



Regional Coordination Group
Mediterranean and Black Sea

**Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the
Council of 17 May 2017**

on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (recast)

Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2021/1167 of 27 April 2021

establishing the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of biological, environmental, technical and socioeconomic data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors from 2022

**Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1168 of 27 April
2021**

establishing the list of mandatory research surveys at sea and thresholds as part of the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors from 2022

**Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/39 of 12 January
2022**

laying down rules on the format and timetables for the submission of national work plans and annual reports for data collection in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and repealing Implementing Decisions (EU) 2016/1701 and (EU) 2018/1283

**RCG Med&BS Regional Work Plan on data
collection in the fisheries and aquaculture
sectors**

2025-2027

Version 5.4

Paris, 30 August 2024

CONTENTS

- SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION 4**
 - DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK AT REGIONAL LEVEL 4
 - TEXT BOX 1B: OTHER DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES..... 5
- SECTION 2: BIOLOGICAL DATA 9**
 - TEXT BOX 2.4: RECREATIONAL FISHERIES..... 9
 - Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea*..... 9
 - TEXT BOX 2.5: SAMPLING PLAN DESCRIPTION FOR BIOLOGICAL DATA 10
 - Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea*..... 10
 - TEXT BOX 2.6: RESEARCH SURVEYS AT SEA 11
 - Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea*..... 11
- SECTION 4: IMPACT OF FISHERIES ON MARINE BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES 17**
 - TEXT BOX 4.2: INCIDENTAL CATCHES OF SENSITIVE SPECIES 17
 - Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea*..... 17
 - TEXT BOX 4.3: FISHERIES IMPACT ON MARINE HABITATS 18

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

Data collection framework at regional level

General comment: Use this text box to describe how data collection is organised in your region (countries involved, contact information) and what activities, methodologies, standards etc are included in the regional work plan.

As agreed during RCG 2023 decision meeting, this Regional Workplan for the Mediterranean and Black Sea region is the first official regional programme for the period 2025-2027.

Role of RCGs

The Regional Coordination Groups (RCGs) are the main hub for regional coordination and cooperation between member states within the different regions. The RCGs should in accordance with Council regulation (EU) 2017/1004 aim at developing and implementing procedures, methods, quality assurance and quality control for collecting and processing data with a view to enabling the reliability of scientific advice to be further improved. It is to the initiative of the RCGs to develop and implement the draft regional workplans RWPs, supplementing the national workplan MS submit to the Commission on a regular basis.

The textboxes and tables presented in a RWP are all emanating from RCG Inter Sessional Sub-Groups (ISSG, see <https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/intersessional-subgroups/> for more details), agreed at the RCG Med&BS Meeting and approved at the RCG Decision Meeting with all National Correspondents involved.

Objectives of RWPs

The Regional Work Plan (RWP) is a possibility offered in the Regulation EU 2017/1004, where it is stipulated that *'Regional coordination groups may prepare draft regional work plans [...]. Those draft regional work plans may include procedures, methods, quality assurance and quality control for collecting and processing data [...], regionally coordinated sampling strategies and conditions for delivery of data in regional databases. They may also contain cost-sharing arrangements for participation in research surveys at sea'*. It is also specified that *'a regional work plan shall be considered to replace or supplement the relevant parts of the national work plans of each of the Member States concerned.'*

After years of development in the RCGs leading to the RWP 2023 test run developed with the technical support of the STREAMLINE regional grant (MARE/2020/08), comments and suggestions by STECF and developments in other regional grants (e.g., STREAM, FishPi², and Fishn'Co, etc.), this RWP 2025-2027 for Med&BS region is the first agreed RWP and integrated in the National Workplans.

Linkage between NWP and RWPs

The setting of this RWP one year in advance of NWP for the same period is meant to prepare all MSs to integrate the agreed elements from the RWP in their NWP with some basic principles as follows:

Principle 1: RWP should only contain elements agreed at RCG level.

Principle 2: RWP will contain information on a more general level so that there will not be a need to update it every year when some numbers in one MS NWP table will change. RWP may be amended during interim years, only if the amendments do not lead to modification and resubmission of all MS NWP in the region, unless all MS agreed to do so.

Principle 3: The legally binding document is the NWP, so elements of RWP are binding only when referred to in the NWPs textboxes and tables. Thereafter, the realization (AR) is reported only at National level, which will then logically follow both NWP and RWP.

