

Recommendation GFCM/35/2011/2
on the exploitation of red coral 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;

RECALLING the past involvement of GFCM, especially in the 1980s, resulting in three Technical Consultations on Red Coral (Spain 1983, Italy 1988 and Algeria 1989);

TAKING into account the SAC advice on red coral exploitation, as provided at its Thirteenth Session;

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 (CPCs) in the GFCM Competence Area shall prohibit the use of any kind of towed gear, irrespective of the specific name, to exploit red coral. The only permitted gear for the harvesting shall be a hammer used by a scuba diver. This provision is without prejudice to stricter measures which may be adopted or maintained by CPCs.
2. CPCs shall prohibit the use of the Remotely Operated underwater Vehicles (ROVs) in the GFCM Competence Area for the exploitation of red coral.
3. By way of derogation from paragraph 2, formally granted by a Contracting Party on the basis of a specific fisheries authorisation, the use of ROV may be authorized in zones under national jurisdiction only and subject to the following conditions:

a) In Contracting Parties where ROV is already authorized only for reasons of observation and prospection and provided that ROV models cannot be equipped with manipulator arms or any other device allowing the cutting and harvesting of red coral. Contracting Parties concerned shall provide to the GFCM Secretariat the list of authorizations issued (specifying the date of their issuance) not later than the end of September 2011 and shall ensure that no new authorisation will be granted. The authorisation of ROV for prospection shall only be allowed until 2015, unless scientific advice states otherwise.

b) The provision in paragraph (a) above is without prejudice to Contracting Parties which have not yet authorised the ROV for prospection and may wish to do so. This authorisation shall be granted only on the basis of scientific results obtained in the context of national management plans and showing no negative impact on the sustainable exploitation of red coral.

c) Within a framework allowing for scientific experimental campaigns both for observation and harvesting during a limited period not extending beyond 2015, carried out under the supervision of national research institutions and/or in collaboration with national, international bodies as well as any other relevant stakeholder. The scientific results of these studies will be presented to the SAC, through the GFCM Secretariat, for its consideration and advice, including the status of the stock, the impact and the advisability of using ROV for direct harvesting of red coral. This derogation shall be without prejudice to stricter measures which may be adopted or maintained by Contracting Parties.

4. CPCs shall ensure the prohibition of the exploitation of red coral populations at depth less than 50 m until scientific studies, as validated by GFCM-SAC, indicate otherwise.

5. By way of derogation from paragraph 4, Contracting Parties may authorize exploitation of red coral at less than 50 m provided that an appropriate national management framework has been developed ensuring an authorization system and that only a limited number of red coral banks are exploited by the establishment of adequate spatio-temporal closures. This derogation shall be without prejudice to stricter measures which may be adopted or maintained by Contracting Parties.

6. Detailed information of the national management framework and the studies carried out at national level to apply this derogation must be provided within the annual national report to GFCM Secretariat for transmission to SAC for its considerations and advice.

7. CPCs shall ensure that authorized fishermen record and report to national authorities the daily catches and fishing effort by area and depths (e.g. number of fishing days, numbers of diving, etc) while allowing, whenever the case, comparisons with results of ROV experimental campaigns. This information must be made available to GFCM Secretariat for transmission to SAC for its considerations and advice.

8. SAC is requested to advise on the status of red coral banks and, not later than 2014, on the impact and adequacy for the continuation of using ROV for the prospection and harvesting of red coral banks.

9. As appropriate, the GFCM and its Members should, individually and collectively, engage in capacity building efforts and other research cooperative activities to improve knowledge on red coral and red coral fisheries and to support the effective implementation of the present Recommendation as well as of other management measures, including entering into cooperative arrangements with other appropriate international bodies and promote participatory programmes with relevant stakeholders.

10. Scientific and technical knowledge acquired through the actions stipulated under paragraphs 3 (c), 5, 7 and 9 above shall be taken into account by SAC with a view to develop an adaptive regional management plan.