidae species (haarder) and pike perch. For commercial freshwater aquaculture of Ukraine the species included all Ukrainian kinds of carp, silver and spotted silver carps and their hybrids, grass carp, sturgeon species, catfish, buffalo, haarder and some other species. Finally, he noted that the marine aquaculture sector was relatively new; it was currently mostly focused on

shellfish farming of Mediterranean mussels as well as cage farming of flatfish, mullets and valuable semi-migratory fish.

43. After summarizing the legal technicalities regulated aquaculture at the national level, the representative of Georgia commented that whereas, inland aquaculture in Georgia was already developed, marine aquaculture was still being tested out; the country needed technical assistance in order to develop this sector too. The representative indicated that data on aquaculture at the national level would shortly be collected and sent to the GFCM Secretariat for adding to those of other riparian countries in the regional database. However, historical data might be lacking since the information system on aquaculture was destroyed in the past. Efforts were underway in Georgia to promote consultations among the different stakeholders interested in aquaculture.

44. The situation of Romania, as reported by the national representative, was similar to that described by the representative of Bulgaria. Marine aquaculture production has remained at a low level, mainly due to the environmental features of the Black Sea in Romania. Financial limitations were hampering the development of the sector. On this note, it was suggested that the GFCM could perhaps launch initiatives to jump-start the sector, in addition to providing training and technical assistance. Support from the GFCM could also be needed in relation to environmental legislation, especially for marine aquaculture.

45. The representative of the EU informed participants that the EU planned to boost aquaculture. To this end, a common strategy on aquaculture development had been agreed upon. This had been formalized through guidelines for aquaculture applicable at the EU level. In general, European aquaculture had a high level of environmental sustainability and offered high quality fish, produced with sound animal health and consumer protection standards. Furthermore, the reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy built upon these standards and called on national governments to translate the common objectives contained in these guidelines into multiannual national plans. These guidelines, *inter alia*, assist EU Member States in setting their own national targets in light of starting positions, national circumstances and national decision-making procedures. The representative of the EU briefly listed some of the objectives of the guidelines which included: (i) simplifying administrative procedures in particular regarding licenses; (ii) securing the allocation of water and space for freshwater and marine aquaculture within in coordinated spatial planning; (iii) promoting business diversification in order to provide additional sources of income and promoting sustainable aquaculture growth; and (iv) to exploiting all competitive factors such as high environmental, animal health and consumer protection standards.

46. It emerged from the discussions that there were some issues of common interest and concern for the development of Black Sea aquaculture – such as environmental issues, legislation, visibility and perception of the sector – on which the GFCM could work.. In view of raising necessary funds, the GFCM Secretariat was attempting to make efforts and draw the attention of donors on initiatives of interest to them. The AMShP was a very promising tool in this regard since the creation of mirror platforms at the national level would operationalize the work of this tool. Similarly, the GFCM Secretariat had been supporting some Contracting Parties in other subregions in revising their national aquaculture legislation and enhancing the visibility of aquaculture by sharing success stories with the public. Challenging tasks such as the inventory of farms, the identification of allocated zones for aquaculture, diversification and quality of aquaculture production and monitoring programmes to minimize the impact of aquaculture activities were also being tackled by the GFCM.

Restocking and aquaculture data collection systems

47. The GFCM Secretariat recalled the process through which the principle for guidelines on aquaculture stock enhancement were developed over the past two years. The Secretariat then referred to the interest shown by the Commission at its thirty-eighth session and the request to translate the principles into other languages. It was concluded that this was a good practice which merited to be further encouraged.