Guidance for MS

Each element of an RWP is an RCG agreement which needs to be reflected in all NWPs in a region. Reporting these agreements in NWPs formalizes these as commitment by each MS. MS should thus

copy all relevant information from RWP tables directly into the corresponding table in the NWP to ensure consistency between NWPs and RWPs. For RWP textboxes, MS should make sure that a link is provided to the details of the relevant RWP textbox and add national specificities, if any. The realization of the RWP will not be reported directly through added table columns and text sections. It is the approved NWPs, containing combined information from national and regional initiatives, which will be evaluated within the Annual report evaluation process.

Contents and MS involved

This document and the related set of tables form the Regional Work Plan for the period 2025-2027 prepared by RCG Med&BS. These two documents contain only elements of data collection which are regionally coordinated and were agreed at RCG Med&BS level.

The countries contributing to the data collection activities in the Med&BS region are Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania.

The RWP Med&BS 2025-2027 contains the following textboxes and tables:

- Section 1: General information

Textbox 1B: Other data collection activities

- Table 1.1 : Data availability
- Table 1.2: Regional and International coordination
- Table 1.3: Bilateral and multilateral agreements

- Section 2: Biological data

- Table 2.1: List of required species/stocks

Textbox 2.4: Recreational fisheries

- Table 2.4: Recreational fisheries

Textbox 2.5: Sampling plan description for biological data

Textbox 2.6: Surveys at sea

- Table 2.6: Surveys-at-sea

- Section 4: Impact of fisheries on marine biological resources

Textbox 4.2: Incidental catches of sensitive species

Textbox 4.3: Fisheries impact on marine habitats

- Table 4.1: Stomach sampling and analysis

Text Box 1b: Other data collection activities

General comment: Use this text box to provide information on other data collection activities that relate to your EMFAF operational programme and need to be included in the work plan and the annual report. Describe activities that are funded by the DCF but fulfil objectives under other EMFAF priorities, like marine knowledge, or activities funded by the DCF, but without a direct link to the EU MAP specific requirements or WP template tables, like freshwater fisheries. You can also include one-off specific studies for a particular end-user need that do not enter the regular data collection.

The aim of this textbox is to describe fundamental tools and services developed for the better functioning of the RCGs.

Name of the study: RCG's Secretariat

1. Aim of the data collection activity

Support the operation and functioning of the RCG's Secretariat underpinning fluent regional coordination of data collection activities as stipulated by Article 9 of the DCF Regulation (EU) 2017/1004.

2. Duration of the data collection activity

2025-2027

3. Methodology and expected outcomes of the data collection activity

The Secretariat's organizational structure has been set up and pilot tested throughout the SecWeb project (MARE/2020/08 grant). The key functions of the RCG's Secretariat have been determined in close collaboration with all RCGs, in particular with RCG and Intersessional Subgroups (ISSGs) chairs. A business model has been developed. In addition, good practices in communication within and among the RCGs have been promoted and installed. The overall capacity to reach out to a wider public and increase the visibility of the work and output of the RCGs has been boosted with the development of a dedicated website and the consolidation of a visual identity.

RCG chairs and the RCG's network (including participants and stakeholders) have readily acknowledged the added value of having an RCG's Secretariat to support and improve data collection coordination activities.

Based on the SecWeb project outputs, the proposed data collection related activity will connect the whole RCG network and stakeholders to work together on common goals. The Secretariat provides fluent administrative and coordination support for more efficient regional coordination liberating national experts involved in regionally coordinated data collection activities from heavy burden administrative tasks.

Overall expected outcomes:

1. A full-time dedicated Secretariat support service for the RCGs enables a consistent approach to administering RCG activities, facilitating communication, and enhancing the intersessional work, and also supporting the work of RCG sub-groups.
2. A dynamic and permanently updated website (<https://www.fisheries-rcg.eu/>) will be kept available including as features:
 - Repository – one-stop location and reference location for reports, various agreements covering regional coordination, RCG protocols and working procedures
 - Integration – allowing seamless synchronization with third-party information needs and requests;
 - Responsive display – to serve content across multiple devices, screens, and browsers;
 - User experience- maintaining a satisfactory user experience throughout the website sections;
 - Accessibility – To any interested visitor in a user-friendly way across the website sections;

- Retention- keeping visitors coming back to the website;
- Links to relevant restricted access sites and virtual environments.

The Visual identity for the RCGs is increasingly consolidated and visibility and understanding of the work by the RCGs is enhanced for the relevant stakeholder groups.

