

Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/4
on the incidental bycatch of sea turtles 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;

CONSIDERING that Mediterranean sea turtles are listed in 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 a regional action plan has been implemented by RAC/SPA;

HAVING regard to ICCAT Recommendation 10-09 on the bycatch of sea turtles in ICCAT fisheries;

RECOGNIZING that also some other types of fishing operating in the GFCM Competence Area can adversely affect sea turtles and there is a need to implement measures to mitigate these adverse effects;

NOTING the importance of harmonizing conservation and management measures with other organization responsible for managing international fisheries;

EMPHASIZING the need to improve the collection of scientific data regarding all sources of mortality for sea turtle populations including but not limited to data from fisheries within the GFCM Competence Area;

TAKING into account the SAC advice on the use of de-hooking devices by longliners;

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 ensure the implementation of fisheries management measures that strongly mitigate or eliminate the risk of incidental taking of sea turtles in fishing operations and/or the mortality associated with those incidental takings.
2. Specimens of sea turtles accidentally taken in fishing gears shall be safely handled and released unharmed and alive to the extent possible.
3. Any kind of vessels of CPCs shall be prohibited to take on board, tranship and land sea turtles unless otherwise required to rescue and to secure assistance for the recovery of harmed and comatose individual animals and provided that the competent national authorities concerned have been duly and officially informed in advance.
4. SAC shall provide in 2011 information useful for fishermen on the procedure to identify comatose turtles and release them when they are safe.
5. Any event of incidental taking as well as releasing or discarding shall be recorded by the ship-owner/master in the logbook (or any other equivalent document as developed by a CP to this specific end) and reported to national authorities for notification to GFCM Secretariat within the annual national reporting to SAC.
6. CPCs shall ensure that incidental taking of sea turtles in fishing activities is monitored and recorded. Starting no later than 2013, the SAC annual national reports shall contain information on the interaction of the fishing fleets with sea turtles in GFCM fisheries by gear type and characteristics: times, soak duration, depths and locations, target species, sea turtles species and disposition status of sea turtle specimen(s) (i.e. discarded death or released alive).
7. CPCs are strongly encouraged to facilitate the cooperation between scientists and fishermen to collect this information.
8. CPCs shall require, not later than 2013, that :
 - a) to the extent practicable, fishing vessels using purse seines for small pelagic in the GFCM Competence Area avoid encircling sea turtles and release encircle or incidently entangled sea turtles;
 - b) to the extent practicable, fishing vessels using surrounding nets without purse line for pelagic species, including on Fish Aggregating Devices, avoid encircling sea turtles and release encircle or entangled sea turtles;

9. With a view to meet the requirements of paragraph 2, fishing vessels using longlines and bottom-set nets in the GFCM Competence Area shall carry on board safe handling, disentanglement and release equipment, capable of releasing sea turtles unharmed and in a manner that maximizes the probability of their survival. This provision must be fully implemented not later than 2014, unless otherwise stipulated by stricter measures adopted by a Contracting Party.

10. The GFCM Secretariat shall compile, no later than 2013, the data collected under paragraph 4 as well as, in close cooperation with ICCAT and other appropriate international bodies, the available information from the scientific literature and other relevant sea turtle bycatch mitigation information, and report to the SAC for its consideration.

11. The SAC shall provide advice if possible in 2013, and no later than 2014, on the characteristics of devices, fishing gears and fishing operations or other approaches to mitigate/eliminate sea turtles bycatch and to release them alive.

12. The SAC shall identify current gaps in the scientific knowledge and experiments, including socio-economic aspects, with a view to overcome them and obtain more robust and implementable results. If necessary, SAC shall provide the protocol and the sampling design to carry out these additional studies under the responsibility of the Contracting Parties.

13. Guidelines should be produced by SAC in 2012, then widely published and distributed and made available in the GFCM web-site in order to mitigate sea turtles bycatches, including information on already existing kits for de-hooking turtles and provision of training materials on use of this equipment.

14. Upon receipt of advice from the SAC, the GFCM shall consider, if necessary, additional measures to mitigate sea turtle bycatch in those fisheries which have been considered most relevant

As appropriate, the GFCM and its Members should, individually and collectively, engage in capacity building efforts and other cooperative activities to support the effective implementation of the present Recommendation, including entering into cooperative arrangement with other appropriate international bodies.