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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Accompanying the document

**PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF
THE COUNCIL**

**Establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the
western Mediterranean Sea**

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Executive Summary Sheet

Impact assessment on a Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea

A. Need for action

Why? What is the problem being addressed?

There are two major problems in the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean. These are the **high levels of overfishing** and the **ineffective regulatory framework**. The excessive use of fishing capacity (i.e. high amount of vessels and fishing effort) has been identified as the leading cause of overfishing. At the same time, the current regulatory framework is ineffective because of its limited scope of application, the slow and poor implementation and the lack of stakeholder ownership. These two problems have resulted, directly or indirectly, in the alarming state of demersal stocks (i.e. over 80 % of the assessed stocks are overfished and the biomass of some of them is very low, indicating that there is a high probability of collapse), socio-economic implications for the fishermen and the fishing sector, and impacts on the marine environment.

The problems described above primarily affect fishermen fishing for demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean, meaning EU fleets from Italy, France and Spain. According to the data reported under the EU fisheries data collection framework (DCF), around 13 000 vessels would be potentially affected by this initiative.

What is this initiative expected to achieve?

The **general objectives** are as follows: to achieve the objectives of the CFP (Article 2) in the western Mediterranean demersal fisheries, namely with regards to ensuring that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that allow economic, social and employment benefits; and to improve the regulatory management framework of these fisheries.

The **specific objectives** are as follows: (i) to achieve and maintain fishing mortality at the maximum sustainable yield for all demersal stocks by 2020; (ii) to increase the selectivity of bottom trawls, particularly to exclude juvenile individuals; (iii) to ensure a sustainable fishing sector; and (iv) to provide an effective management framework, which is simpler, more stable and provides stakeholders with greater ownership.

What is the value added of action at the EU level?

Demersal fish stocks and fishing vessels are trans-boundary, so action at Member State level alone is unlikely to be effective in achieving the objectives. To be effective, measures should be coordinated and apply to the whole area of distribution of the stock and to all fleets concerned; hence the need for an action at European level.

B. Solutions

What legislative and non-legislative policy options have been considered? Is there a preferred choice or not? Why?

Three policy options were considered: **Option 1** 'No policy change' – The first option is the status quo, or no policy change (i.e. the existing regulatory framework would continue to apply). It is used as a benchmark against which the alternative options will be compared; **Option 2** 'Amending the current management framework' – Under this option the current management tools, namely the national management plans, would be reviewed to include the CFP objectives. The main aspects to be considered in the review would be: amendments to the current scope (in terms of fish stocks, fisheries and area covered); new conservation objectives such as MSY; quantifiable targets and timeframes; and new safeguards; and **Option 3** 'Adopting a multi-annual plan at EU level' – This option would aim at ensuring that EU fishing fleets targeting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean are regulated by a single and integrated regulatory framework at the EU level.

The preferred option is **Option 3: a multi-annual plan at EU level**, as it performs best on all the environmental and socio-economic objectives. It is also more coherent with the reformed CFP, streamlined (one main regulatory framework), more stable (it considers the long-term perspective) and more transparent (as the three Member States concerned would jointly adapt current fishing mortalities to sustainable levels through a Council Regulation) than options 1 and 2.

Who supports which option?

All of the consulted stakeholders agreed that the current management framework (Option 1 or baseline) would not be sufficient to meet the objectives of the CFP. The consultation also found that most stakeholders do not agree with the alternative of amending the current management framework (Option 2) because the problems previously described would still persist. On the other hand, the large majority of stakeholders (i.e. MEDAC, public administrations, NGOs and scientific community) regard an EU multi-annual plan (Option 3) as the best possible long-term solution. In their view, this approach is justified by the multi-species nature of the fisheries, the various Member States involved and the interactions between the different gears and types of fisheries.

C. Impacts of the preferred option**What are the benefits of the preferred option (if any, otherwise main ones)?**

From an **environmental viewpoint**, the modelling suggests that approximately 70 % of the assessed stocks would recover to SSB levels above the B_{PA} precautionary reference point by 2025. However, the probability of achieving fishing mortality targets for all stocks would remain low, at around 36 %. The simulations suggest that, under the multi-annual plan, neither indicator would be fully met. Nevertheless, this option produces substantially better results than the baseline and also than Option 2 in relation to change F_{MSY} . From a **socio-economic viewpoint**, only 1 fleet segment would be at financial risk by 2025 (eight fleet segments less than the baseline). The affected fleet segment (i.e. Spanish netters between 12 and 18 metres in overall length) has 52 vessels.

The multi-annual plan would also be streamlined (one main regulatory framework), more stable (it considers the long-term perspective) and more transparent (as the three Member States concerned would jointly adapt current fishing mortalities to sustainable levels through a Council Regulation) than the amended framework.

What are the costs of the preferred option (if any, otherwise main ones)?

The multi-annual plan would imply greater transitional employment- and profitability-related costs, as a consequence of the substantial reductions needed to attain fishing mortality targets. This option would put 8 fleet segments at financial risk by 2022 (three fleet segments more than the baseline). They are the French, Spanish and Italian bottom trawlers between 18 and 40 metres in overall length and some Spanish passive gears (e.g. longliners between 6 and 12 metres). The 8 fleet segments have 1 415 vessels, 6 193 FTE fishermen and 3 100 jobs in ancillary activities at risk. However, under the multi-annual plan, socio-economic performance is expected to improve across all fleets by 2025, with 25 of 26 fleets in profit.

How will businesses, SMEs and micro-enterprises be affected?

All of the impacts described above are expected to be especially relevant to SMEs, as the large majority of fishing firms involved in exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea are micro-enterprises (on average, 89 % of the French, Italian and Spanish enterprises in the fishing sector have only 1 vessel). There is therefore no basis to exclude them from the scope of the initiative, as otherwise the initiative would be aimless. The multi-annual plan would therefore most likely apply to all enterprises including SMEs, to a varying degree depending on how Member States will decide to allocate the necessary reductions on the different fleet segments.

Will there be significant impacts on national budgets and administrations?

As for the Member States, putting in place the multi-annual plan and the new effort management regime may lead to some additional administrative costs, but this could be catered for through EMFF support (Article 36 of the EMFF). After a transitional period, it is expected that the administrative costs (equivalent to maintaining the established regulatory framework) would fall and be more in line with the benefits of achieving the goals set.

Will there be other significant impacts?

No.

D. Follow up**When will the policy be reviewed?**

The plan, and its impacts, would be assessed by the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) five years after its entry into force. The Commission would then report to the European Parliament and Council on the results.