A regularly updated Stakeholders' database improves the communication function among the RCGs' experts and the stakeholders' community.

Internal communication protocols and help-desk in place makes it easier for any new comer to efficiently join, adopt responsibilities, and contribute to the RCGs objectives and work commitments.

The public description of the secretariat functions, operational working protocols and commitments will build trust and enhance the whole network transparency and accountability.

Agreements and commitments are as follows:

At the 2022 RCG Decision meeting, all MS agreed on the principle of the implementation of a long-term secretariat in support of the work of all RCGs. This agreement led to continued support beyond the deadline of the SecWeb-project. Based on the experience gained, the extended support for regional coordination activities and the aim to secure a long-term, uninterrupted support, the agreement on the principle remains in place for 2025-2027.

(max 900 words per activity)

General comment: Use this text box to provide information on other data collection activities that relate to your EMFAF operational programme and need to be included in the work plan and the annual report. Describe activities that are funded by the DCF but fulfil objectives under other EMFAF priorities, like marine knowledge, or activities funded by the DCF, but without a direct link to the EU MAP specific requirements or WP template tables, like freshwater fisheries. You can also include one-off specific studies for a particular end-user need that do not enter the regular data collection.

Name of the study: Med&BS Regional data base (RDBFIS)

1. Aim of the data collection activity

To contribute to the development and operation of the Med&BS Regional Database (RDBFIS)

2. Duration of the data collection activity

2025 - 2027

3. Methodology and expected outcomes of the data collection activity

The RDBFIS is a fundamental tool for regional coordination. The RDBFIS gathers in a single data base catch, effort and sampling data for biological variables and PETs together with information on the sampling design. The RDBFIS is planned to integrate national databases and has an important part to play in increasing transparency and improving the quality of stock assessment within GFCM and STECF.

The temporary hosting and further development of the RDBFIS is currently supported by the specific contract RDBFIS II (CINEA/EMFAF/2021/3.1.2/03/SC04/SI2.881222) funded under the EU Framework Contract EASME/2020/OP/0021. In addition, the Steering Committee for the Med&BS

Regional Database, established under the umbrella of the RCG Med&BS, will support and cooperate with this initiative.

This transition to RDBFIS requires an important effort by countries:

- To adapt their internal processes to store and provide data in the RDBFIS data model;
- To participate in the development of the RDBFIS through the RDB SC and ISSGs giving feedback about different data types and end user needs (including catch and effort data, SSF data, biological variables, MRF, PETs, SSF...)

General comment: Use this text box to provide information on other data collection activities that relate to your EMFAF operational programme and need to be included in the work plan and the annual report. Describe activities that are funded by the DCF but fulfil objectives under other EMFAF priorities, like marine knowledge, or activities funded by the DCF, but without a direct link to the EU MAP specific requirements or WP template tables, like freshwater fisheries. You can also include one-off specific studies for a particular end-user need that do not enter the regular data collection.

Name of the study: Regional Coordination taking place in ISSGs and pan regional cooperation between RCGs

1. Aim of the data collection activity

To develop and propose coordinated actions in dedicated thematic areas during the Intersessional year for the RCG Med&BS.

2. Duration of the data collection activity

2025 - 2027

3. Methodology and expected outcomes of the data collection activity

Regional cooperation is meant to improve the efficiency of data collection through sharing of expertise, data, best practices, knowledge and collaborative tasks. The RCGs bring together several Member States to coordinate planning and implementation of data collection. Their workplan across the year, from one round of the annual technical meetings to the next, is supported with the setup of the Intersessional Subgroups.

In these subgroups, the experts concentrate on specific Thematic Focus Areas, and sometimes they are pan-regional. During the relevant RCG meetings, the different ISSGs present progress and hurdles encountered across the period and propose the update of their Terms of Reference with the tasks and targets for the new intersessional period for approval. The work performed by ISSGs is essential for RCG technical meeting preparation and meeting discussions and Member States are requested to name experts in the different ISSGs relevant to them and these experts should allocate a significant amount of time for carrying the work during the intersessional year.

The ISSGs may change over the years as tasks are completed and new needs are coming up. A non-exhaustive list of the ISSG is presented below:

- ✓ ISSG on RWPs;
- ✓ ISSG on Recreational Fisheries;

- ✓ ISSG on fish stomach content analysis;
- ✓ ISSG on PET's bycatch monitoring;
- ✓ ISSG on sampling design optimization;
- ✓ Steering Committee for the Med&BS Regional Database.

