

47th Session of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) November 4th – 8th, 2024

Written report complimenting brief OceanCare's verbal intervention delivered on Monday 4th November 2024 under Agenda Item 2. Progress on cooperation matters: Implementation of memoranda of understanding with partner organisations

We appreciate the opportunity to update the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) on the activities OceanCare has undertaken since the last GFCM Commission Meeting. We would like to submit, in alignment with our existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the following short report complementing our verbal intervention made under agenda item 2: Progress on cooperation matters.

Recently, the FAO's Partnerships Office highlighted the MoU between the GFCM and OceanCare as a success story of FAO collaboration with non-governmental entities in the [Partnership Report](#). This recognition was featured in a [web-story](#), which we had the opportunity to help draft in close coordination with the GFCM Secretariat. This recognition reflects the productive partnership between OceanCare and the GFCM in recent years. OceanCare extends its thanks to the FAO for this acknowledgement and reaffirms its commitment to continued collaboration with the GFCM and its contracting parties to address the pressing challenges in the GFCM region, including for example threats posed by underwater noise, plastic pollution, destructive fishing practices, and climate change.

Issue specific reporting

Underwater noise pollution

Last month, OceanCare participated in a workshop in Malmö, Sweden, hosted and organised by the World Maritime University in close collaboration with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). The workshop addressed the impacts of ocean noise pollution generated by shipping on the marine environment. We were pleased to see the GFCM's online participation in this workshop. The expertise the GFCM contributes to the increasingly critical discussions on ocean noise pollution—particularly regarding its impact on fishing catch rates—is invaluable, and we look forward to continuing these deliberations.

Ahead of the workshop in Malmö, OceanCare also participated as a panellist at the 24th United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which focused on 'The ocean as a source of sustainable food'. During our panel presentation, OceanCare addressed the impacts of noise pollution on fisheries, fish and invertebrates, as well as on overall ecosystem health. We also highlighted that the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) has established threshold values for underwater noise to achieve good environmental status (GES), thereby enhancing the protection of marine ecosystems and marine living resources and such framework should stimulate being replicated in other fora.

Marine plastic pollution

OceanCare appreciates the GFCM's participation in previous sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on a global, legally binding plastic treaty. We are pleased to report that the GFCM was the most prominent Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) present, and its work on fishing gear was directly referenced by the FAO as a positive example for other RFMOs to emulate. We remain committed to strengthening our collaboration with both the FAO and the GFCM on this matter, especially in view of the potential adoption of an ambitious, legally binding agreement next month. This treaty is long overdue and will play a crucial role in addressing the serious levels of plastic pollution in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.



Additionally, the work agreed on in decisions 14.45 and 14.36 by the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) at its Conference of the Parties (COP) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in February 2024, will provide further opportunities for close collaboration between the GFCM and CMS, identifying synergies in tackling Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG).

Destructive fishing practices

OceanCare has recently released a report on global bottom trawling and its detrimental effects on the marine environment, particularly in areas with vulnerable marine ecosystems. Although not primarily focused on the Mediterranean Sea, the report, titled "[The Trawl Supremacy: Hegemony of destructive bottom trawl fisheries and some of the management solutions](#)", highlights the well-documented environmental damage caused by bottom trawling and underscores the importance of the GFCM's regulatory work in closing select areas to this destructive fishing practice. Based on the summary of scientific findings detailed in the report, OceanCare firmly believes that the persistent threats posed by bottom trawling to marine life require meaningful attention, especially as other GFCM partner organisations have also raised concerns. Failure to ban bottom trawling in MPAs will threaten the health of marine ecosystems and undermine global efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss. OceanCare will therefore reach out to the GFCM to explore opportunities for joint action on this topic.

Ocean governance

In June 2023, after almost two decades of discussions and negotiations, the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) adopted, by consensus, a new legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). This Agreement has been a priority for OceanCare in the past years.

Since the opening of signatures in September 2023, 105 countries have signed the Agreement, and 14 countries have completed ratification. The number of ratifications is expected to increase steadily as countries enter the final stages of their domestic ratification processes.

The success of the Agreement will ultimately be judged by the tangible benefits it delivers for marine life, particularly through robust and globally consistent environmental impact assessments. The Mediterranean region faces considerable challenges in balancing biodiversity conservation with other interests. Therefore, it is essential that the GFCM begins to explore collaborative strategies to address these issues, including consideration of how the BBNJ Agreement can contribute to the GFCM's efforts. OceanCare remains actively involved in encouraging the ratification processes of the BBNJ Agreement, as well as its implementation. The success of the Agreement will ultimately be judged by the tangible benefits it delivers for marine life, particularly through robust and globally consistent environmental impact assessments and balancing biodiversity conservation with other activities.

We thank the GFCM Secretariat for the excellent partnership and look forward to continuing our cooperation in addressing the many pressing challenges facing the increasingly threatened Mediterranean.

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