48. Mr Ilhan Aydin, national expert from Turkey and second vice-coordinator of the WGBS, presented an overview of the most recent research on aquaculture and restocking activities as carried out by the Central Fisheries Research Institute of Trabzon. This institute has been very active in

carrying out several projects and actions on aquaculture and in providing advice to both professionals and farmers (including advising on consultation processes). Mr Aydin presented the ongoing work on hatcheries for Black Sea trout (*Salmo trutta labrax*), the Mediterranean mussel (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*), sturgeon (*Acipenser ssp*) and turbot (*Psetta maxima*), all of which were directly relevant to restocking. He stressed that it might be relatively easy for researchers to culture species such as turbot; which, on the other hand, are very difficult to farm without the involvement of researchers. He also pointed out the issue of turbot restocking, indicating that there was a balance between releasing young animals, which were subject to higher mortality, or older individuals, that were already “domesticated” and may have problems adapting to the wild. Mr Aydin also presented the use of animal releases to perform tagging programmes. It was suggested that it would be timely for the GFCM to support releasing programmes linked to restocking at least for species such as turbot. For species such as the sturgeon, migration patterns are fairly extensive. Consequently, release programmes should be backed up by all six riparian countries. Focal points should tentatively be appointed by the six riparian countries.

49. With regards to data on aquaculture, Black Sea riparian countries were encouraged to appoint national focal points for aquaculture that could work as a conduit between their state and the GFCM. This would, *inter alia*, improve the reporting of aquaculture data in line with applicable GFCM decisions.

Other activities

50. The GFCM Secretariat reported on the progress in the establishment of a database for national legislation, including legislations enacted by the six Black Sea riparian countries. The work was ongoing and its importance was key to the six riparian countries as the database was a tool at their disposal to facilitate harmonization and also compare the status of elaboration of legislations in the areas under the mandate of the GFCM.

51. Mr Aydin updated participants on the outcomes of the (*International Symposium on Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences (2014 FABA Symposium)*), held in Trabzon. This symposium gathered prominent scientists from the region as well as invited speakers from all over the world. In total, there were around 600 participants from 48 countries with a total of 132 talks and 325 posters presented. A select number of these manuscripts are expected to be published in the Turkish Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences (TrJFAS) which belongs to Central Fisheries Research Institute. TrJFAS is a refereed academic journal which has been accepted to SCI Expanded. A number of international organizations were also represented, including the GFCM. The symposium enjoyed the support of both civil society organizations and private organizations. The next FABA event is tentatively scheduled for 2016 in Antalya.

52. Mr Nicolaev, representing the Black Sea Commission, reported on the activities of the AGFOMLR and shared data on fishing activities and catches in the Black Sea. These data were indeed consistent with those of the GFCM on target species in the Black Sea, including data on the decreased composition of the regional fishing fleets and regional catches. Mr Nicolaev drew the attention of participants to the impacts of overfishing and climate change in the region; impacts which are thought to be affecting fish agglomeration behavior. He then reported on various activities and meetings of the Black Sea Commission which were also of relevance to the work of the GFCM, in light of the memorandum of understanding between the two organizations. Mr Nicolaev had been ensuring coordination between the work of the Black Sea Commission and the GFCM in order to avoid duplication and optimize the use of resources.

53. With regards to the ongoing work on common indicators for exploited marine populations, participants agreed that further coordination would be appropriate between the Black Sea Commission and the GFCM so as to harmonize these indicators.

54. Mr Goktug Dalgic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, introduced the background and activities of the UniEuroFish Project which aims to fuel cooperation between universities and the private sector. The final beneficiaries of the project were around 2000 fishers as well as the coastal communities of Rize, Artvin and Trabzon. The most relevant outcomes foreseen for this project include the establishment of a multi-stakeholder protocol agreement, vocational courses and training

for capacity building purposes. The objectives of this project will be pursued through transversal cooperation and didactical activities for professional fishers. In terms of legislation, lectures would be provided on the regional applicable requirements, such as those required under the GFCM. The results of the project could potentially be presented at the *Regional conference on sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea* tentatively scheduled for December 2015 in Algeria. This conference will be organized by the GFCM together with several partners.