SECTION 2: BIOLOGICAL DATA

Text Box 2.4: Recreational Fisheries

Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea

General comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(2)(a), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapter II point 2.2 of the EU MAP Delegated Decision annex. Use this text box to give an overview of the methodology used to collect data on marine and freshwater recreational catches. For freshwater diadromous species, use Table and Text Box 2.3.

For the description of the sampling scheme/survey please refer to Table 2.4 in the NWP of the ten Med&BS Member States.

The regional work plan (RWP) on recreational fisheries (RFs) in the Mediterranean and Black Sea is minimum aimed at:

1. Estimating the population of recreational fishers by segment (fishing gear-technique; e.g., shore, boat, spear fishing, etc.) and sub-region*.
2. Identification of lists of priority species by sub-region*:
 - A) As a BINDING action, MS to apply multispecies approach and collect data from off-site surveys in order to propose list of priority species for the estimation of “catches” (a) and “releases” (b), and finalise the list by sub-region. Moreover, to propose a list of vulnerable species (c) incidentally caught in recreational fisheries and finalise the list by sub-region.
 - B) As a NON-BINDING action, MS to apply on-site samplings in order to: a) validate the estimations of the off-site survey (e.g. average kg/fisher), b) validate the species reported in the off-site survey (recreational fishermen use different common names in different areas), c) collect biological data (length and/or weight) in order to propose list of priority species for the estimation of biological data and finalise the list by sub-region, d) validate the vulnerable species reported in the off-site survey and propose a final list.

The list of priority species proposed by GFCM ([Report of the Working Group on Recreational Fisheries \(WGRF\) | General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean \(GFCM\) | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#)), as well as the work done under the RCG Med&BS umbrella (Please see the Final Report of the Regional Co-ordination Group Meeting for the Mediterranean and Black Sea 2021 Workshop on Recreational Fishery 8-9 March 2021 and 9 April 2021 (follow-up meeting); and the Final Report of the RCG Med&BS 2019, Malta), will be taken under consideration.

Taking into consideration the recommendations and procedures proposed by the GFCM Handbook (<https://www.fao.org/gfcm/publications/series/technical-paper/669/en/>), and the experience gained by means of the implementation of the pilot studies, each MS will implement this RWP starting from 2025 following their own procedures (e.g., telephone surveys, license system or a combination for off-site surveys or an on-site survey) in order to cover all segments. The on-site sampling can be multispecies or a list can be used, if available, from off-site surveys.

*This applies to MS covering more than one sub-region: e.g., Italy (Western Med, Central Med, Adriatic) and Greece (Central Med, Eastern Med); Spain and France will aim at providing estimates for western Mediterranean recreational fisheries. Exceptions: Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania.

With the aim of facilitating this process and setting minimum standards, standardized protocols for performing the off-site survey (questionnaire to be used in a telephone survey) and on-site survey (questionnaire to be used in face-to-face interviews) are also attached as Annexes I and II respectively. These have to be considered as templates, and each MS can modify/adapt them according to specific needs.

Text Box 2.5: Sampling plan description for biological data

Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(2)(a) and (b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapter 2 point 2.1(a) of the EU MAP Delegated Decision annex. This text box complements Table 2.5.

Commercial fishing trip

The regional coordination of sampling plan for biological data is under development in the RCG Med&BS ISSG on sampling optimization. The work relates to developing regional sampling plans.

The following roadmap was agreed at the ISSG and RCG level:

- Identification of new scenarios, on the basis of feedback during the next RCG;
- New RCG data call on sampling costs, biological detailed data, landing data; a template for sampling costs was distributed. The ISSG experts started to collect the data;
- Biological data revision, including identification of reference person for each case study;
- Run sampling optimization tools on revised biological data, including new scenarios;
- Transferring new results to ISSG RWP for revision and discussion.

Agreement and commitment: Based on the activities performed under Task 2.1 of the STREAMLINE regional grant, the Regional Coordination Group for the Mediterranean and Black Sea (RCG Med&BS) agreed to use the sampling optimization strategy R routines (developed by

STREAM and refined by STREAMLINE) to feed the Regional Work Plans on the collection of commercial fisheries data, including SSFs.

(One text box (max. 1 000 words) per region/RFMO/RFO/IO)

Text Box 2.6: Research surveys at sea

Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

The regional coordination of surveys in the Med&BS is under development in the RCG ISSG RWP Med&BS. The work relates to presenting all the internationally coordinated surveys in the Med&BS (FAO-GFCM GSAs 1-29) with commonly agreed text and tables where planned days at sea are reflected.

