



The Mediterranean region is both geographically crowded and politically complex. Some 20 countries share their shores along its 45 000 kilometre coastline and the rich fisheries resources under its waterline.



The Mediterranean Sea, in addition to providing goods and services of high economic value, such as trade routes that link Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, sunny beaches, magnificent scenery and many historic attractions that make it an obvious tourist attraction, also sustains high biodiversity and rich traditional fisheries. These contribute significantly to the socio-economic wellbeing of the 150 million people who live along the coastal areas – providing direct and indirect employment to 1.2 million people and earning the Mediterranean countries some US\$ 3.8 billion a year, not to mention contributing to regional food security.

However, the state of the resources that form the basis of these livelihoods is not good. Catches of many Mediterranean fish species peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fish catch per unit of fishing effort – a measure that weighs the amount of fish caught against the effort used to catch them – has been declining for many species. While overfishing is a leading problem, coastal development, pollution and changing climates also contribute to weakening Mediterranean fish stocks.

Recognizing this, Mediterranean countries have begun to work more closely together to ensure sustainability of their shared fish resources. FAO, working with donors, has established a series of projects designed specifically to foster cooperation among countries and subregions, supporting their efforts to improve the sustainability of their fisheries. The impact of these projects can be seen in the ongoing collaboration among participating countries, whose scientists and research institutions now exchange fish-related data, results and methodologies.

## Mediterranean fisheries resources

### Facing the future

The FAO Mediterranean fisheries projects, as shown on the map, illustrate how dynamic the entire process has been, with some countries involved in more than one subregional project, some projects already completed, some midway to completion and others in initial phases. The sustainability of the earlier efforts can be seen in the way the countries supported by newer FAO projects are able to benefit from the lessons learned in the earlier ones. Moreover, all countries in the region have adopted and can take advantage of the positive regional attitude toward fisheries management – an approach that was non-existent before these projects became a part of the fisheries sectors of the region.

However, in spite of what has been learned and what has been accomplished, the existing networking process and cooperative framework established by the projects are fragile. The work at the subregional level needs to continue and be expanded to the entire Mediterranean region in order to achieve fuller implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF), and to support countries in meeting the new demands of the twenty-first century, especially as they impact the Mediterranean Sea.



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## The FAO connection

WORKING TO LINK  
MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

*above and  
below the waterline*

to ensure  
fisheries  
sustainability  
and improve  
livelihoods

The donors that have worked with and supported FAO in this work come from both within and outside the region.



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## THE PROCESS

FAO projects instrumental in promoting a regional attitude in Mediterranean fisheries

FAO fisheries projects established in the Mediterranean have been influential in developing a regional attitude toward fisheries management in the region among the countries that share the fisheries resources. In permanent regional working groups established by FAO, fisheries managers and researchers from across the region work together to set priorities and undertake coordinated research to support fisheries management at national and subregional levels, which is essential for the sustainable use of shared resources. Through this collaboration, countries in the Mediterranean subregions have been able to undertake research on shared stocks and deal with common fisheries management issues while fostering trust among participating countries.

### ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING

**Before:** Many countries were unaware of the need and possible advantages of working with their neighbours, especially as regards shared fishery resources.

**Today:** Advocacy activities organized by the FAO projects have raised visibility of fisheries management in the political agendas of many, if not all, Mediterranean countries. Countries with shared stocks recognize they cannot manage their national fisheries by themselves, and fisheries managers recognize the need to work with researchers and other stakeholders in gathering reliable information to develop national management strategies that will support economic and social goals while ensuring sustainability.

### CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

**Before:** Few Mediterranean countries had capacity to collect and analyze fisheries data.

**Today:** FAO has provided training activities to national fisheries research and management institutions, developing capacity in data collection and analysis across the region, and enabling all countries to work together as equals.

### KNOWLEDGE GATHERING, ANALYSIS AND SHARING

**Before:** Information gathered and analysed by countries often was not standardized or shared, and information on national fisheries sectors was scattered, leaving managers with an incomplete picture of their fisheries resources.

**Today:** FAO has facilitated adoption of standardized methodologies that

enable countries to compile and share national data, contributing to the regional knowledge base. The increased data availability has facilitated compilation, publication and distribution of information on fisheries and shared stocks, making it easier for government institutions to see their fisheries in a larger perspective.

### SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

**Before:** Most cooperation was bilateral and few avenues existed for countries in the different subregions to harmonize research methodologies. Countries operated on their own and sometimes relied on development support to meet needs as they came along.

**Today:** FAO has facilitated opportunities for scientists to work together across international borders and, in turn, build the case with their governments of the need for scientific cooperation. FAO projects provide neutral fora for discussions at subregional scale, as well as practical support in technical areas to improve fisheries management.