55. The GFCM Secretariat was invited to make all presentations delivered at the meeting available through its SharePoint portal.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2015-2016

57. The following activities were proposed for the 2015–2016 programme of work:

Activities under the direct mandate of the WBGS, for the Commission's information

FISHERIES

- Continue the analysis of anchovy otoliths from surveys and catches in order to evaluate the possibility of estimating the percentage of different anchovy subspecies in anchovy catches in the Black Sea and to harmonize age-reading across institutes (to be coordinated by Ali Cemal Gücü);
- Collect information on bonito abundance and distribution in the Mediterranean and Black Sea to work towards the assessment of status of bonito in the Black Sea (to be performed by the Black Sea riparian countries through the national reports);
- Collect information on catches of piked dogfish and identify the main fisheries affecting its population (to be performed by the Black Sea riparian countries through the national reports). The experts of the riparian countries were encouraged to collect any additional information from survey data and to share it with the relevant groups;
- Coordinate the collection of data on catch and bycatch of the rapa whelk fishery and report it to the 2015 Subregional Group on Stock assessment (to be carried out by the Trabzon Institute);
- Continue with the activities for the stock differentiation for turbot to support a dedicated meeting on stock differentiation in 2016/2017 (to be coordinated by İlhan Aydın); and
- Continue the collection of information to analyze fluctuation in catches of small pelagic species, especially sprat (catches, market, etc.) - to be presented to the 2015 Subregional Group on Stock Assessment (to be coordinated by Violin Raykov).

AQUACULTURE

- Contribute to the regional questionnaire on national aquaculture multi-stakeholder platforms or equivalent mechanisms in the GFCM area (to be coordinated by the GFCM Secretariat).

Activities submitted to the Commission for decision

FISHERIES

- Develop a catalogue of fishing gears and vessel types used in the Black Sea, including the relative importance of the different types of gears used by the fleets - to be reported in 2016/2017 (to be coordinated by the GFCM Secretariat with the involvement of national experts; Turkey offered to support Georgia in this undertaking).

AQUACULTURE

- Contribute to the preparation of the regional guidelines for simplification of administrative procedures (to be coordinated by the GFCM Secretariat);
- Compilation of a list of success stories in the GFCM area on marketing and perception of aquaculture products (to be coordinated by the GFCM Secretariat); and

- Conduct a census of Black Sea aquaculture activities (including infrastructures, species, etc.) for 2016/2017 (to be coordinated by the GFCM Secretariat).

58. The proposed meetings to be convened within the programme of work for 2015-2016 are as follows:

Meeting	Place/Date
Workshop on training for data collection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea	Trabzon October – December 2015
Workshop on the management of anchovy in the Black Sea	Trabzon October – December 2015
Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea (SGSABS) (including sessions on benchmark assessment of turbot, anchovy and red mullet, and harmonizing surveys-at-sea)	Burgas October – December 2015
Fifth meeting of the Working Group on the Black Sea (WGBS)	Kiev/Constanta March 2016
Workshop in support of the implementation of Allocated Zones for Aquaculture (AZA) for aquaculture development (SHoCMed project)	TBD, Georgia TBC September - October 2015
Training for Black Sea riparian countries control experts	Constanta, TBC Second half 2015

59. Participants were reminded about the upcoming working groups on vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and IUU fishing (Marrakech, Morocco, April 2015) and were strongly encouraged to participate.

60. The WGBS adopted its work programme and agreed that it would be carried out subject to the endorsement by the Commission and the availability of funds.

DESIGNATION OF THE NEW WGBS BUREAU

61. The Executive Secretary recalled the relevant provisions governing the election of the WGBS Bureau with particular reference to the duration of the mandates and informed participants about the status of the outgoing Bureau.

62. It was recalled that the mandate of the current bureau had elapsed and the participants warmly thanked the three members of the bureau for the excellent job carried out. With this in mind, it was unanimously proposed that the current bureau's mandate be renewed (Mr Simion Nicolaev as Coordinator, Mr Violin Raykov as vice-coordinator and Mr Ilhan Aydin as second vice-coordinator).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

63. The WGBS agreed on the following general conclusions and recommendations:

- To support the organization of joint surveys-at-sea for stocks of small pelagic and demersal species, and to facilitate the organization of these surveys through the preparation of a conceptual note which will include: the identification of survey objectives; areas where contribution from riparian countries will be needed; and the relevant timing for the surveys. The concept note will be

prepared by the GFCM Secretariat with the support of the WGBS coordinator. It shall be submitted to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission for endorsement;