2025 will be the start of the implementation of this work.

The MS involved are listed in each of the surveys below.

Agreement and commitment

- Only surveys internationally coordinated are included in the RWP
- Surveys listed below are the ones relevant for the region and are to be conducted by the MS listed as participants
- The allocated effort by MS is given in Table 2.6.

Research survey: International bottom trawl survey in the Mediterranean (MEDITS)

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

1. Objectives of the survey

The MEDITS survey programme intends to produce basic information on benthic and demersal species in terms of population distribution as well as demographic structure, on the continental shelves and along the upper slopes at a global scale in the Mediterranean Sea, through systematic bottom trawl surveys.

2. Description of the survey design and methods used in the survey for each type of data collection as listed in Table 2.6 for this specific survey.

The MEDITS is conducted in spring - summer period from May to July based on MEDITS protocol using specially designed bottom trawl net GOC 73. Sampling stations are randomly distributed according to the depth strata (10-50; 50-100; 100-200; 200-500; 500-800 m) and the number of stations is proportional to the surface of each stratum.

MEDITS data are collected, processed and analysed according to the common protocol (MEDITS-Handbook. Version n. 9, 2017), to produce information (i.e. population distribution, abundance, size composition etc.), on benthic and demersal species found in an area with a depth ranging from 0 to 800 m. The working zone (on the continental shelves and along the upper slopes) has been adopted to cover at best the distribution areas of the main exploited or potentially exploitable species, considering the administrative and technical constraints of the project.

The stations are distributed in each GSA applying a random stratified sampling scheme using as strata the geographical combination of zones and depth.

In order to improve the quality of the MEDITS data and the consistency of the information collected a routine (RoME, Bitetto et al., 2017) has been developed for common use, which rationale has been incorporated in the checks made at JRC level during the data upload and the assessment working groups (STECF EWGs).

3. For internationally coordinated surveys, describe the participating Member States/vessels.

Since 2001, European MSs bordering the Mediterranean are obliged to carry out MEDITS survey yearly in the framework of the EU Data Collection. Italy, France, Spain, Croatia, Greece, Malta, Slovenia, and Cyprus are involved in the MEDITS and permanent links are maintained with relevant bodies (i.e., RCG Med&BS, MEDITS Steering Committee, and GFCM). Targets number of hauls, by area and participating countries, are reported in the Annex III of the MEDITS Handbook (MEDITS-Handbook Version n. 9, 2017). Currently, the MEDITS Handbook is under revision.

4. Where applicable, provide more details on the type of participation and/or threshold agreement applied.

Targets number of hauls, by area and participating countries, are reported in the Annex III of the MEDITS Handbook (MEDITS-Handbook Version n. 9, 2017).

Research survey: Beam Trawl Survey (SOLEMON)

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

1. Objectives of the survey

Common sole, *Solea solea*, is an important resource in the GFCM area. About 22% of the GFCM landings of common sole come from the Adriatic Sea. In GSA 17, common sole are targeted by “rapido” trawl and set nets, that amount to an annual value of landings of around 40 million Euros.

The main survey objectives are:

- a) Assessing abundance and distribution in GSA17 of sole and other important demersal resources by surveys with “rapido” gears suitable to seize flatfish and other benthic animals.
- b) Pursuing the studies on the ecosystem impact of the “rapido” trawl fishery.
- c) Finally, survey data will also contribute to the setting of the GES and targets for the Adriatic Sea in the framework of an ecosystem approach. Thus, matching to the requirement of the implementation of the MFSD (DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC).

2. Description of the survey design and methods used in the survey for each type of data collection as listed in Table 2.6 for this specific survey.

The survey should cover sole presence within the GSA 17 that, according to the genetic information pertains as a single stock.

All this holds also for benthic fish and shellfish of commercial interest, including rays and other elasmobranchs, since EU greatly focuses on such vulnerable resources. Survey should be carried out based on the protocol used since 2005 (SoleMon, 2019; Survey – Handbook Version 2019) and utilising the same gear. The gear is a modified beam trawl named as “rapido” trawl and should be appositely planned to fish on different types of bottom. The research vessel should utilize two gears simultaneously in each haul.

3. For internationally coordinated surveys, describe the participating Member States/vessels.

Data will be shared in WGs, both at EU and Mediterranean level, and with all Adriatic member States through common database AtrIS. Targets number of hauls, by area and participating countries, are reported in the Solemon Handbook (SoleMon, 2019).

