

## An historic session of the GFCM concludes in Malta



**Malta, 3 June 2016.** The fortieth session of the GFCM concluded its work today in St Julian's after four days of intensive discussions among more than 120 participants. The session marked a watershed event for the region: for the first time in the history of the GFCM, all 24 riparian countries of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea were in attendance, as well as the European Union and Japan. Sixteen organizations also participated actively in the consultations, building an important momentum towards sustainable fisheries in the region. No fewer than ten decisions were adopted and will be paramount for the recovery of fish stocks and the protection of vulnerable habitats in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Particularly remarkable are the decisions taken to support management in the Strait of Sicily, Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea. The resolve shown in Malta is a significant step towards reverting the alarming status of the stocks, thus boosting blue growth and sustainable livelihoods for the region.

This fortieth session was also marked by a strong commitment to take action to combat IUU fishing. In this respect, the Commission advocated for the declaration of an International Day for the Fight against IUU Fishing by the FAO Committee of Fisheries, due to take place in July. This important initiative was echoed by the adoption of a new regional scheme on port State measures by the GFCM, which heralds the imminent entry into force of the "FAO Port State Measures Agreement" on 5 July 2016.

Promoting coastal livelihoods through sustainable small-scale fisheries was also pinpointed as a main element towards a broader commitment to sustainable development, against the backdrop of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and FAO Strategic Objective 2. In this regard, the adoption of a mid-term strategy by the GFCM marked the identification of clear, measurable and bold targets to be reached by 2020. It is the first time that a regional fisheries management organization presents a specific strategy to address in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 which is to "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development".

Increasing sustainable aquaculture production is also expected to be pursued with determination, in support of these targets.

Finally, the GFCM renewed its strong commitment to cooperation when granting cooperating non-contracting party status to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The organization of a high-level conference on Black Sea fisheries governance, to be hosted by Romania in 2016, was also announced. At this conference, the launch of a regional cooperative project for the Black Sea region, dubbed BlackSea4fish, will be tabled for in-depth discussion. In the meantime, the GFCM will continue to foster a subregional approach in order to facilitate a level playing field and to work more closely with those countries facing similar challenges.

Overall, the message emerging from Malta is that, despite the complex regional situation, enormous cooperation has been fostered by the GFCM to promote healthy fisheries and aquaculture, and in the process, a healthy marine environment. It is expected that all the decisions taken should result in concrete benefits for the sustainability of living marine resources, the quality and quantity of available fish products, legal protection from unfair competition, and the safeguarding of livelihoods in order to build a better future for the region.