- To establish a system of reporting across all Black Sea riparian countries for the submission of relevant information on fisheries management in the region. This will be based on a common template (as reproduced under Appendix C. This report will be submitted by the Black Sea riparian countries to the GFCM Secretariat at least one month ahead of the meetings of the WGBS;
- To support the harmonization of the descriptors and indicators on the state of exploited marine populations being developed by the GFCM and the Black Sea Commission in their respective areas;
- To foster collaboration between the GFCM, the Black Sea Commission and other relevant partners on aquaculture-related aspects; and
- To strengthen capacity-building at the national level through training activities on specific aspects of aquaculture and the dissemination of regional indicators for aquaculture development in the Black Sea.

64. The WGBS also provided the following advice for the management of selected fisheries:

- For turbot (*Psetta maxima*), develop a management plan that ensures the recovery of the population, taking into account the various elements mentioned in Appendices D and E of this report. This is to be submitted to the thirty-ninth session of the Commission.
- For anchovy (*Engraulis encrasicolus ponticus*), proceed with scientific and technical efforts for the preparation of a subregional management plan for this stock during the next intersession, taking into consideration existing national plans.
- For piked dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*), develop a recovery plan that identifies the impact of different fisheries on this species and that ensures a major reduction in fishing mortality (direct, indirect and delayed). As an initial step for this recovery plan, incorporate measures to reduce bycatch of piked dogfish in future management plans in the area (as well as in the turbot management plan outlined above).
- In general, for all Black Sea stocks considered to be fished at unsustainable levels, consider the implementation of measures to combat IUU fishing (e.g., on-board controls) as well as any additional measures (e.g., reduction of fishing effort or introduction of a quota system) for the reduction of fishing mortality. Additionally, develop and apply a methodology to assess unreported fishing in the Black Sea, both to assist in the provision of advice for Black Sea stocks and to monitor the efficiency of any management measure against IUU fishing;

ANY OTHER MATTER

65. In light of the outcomes of the intersessional meeting of the Compliance Committee (FAO HQs, January 2015), where the three non-Contracting Parties to the GFCM were found to meet the requirements for obtaining cooperating non-Contracting Party status, Mr Ioseb Kartsivadze, on behalf of the competent Georgian authorities, formalized his country's request to be granted this status within the GFCM.

66. Mr Kostiantyn Demianenko, on behalf of the State Agency of Fisheries of Ukraine, also confirmed his country's request to be granted cooperating non-Contracting party status within the GFCM. Furthermore, he informed the WGBS that Ukraine was moving forward in further developing cooperation with the GFCM further as it considered the Commission to be an effective international instrument for the conservation and rational exploitation of Black Sea marine living resources, and for supporting activities such as updating national legislations and national fisheries management systems.

67. The GFCM Secretariat was requested by the WGBS to lodge these requests at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission for its consideration and decision.

68. The WGBS saluted this historical moment which represented a milestone in enhanced cooperation among the Black Sea riparian countries and expressed hope that cooperating non-Contracting Party status would represent an intermediate step towards full membership to the Commission in due course.

69. In order to ensure a continuous flow of information and data from the WGBS to the GFCM Secretariat, the need for technical focal points was stressed. For the non-Contracting Parties, the following proposed focal points were proposed by Ukraine: Ms Tetyana Yakovlyeva for aquaculture and Mr Kostiantyn Demianenko for the DCRF. Nominations for Georgia and the Russian Federation would be requested by the GFCM Secretariat. For the Contracting Parties, the current focal points were maintained.

70. The WGBS wholeheartedly thanked the Government of Georgia for hosting the meeting, for the warm hospitality extended to all participants and for the commitment to the great organization of the meeting.

71. The contributions of all participating experts were praised. The efforts of those involved in ensuring the correct implementation of WGBS activities according to the work plan and the constant commitment of the coordinator and vice-coordinators were also praised. The active participation of non-Contracting Parties in the meeting were highly appreciated and were regarded as essential in working towards the concerted, effective management of fisheries and aquaculture in the area.