4. Where applicable, provide more details on the type of participation and/or threshold agreement applied.

Italy, Croatia and Slovenia to cooperate and coordinate.

Research survey: Pelagic Trawl Survey in the Black Sea (PTSBS)

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

1. Objectives of the survey

The aim of the pelagic trawl survey in the Black Sea is the assessment of the stock biomass of sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*) (Table 2.6 - Research surveys at sea). Furthermore, an analysis of the distribution and abundance of the other species caught as by-catch will be presented.

* Estimating abundance indices (by number and biomass) of the main pelagic species of commercial interest distributed at a depth between 10 m and 100 m;

* Describing the demographic structure of species of interest to the fishery, together with spatial distribution patterns;

* Undertaking size and biological sampling, including extraction of parts to determine the age of the main species targeted by the fishery;

* Assessing the impact of fishing activity on the environment.

2. Description of the survey design and methods used in the survey for each type of data collection as listed in Table 2.6 for this specific survey.

The surveys for sprat are planned in Spring and Autumn each year. Each survey includes 30 mid-water trawl hauls in Romania, and 36 in Bulgaria.

3. For internationally coordinated surveys, describe the participating Member States/vessels.

According to the agreement between Bulgaria and Romania, both countries will undertake annually research surveys in their territorial waters and EEZ under their jurisdiction, following common methodology, harmonization of biological data sampling and analysis and harmonization of stock assessment methods.

Both countries will follow the methodologies published in their web pages, accomplished by the Technical guidelines for scientific surveys in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. - FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Papers No. 641, and methodologies already adopted by other EU countries: MEDIAS HANDBOOK. The pelagic trawl survey results are presented during the MEDIAS meeting.

4. Where applicable, provide more details on the type of participation and/or threshold agreement applied.

Romania and Bulgaria commit to provide the financial means for the scientific surveys and working meetings.

The type of participation was marked in Table 2.6 as 'Combination'. The 'Combination' consists of 'Financial', 'Technical' and 'Personnel', but none of them is a matter of Cost-sharing agreement, because the signed agreement is only for coordination of methodologies and activities.

Research survey: Bottom trawl survey in the Black Sea (BTSBS)

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

1. Objectives of the survey

The aim of the bottom trawl survey in the Black Sea is the assessment of the stock biomass of turbot (*Scophthalmus maximus*) (Table 2.6 - Research surveys at sea), along the Romanian and Bulgarian Black Sea coasts, estimation of the biomass and abundance of the reference species by depth strata and study of size/age and sex structure, food composition, by-catch, distribution of the stock. Furthermore, an analysis of the distribution and abundance of the other species caught as by-catch will be presented (piked dogfish and whiting).

- * Estimating abundance indices (by number and biomass) of the main pelagic species of commercial interest distributed at a depth between 10 m and 100 m;
- * Describing the demographic structure of species of interest to the fishery, together with spatial distribution patterns;
- * Undertaking size and biological sampling, including extraction of parts to determine the age of the main species targeted by the fishery;
- * Assessing the impact of fishing activity on the environment.

2. Description of the survey design and methods used in the survey for each type of data collection as listed in Table 2.6 for this specific survey.

In Romania, two surveys for turbot stock assessment by swept area method will be conducted, in April-May and November - December. The surveyed region will be divided into four strata, depending on the depth – Stratum 1 (15-35 m), Stratum 2 (35-50 m), Stratum 3 (50-75 m) and Stratum 4 (75-100 m). For assessment of turbot, whiting and piked dogfish abundance and biomass, the surveyed territory will be divided into 100 squares. The sampling will be carried out at 40 randomly chosen fields (rectangles) in the spring and 40 in autumn, situated at a depth between 15-100 m. Each rectangle is with sides 10'Lat × 10'Long, while the total area is 125.16 km² (measured by GIS), large enough for a standard lug extent in a meridian direction to fit within the field boundaries.

In Bulgaria, the BTSBS is conducted in May-June and November-December each year. The survey design follows the scheme of the previous demersal surveys, e.g. the region will be divided into four strata, depending on the depth – Stratum 1 (15-35 m), Stratum 2 (35-50 m), Stratum 3 (50-75 m) and Stratum 4 (75-100 m). For assessment of abundance and biomass, the surveyed territory is divided into 143 squares, each of them with sides 5 x 5 Nm, area 25 Nm². The sampling will be carried out at 36 randomly chosen fields (rectangles), situated at a depth between 15-100 m. Each rectangle is with sides 5'Lat × 5'Long, while the total area is 62.58 km² (measured by GIS). Each field should be marked with letters and digits for better distinction.