### MANAGEMENT TOOLS DEVELOPMENT AND STANDARDIZATION

**Before:** Many countries had incomplete capacity to gather and analyze fisheries statistics and lacked knowledge of the contribution of their small-scale artisanal fisheries.

**Today:** FAO has facilitated development of databases on small-scale fisheries and socio-economic situations, introduced mechanisms for data management, and supported national censuses of the fisheries sector.

## THE PROJECTS

Linking countries and subregions to support the use and conservation of marine resources

### COPEMED-I 1996-2005; COPEMED-II 2008-2011: Countries of the Western and Central Mediterranean

When CopeMed-I was launched in the central and west Mediterranean, it faced an imbalance in north-south capacity and inadequate avenues for cooperation among countries. As the first of the FAO subregional projects, it initially focused on raising scientific and technical capacity, especially of the southern countries, so that cooperation could advance on an equal level. CopeMed-II was able to expand on CopeMed-I's efforts, integrating fisheries administrations and other stakeholders, providing technical assistance for joint data analyses, coordinating scientific investigations, facilitating a subregional approach to discussions on shared stocks and strengthening national capacity in the field of fisheries statistics. Standardization and mechanisms developed by the project have improved knowledge of marine resources in the subregion.

### ADRIAMED 1999-2012: Countries of the Adriatic Sea

Although it is one of the largest Mediterranean areas with shared fisheries resources, scientific information about the Adriatic Sea Fisheries was fragmented until AdriaMed brought the countries of the subregion together in 1999. Many of these countries had recently been through turbulent times, nevertheless they recognized the need to have joint management of their shared fisheries resources. AdriaMed increasingly assumed a catalytic role in encouraging cooperation aimed at fisheries management in the Adriatic Sea, providing an environment that enabled countries to establish a solid cooperative framework, a unified approach to fisheries management, and agreement on the way forward in research and sustainable use of common resources. This was achieved by standardizing monitoring, fisheries and aquaculture research programmes, and by providing technical assistance in areas such as statistics, biology and socio-economics, in order to establish a multidisciplinary approach to fisheries.

### MEDSUDMED 2001-2012: Countries of the South Central Mediterranean Sea

Even though fishing in the Straits of Sicily supports significant fleets and high fish production, knowledge of fishery resources and ecosystems was often scarce. MedSudMed started with a goal of increasing scientific cooperation, focused initially on building capacity of the countries to participate in assessment and monitoring of their fisheries resources. Today, the countries are not only gathering and analyzing but also sharing data, undertaking joint surveys and analyses, and providing joint advice for fisheries management. To make this happen, the project developed and implemented standardized methodologies and monitoring protocols used to, for example, increase knowledge on the spatial distribution of shared fish stocks, especially on the spawning and nursery areas.

### MEDFISIS 2004-2011: Mediterranean member countries of the GFCM

In 2004, with the Mediterranean fishery resources at risk of being exploited to the point of biological depletion, FAO and the EC supported a project to develop a regionwide compatible and integrated system to diagnose fisheries problems. Known as MedFisis, the project designed a system to ensure that the information needed to track sustainability indicators could be collected and compiled in a reliable and timely manner. When the project closed in 2011, capacity had been raised to the point that countries could collect and analyze their own data, with emphasis on a fishing fleet register and catch assessment surveys.

### ARTFIMED 2008-2011: Morocco and Tunisia

The ArtFiMed project focused on improving livelihoods in three artisanal fishing communities of Morocco and Tunisia and, in turn, reducing poverty. This included promotion of responsible fisheries through supporting fishers' organizations, focusing on enhanced safety at sea, reinforcing collaboration among fisheries actors, implementing monitoring systems and improving family livelihoods through application of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries principles. The project has shared its results with other artisanal sites in the two countries and contributed to the national and regional fisheries information database.

### EASTMED 2009-2014: Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean

Before EastMed was launched, FAO brought representatives of the countries in the subregion together for a preparatory discussion where they shared their perceptions of the main issues. This subregion does not have a tradition of sharing data, thus EastMed was faced with building trust among members and giving them the confidence to share information about where they felt they needed support. Building from this, EastMed now provides technical assistance in data collection schemes as well as training on stock assessment and has established initiatives to undertake surveys at sea based on agreed protocols. It also has undertaken institutional-strengthening activities, resulting in establishment of partnerships among administration and scientific communities.

### General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

GFCM promotes the development, conservation and best utilization of fisheries resources as well as sustainable development of aquaculture in the Mediterranean. The FAO Mediterranean projects maintain a high level of coordination and cooperation with the GFCM, facilitate the cooperation of their participating countries, provide scientific contributions for discussion, and support involvement of national experts in GFCM activities.