72. Gratitude was expressed to the WGBS coordinator for chairing the meeting and for his efforts all year long in support of WGBS activities. He, in turn, thanked participants, especially in light of the growing complexity of the issues addressed and their persistent and encouraging spirit of cooperation.

73. Moreover, gratitude was expressed by participants to the GFCM Secretariat for the tremendous efforts in backstopping the WGBS and facilitating the coordination and implementation of its activities throughout the intersessional period.

DATE AND VENUE OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE WGBS

74. The meeting acknowledged the kind offer by Ukraine and Romania to host the fifth meeting of the WGBS (in Kiev and Constanta respectively), tentatively scheduled for March 2016. The GFCM Secretariat was requested to undertake the necessary consultations and inform the WGBS in due course on the final decision relating to the venue of its next meeting.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT AND CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

75. The meeting report, including its appendices, was adopted on Wednesday, 11 March 2015.

Agenda

- 1. Opening of the meeting**
- 2. Meeting arrangements and adoption of the agenda**
- 3. Review of GFCM decisions relevant to the WGBS, including with regards to the amendment process of the GFCM legal and institutional framework**
- 4. Overview of intersessional activities relevant to the Black Sea**
- 5. Tentative programme of work for 2015-2016, including:**
- 6. Designation of the new WGBS Bureau**
- 7. Conclusions and recommendations**
- 8. Any other matter**
- 9. Date and venue of the fifth meeting of the WGBS**
- 10. Adoption of the report and closure of the meeting**

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FORMAT FOR THE PREPARATION OF NATIONAL REPORTS for the WGBS

Description of the fisheries

Provide the following information (use tables provided where appropriate):

Description of the fishing grounds and GSA.

Total landings by group of targeted species.

Total landings by species (estimated if needed)

Fleet:

- number of vessels by fleet segment (Tables will be provided). Indicate updates from last year.
- LOA (range and average)
- Total KW (or HP) + GT (or GRT)

Progress on the assessment of status of stocks

Report on the advances towards improving on stock assessment. Which actions taken or which stock assessments attempted and where were they reported. Advice should be discussed on the appropriate WG

Progress on the development of statistics and information system

Description of the national system of fishery statistics and/or any improvement/change occurred. Indicate whether or not progress in activities related to the collection and processing of fishery statistics have been done with the assistance of FAO regional projects. Type of data collected, transmission to GFCM Secretariat and other international bodies. Inventory of existing databases. Synergies with other applications.

Status of research in progress of relevance to fisheries, including on stock assessment, socioeconomics and marine environment.

Description of the results of the continuing and in progress research projects of interest to the WGBS, with particular emphasis on management oriented assessment and GFCM priority species.

Involvement in activities of other partner organizations and initiatives, including FAO regional projects

Description of activities carried out during the intersessional period with other partner organizations, level of involvement, results obtained and assistance received.

Management and fisheries related environment protection measures at national level

Description of new management and environment protection measures (legislation, regulations, etc.), including spatial protected areas, and highlighting those taken in direct response to GFCM recommendations during intersessional period **including the assessment of their effects**