The seabed area covered during a single haul represents a basic measurement unit, considered representative, as turbot do not aggregate in dense assemblages. The duration of each haul is 60 min at the trawling speed of 2.2-2.6 knots.

3. For internationally coordinated surveys, describe the participating Member States/vessels.

According to the agreement between Bulgaria and Romania, both countries will undertake annually research surveys in their territorial waters and EEZ under their jurisdiction, following common methodology, harmonization of biological data sampling and analysis and harmonization of stock assessment methods.

Both countries will follow the methodologies published in their web pages, accomplished by the Technical guidelines for scientific surveys in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. - FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Papers No. 641, and methodologies already adopted by other EU countries: MEDITS handbook. The bottom trawl survey results are presented during the MEDITS meeting.

4. Where applicable, provide more details on the type of participation and/or threshold agreement applied.

Romania and Bulgaria commit to provide the financial means for the scientific surveys and working meetings.

The type of participation was marked in Table 2.6 as 'Combination'. The 'Combination' consists of 'Financial', 'Technical' and 'Personnel', but none of them is a matter of Cost-sharing agreement, because the signed agreement is only for coordination of methodologies and activities.

Research survey: Pan-Mediterranean Acoustic Survey (MEDIAS)

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(1)(b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapters I and II of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex. It is intended to specify which research surveys at sea, as set out in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex will be carried out. Member States shall specify whether the research survey is included in Table 2 of the EU MAP Implementing Decision annex or whether it is an additional survey.

1. Objectives of the survey

The MEDIAS survey programme intends to evaluate the abundance and spatial distribution of small pelagic fish resources by direct methods (acoustics), independently of the data provided by commercial fisheries; Target species are anchovy and sardine.

2. Description of the survey design and methods used in the survey for each type of data collection as listed in Table 2.6 for this specific survey.

Survey is conducted in the summer-autumn period of the year according to MEDIAS protocol.

Furthermore, a specific date for each GSA has been proposed by the MEDIAS coordination group during 2024, based essentially on the historical periods of the surveys and the availability of research vessels. This proposal will ensure the continuity of time series within the GSA level. A buffer period of plus or minus one month is authorized in case of particular difficulties that may be encountered in certain years. In the case the survey has to be brought forward or delayed by more than this buffer month outside the official period, a request must first be made to MEDIAS SC and the EC before launching the survey. The specific time period by GSA is provided below:

GSA	Official period (month)
GSA1	6 7
GSA6	6 7
GSA7	6 7
GSA9	8 9
GSA10	7 8
GSA15	7 8
GSA16	7 8
GSA 17	6 7
GSA 18	6 7
GSA 20	9 10
GSA 22	6 7
GSA 29 (summer)	6 7
GSA 29 (autumn)	10 11

Acoustic data for fish abundance estimation are collected by calibrated scientific echo sounder at 38kHz; Fish samples are collected by use of pelagic trawl net, with aim to provide information needed for echograms scrutiny, as well as for collection of fish biological data; Abiotic environmental data (measurements of temperature and salinity) collections are made by CTD vertical profiles, while additional biotic data in pelagic ecosystem are obtained by plankton sampling (acoustic at 120kHz and/or vertical hauls).

Collection of navigational data ensures that all other collected data are geo-referenced (suitable for spatial analyses). Manual of the survey is available at <http://www.medias-project.eu/medias/website/>, and it contains a graphical map of the surveys.

3. For internationally coordinated surveys, describe the participating Member States/vessels. The MEDIAS acoustic surveys, performed in summer, should cover a series of areas in the Mediterranean EU MS (Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Slovenia and Greece) with a standardised methodology. As proposed in the RCG Med&BS 2022 recommendation 7, Malta shall carry out the survey within GSA 15 on a voluntary basis, and this commitment will also be reflected in the NWP.

4. Where applicable, provide more details on the type of participation and/or threshold agreement applied.

The geographical areas that will be covered by the MEDIAS surveys and the respective days at sea per participating countries are reported in Table 1 of the Medias manual (MEDIAS-Handbook, 2023).

SECTION 4: IMPACT OF FISHERIES ON MARINE BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Text Box 4.2: Incidental catches of sensitive species

Region: Mediterranean and Black Sea

General Comment: This text box fulfils Article 5(2)(a) and (b), Article 6(3)(a), (b) and (c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapter 2 point 4.1 of the EU-MAP Delegated Decision annex. This text box complements Table 2.5.

