



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels
MARE/D1/PB

Dear Mr Marzoa Notlevsen,

I would like to thank the Mediterranean Advisory Council for advice 69/2023 on invasive species (NIS) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Commission shares fully the concerns expressed in that advice, and highly appreciates its analysis and recommendations. It has already reflected on many of its points in ongoing policy initiatives and projects promoted by the EU at regional level and within the General Fisheries Commission for Mediterranean (GFCM).

The new 2030 GFCM Strategy includes the expansion of the non-indigenous species among the threats to fisheries and the marine environment, along with climate change and plastic pollution, as defined in Target 1 - Fisheries and ecosystems: healthy Seas and productive fisheries. In this context, to meet the target of healthy Seas and productive fisheries, the Strategy provides for dedicated NIS actions, such as:

- establish a regional observatory of non-indigenous species, exchanging information with other GFCM monitoring tools and interacting with relevant partners' platforms.
- implement an adaptation strategy to address the potential effects of climate change and non-indigenous species on fisheries and on the marine environment and ecosystems, including by integrating adequate mitigation and adaptation measures within management plans.

Already as of 2018 and at the initiative of the EU, the GFCM started to accelerate its work on NIS as part of marine fishing resources with high commercial value and volume in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. To this end, the GFCM regional research programme has been launched for the blue crab fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea (Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/7), and its conclusions should shed light on the management of these NIS species.

Most recently and upon EU proposal, the GFCM has launched a pilot study in the eastern Mediterranean, to consolidate an integrated monitoring platform for NIS, which concurrently agreed on the creation of a Mediterranean-wide NIS observatory based in Turkey. Given the fact that the eastern Mediterranean was considered a NIS hotspot, the NIS pilot project will serve as basis for expansion, covering also all GFCM subregions.

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I would like to thank the Mediterranean Advisory Council for its active involvement in the work of the GFCM Subregional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (Athens, 10-12 May 2023) and its valuable contribution for the improvement of the pilot project's concept note. The Mediterranean Advisory Council enriched the pilot project with important elements such as: (a) a solid stakeholders' consultation with the aim of contributing to future management in a quick and adaptive manner, (b) the full involvement of fishermen and relevant stakeholders in addressing the issue of the exploitation and commercialization of NIS, (c) the commercialisation potential of NIS and markets, (d) sharing experience and best practices.

The Commission fully supports the above-mentioned elements and the orientation given to the pilot project and the NIS observatory. At the last annual session of the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee (June 2023), the Commission made clear on behalf of the EU that the NIS observatory should be launched without delay, despite the scrutiny expressed by contracting parties. Consequently, the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee highlighted the importance of ensuring that the work is done with the crucial objective of contributing to future management in a quick and adaptive manner, fully involving fishers and relevant stakeholders in addressing the issue of the exploitation, commercialization and management of NIS to provide opportunities and ensure food security.

It is expected that at the November annual session of the GFCM, the Commission will approve the revised context of the pilot project, adopting the SAC advice for the initiation of the work as soon as possible.

I hope that this information addresses the issues raised in your letter. I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia Rubeck via the functional mailbox of the Advisory Councils MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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