Proposals for future research programmes related to fisheries

**Specific items for the reduction of IUU to be incorporated in a management plan for
Black Sea turbot fisheries**

1. The dimension of turbot bottom set gillnets allowed to operate in the fishery should be compliant with the following rules:
 - Dimensions of the gillnet (maximum length and maximum height) should be specified. Countries should provide the dimensions currently used in their fisheries to the WGBS which should analyze this information and propose the maximum dimensions.
 - Minimum mesh size of 400 mm (compliant with Recommendation GFCM/37/2013/2). The Group recognized that the current mesh size used in Ukraine and Georgia is slightly different, while the current mesh size used in the Russian Federation is larger than that which is specified in the Recommendation.
 - Monofilament or twine diameter shall not exceed 0.5 mm.
2. All gillnets operating in the fishery should be clearly identified. A database of the codifications used by all riparian states should be created.
3. Where possible, a list of designated landing sites should be created.
4. An “authorized vessels” list should be created, containing all vessels that are authorized to catch turbot in Black Sea waters. In order to create this list the following steps should be carried out:
 - Only those vessels that use gillnets that comply with the requisites described in point 1 should be allowed to operate in the fishery;
 - Given that some countries are adapting their current license system, the Group recommended that this list should be ready as soon as possible. The list of vessels should remain confidential;
 - The list should contain a detailed description of each vessel, following the same criteria being used in authorized vessel lists for other management plans and for Fishery Restricted Areas.
5. Authorized vessels should comply with the minimum landing size obligation established in Recommendation GFCM/37/2013/2. They should also provide a detailed report of their fishing activities, including as minimum requirements: operating days, operating area and total catch of turbot. This information should be provided at least quarterly.
6. Establishment of a database of protected areas and closed seasons, with detailed information on regulations in place, in all riparian states, based on information provided by all countries. Where possible, neighbouring countries should agree on common closing seasons to facilitate inspections and avoid potential market competition. A minimum target on the percentage of fishing grounds to be covered by protected measures should be identified.
7. National monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) procedures should be clearly identified. In order to do so, the following steps should be carried out:
 - Countries should prepare an annual control plan, which includes specific objectives to control turbot fisheries;
 - The MCS plan should include monitoring and control of market places.

- Countries should assess the performance of their MCS system in relation to their plan;
- National inspectors should receive all information on authorized vessels, fishing gears and regulations as well as adequate training to specifically achieve the objectives of the MCS plan related to turbot.

Scientific and socio-economic priorities to be incorporated in a management plan for Black Sea turbot fisheries

- Scientific priorities

Scientific priorities should be in line with those prepared by the WGBS and in the working plan of the advisory group on fisheries of the Black Sea Commission (BSC) for the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the BSC and the GFCM.

- Socioeconomic analysis

Countries should collect socio-economic information related to turbot fisheries (e.g., catch value, variable and fixed costs, employment, etc.) and perform economic-efficiency and market analyses, as well as evaluate potential socio-economic impacts of different future scenarios. Countries should also carry out awareness-raising campaigns for all stakeholders regarding the importance of preserving this fishery and combatting IUU fishing.

- Other priorities

Consideration and performance evaluation of the use of restocking from aquaculture to improve stock recovery rates.

Encouraging the recovery of abandoned fishing gear (ghost fishing) which is considered beneficial to reduce fish mortality

Promoting the improvement of gear-selectivity towards optimum fish size selection patterns and reducing bycatch and discard rates of other species through the implementation of case studies.

Promoting the reduction of turbot bycatch in other fisheries such as beam and trawl-based fisheries.

Proposed terms of reference of selected meetings proposed by the WGBS

1. Subregional Group on Stock Assessment in the Black Sea (SGSABS) - 2015

- Revise the status of the main commercial stocks in the Black Sea;
- Review existing data and stock assessment methods for main stocks in the area, with special focus on the estimation of IUU fishing and discards which are required to conduct stock assessments;
- Review updated information on stock identification; and
- Provide advice to the GFCM and other relevant organizations on stock status and research priorities to improve knowledge on the status of stocks.

Specific mandate for 2015:

- Revise input data and attempt analytical assessment for red mullet, whiting and bonito;
- For the case of turbot and anchovy in the Black Sea, perform an in-depth review of the assessment model, its assumptions and the input data used, and review the reference points for these stocks; and
- Revise the estimate of IUU fishing for selected stocks and its application in stock assessments.

2. Workshop on training for data collection in the Mediterranean and Black Sea (*To be provided before the thirty-ninth session of the Commission*)

3. Workshop on the management of anchovy in the Black Sea (*To be provided before the thirty-ninth session of the Commission*)

4. Fifth meeting of the Working Group on the Black Sea (*To be provided before the thirty-ninth session of the Commission*)

5. Workshop in support of the implementation of Allocated Zones for Aquaculture (AZA) for aquaculture development [SHoCMed project] (*To be provided before the thirty-ninth session of the Commission*)