The regional coordination on Incidental catches of sensitive species is under development in the RCG Med&BS ISSG on PETs. The work relates to the development of a regional list of priority PET species, the incorporation of PETs data into the RDBFIS, the assessment of the relative risk of bycatch for the different gear types and/or metiers and agreeing on common methods for data collection.

List of PET Species agreed

A list of PET Species has been developed at GFCM level. This species list will be considered as a baseline by the RCG Med&BS to prioritize future regional work plans regarding PETs sampling programmes. Species lists are living documents and will be subjected to periodic review and update.

Link to the list of PET species:

<https://www.fao.org/gfcm/data/dcrf/fr/>

The regional coordination of data collection of PETs species is under development in the RCG ISSG on PETs. The work relates to the list of PET species which need to be given high priority in the fisheries monitoring in the region. The guidelines provided by the FAO Handbook (<https://www.fao.org/3/ca4991en/CA4991EN.pdf>) will be taken into consideration in terms of sampling methodologies and sampling coverage, as well as the guidelines provided by the EU regional grants (e.g., STREAM, STREAMLINE, etc.; https://dcf.ec.europa.eu/coordinations-more/regional-grants_en).

Agreement and commitment: MS to ensure that the species listed in the documents referred above are recorded when encountered during the sampling activities and given high priority in case concurrent sampling cannot be implemented.

RDBFIS incorporation of bycatch data

The regional coordination of data collection of PETs species is under development in the RCG ISSG on PETS. The work relates to the incorporation of bycatch data into the RDBFIS.

Cooperation with RDBFIS II project will be implemented to continue the work done under RDBFIS, and further refine the database structure to upload and store bycatch data. The results of the tests carried out will allow to assess the incorporation of all PETs bycatch related data into the RDBFIS, essential for the regional coordination of potential regional sampling plans.

Identification of high-risk fisheries

The work ongoing under the MSs NWP and at GFCM level will make it possible to identify the high-risk fisheries from PETs bycatch, but also the coverage of these fisheries, taking into account the effort exerted by these fisheries, the abundance of the different PETs species in the ecoregion and their overlap. The information obtained through this assessment at regional level should allow the RCGs to identify which are the main fisheries that should be sampled at regional level based on the needs of the main end-users.

Text Box 4.3: Fisheries impact on marine habitats

General comment: This text box fulfils Article 5 paragraph 2(a) and 2(b), Article 6 paragraph 3(a), 3(b) and 3(c) of Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 and Chapter 2, section 4.2 of the EU MAP Delegated Decision annex. It contains information on additional studies on the fisheries impact on marine habitats.

Name of the study: Regional coordination on fish stomach contents collection and analysis in the Med&BS

1. Aim of the study:

Regional coordination on fish stomach contents collection and analysis in the Med&BS

2. Duration of the study: 2025-2027

3. Methodology and expected outcomes of the study

In the Mediterranean, the stomach sampling shall be based on European hake, *Merluccius merluccius*, and on the MEDITS international trawl survey. However, in order to cover all the quarters (and a larger size range), it is suggested, if possible, to sample other full stomachs of European hake from the biological sampling of commercial fisheries during all the year. The stomach sampling of European hake shall be done according to three size classes: Juveniles, sub-adults and adults.

In addition, it is proposed to sample the stomachs of monkfish and anglerfish, *Lophius piscatorius* and *L. budegassa*. It is suggested to sample full stomachs of monkfish and anglerfish during all the year, taking advantage of both the MEDITS survey and, if possible, the biological sampling of commercial fisheries.

In the Black Sea, the stomach sampling shall be based on turbot, *Scophthalmus maximus*, and on the Black Sea international surveys. However, in order to cover all the quarters, it is suggested to sample full stomachs of turbot also from the biological sampling of commercial fisheries, in the quarters not covered by the surveys. The stomach sampling of *S. maximus* shall be done according to three size classes: juveniles, discarded adults, and adults.

In addition, it is suggested to sample the stomachs of Mediterranean horse mackerel and sprat, *Trachurus mediterraneus* and *Sprattus sprattus*. It is proposed to sample full stomachs of the two species during all the year, taking advantage of both the surveys and the biological sampling of commercial fisheries. The subdivision of stomachs to be sampled between the two EU MSs (Bulgaria, Romania) was proportionally assigned.

Please see Table 4.1.