



КОНСУЛТАТИВЕН СЪВЕТ ЗА ЧЕРНО
МОРЕ /КСЧМ/

CONSILIUL CONSULTATIV PENTRU MAREA
NEAGRA

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MINUTE

BISAC Focus Group 4 meeting , November 23 , 2022

Subject : "Bycatch of vulnerable species"

On November 23, 2022, at the Continental Forum Hotel, Constanța, Romania, a meeting of focus group 4 of BISAC took place on the topic: "Bycatch of vulnerable species" and via ZOOM video link.

The online meeting was attended as guests by: Mrs. Pinelopi Belekou - DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the EC, Mrs. Steliana Bejan APM Constanța , Mrs. Oana Stancovici - APM Constanța , Mrs. Bianca Whiles - DG MARE, Mrs. Laura Rull del Aguila - DG MARE , Dr. Victor Nița - "Grigore Antipa" Institute, Constanța, Dr. Otilia Mihai - Romanian Ministry of Environment, Prof. Dr. Violin Raykov - Varna Institute of Oceanology, Mrs. Dimitrina Chakarova - IARA, Ms. Polina Tsoneva - "Strategma" OOD, Ms. Tihomira Trifonova - "Strategma" OOD.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: the topic of vulnerable species is particularly important for the Black Sea.

The following is a presentation by Mr. Costin Timofte from the NGO "Mare Nostrum" on the topic "Black Sea free from fishing nets (Net free Black Sea)" . The presentation begins with how the pollution of the Black Sea is related to bycatch. Reaching a global and transboundary level, the problem of marine litter is generated by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; poor solid waste management; lack of infrastructure; insufficient implementation of legal frameworks and, last but not least, lack of financial resources. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has come out with an opinion that the Black Sea is twice as polluted with marine litter as the Mediterranean Sea, with 85% of this litter being plastic. Because of the high pollution, the EU is introducing many environmental policies and strategies to combat marine litter. These are the Marine Strategy and the Green Deal.

Fishing is one of the oldest activities sustained by man throughout history. Its development to the current level began at the end of the 19th century. There are currently 4,600,000 commercial fishing vessels worldwide, and each year 640,000 tons of nets, lines, and traps used in commercial

fishing are discarded and abandoned at sea. Currently, more than 136,000 marine mammals are caught in fishing gear. The number of species affected by capture or ingestion of fishing debris has doubled since 1997, from 267 to 557 species: affecting 66% of marine mammals and 50% of seabirds.

Over the past decade, academia, NGOs and the fishing industry have raised the alarm about these Abandoned, Lost or Discarded Fishing Gears (ALDFGs) - also called 'ghost gears' - and their impact on the aquatic environment. They pose a significant threat to marine habitats and biodiversity because they alter them and also affect the physical and chemical composition of marine sediments. It takes about 600 years for ghost webs to naturally decompose. All the nets ever made, abandoned and undiscovered, still lie at the bottom of the sea.

The "Net free Black Sea" project of the NGO Mare Nostrum is an initiative introduced at the local level and has several goals:

- Removal of ghost fishing gear from two areas between Cape Midia and Vama Veche;
- Creating a working network for effective knowledge transfer between the research world, industry, local government and local communities;
- Raising awareness of the social, economic and environmental damage caused by ALDFG in the Black Sea region.

The implementation period is from May 2022 to April 2023 and is financially supported by the Small Grants Program of the Ocean Conservancy and the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, where the NGO Mare Nostrum is the only member organization from the Black Sea.

The results so far are: about 750 kg of ghost nets removed; promotion of the project in the press, 2 awareness-raising events were also held - an exhibition in the Museum Complex of Natural Sciences and a visual exhibition of nets retrieved from the Black Sea in the Vivo Shopping Center in Constanta.

This is followed by a screening of a short video about the process of collecting abandoned nets.

By the end of the project, a minimum of 250 kg of abandoned nets will still be removed, collection points for these types of litter will be reported on the Global Ghost Gear Initiative portal/app, and a stakeholder workshop will be organized to develop and implement new measures for reducing marine litter from fishing.

Comments follow:

Mr. Laurentiu Mirea: The initiative of the NGO Mare Nostrum is very good. For Romania, no action has been taken by the Ministry of the Environment, although they are said to be willing. It is very important for fishermen to provide financial incentives to collect litter from the sea.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: the idea of the Focus Group, which is by-catch of vulnerable species, is being moved, but as an addition he says that the BISAC started working on the subject of marine litter as early as May 30, 2018 in the city of Burgas with the organization of the Round table.

Ms. Pinelopi Belekou: thanks the NGO Mare Nostrum for the presentation, but the focus group's focus group topic from the BISAC is bycatch of vulnerable species. The important thing is that the so-called ghost nets harm marine life, but emphasis must be placed on the interrelationship between fishing activity and vulnerable species. It is understandable that the BISAC wants to discuss a large volume of topics related to fishing, but the priorities must be clearly emphasized. As for the

lack of motivation to collect marine litter, the members of the BISAC should turn to the Member States, because they decide what the strategies for the protection of the marine environment and the collection of litter should be. Funds are available in the new fisheries and aquaculture programme. Important topics for the Black Sea are protection of sturgeon species, cetaceans and reduction of bycatch. All members of BISAC must actively work and monitor the Blacksea4fish project and the pilot study done on cetaceans in the Black Sea on how they get caught in turbot gillnets, because that happens. It was initiated based on information given by the fishermen themselves, because they are the ones who see best what is happening in the sea. This project will test fishing equipment and methods. It is very important for fishermen to report bycatch of sturgeon species during spawning periods. Any information to the Member States, GFCM and the EC is necessary to protect the species and balance the marine environment. As a conclusion, Ms. Belekou invited the members of the BISAC to participate in the cetacean and turbot bycatch projects. The EC will continue to work with Member States on the topic of vulnerable species. In turbot fishing there is a clear example of how sacrifices can be repaid. The term "sacrifices" refers to all measures imposed for the fishing of this species and the protection of the marine environment. GFCM adopted a decision to transfer the unfished quota from 2021 to 2023.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: And this year there will be problems in accounting for turbot quota in Bulgaria, because fishermen were limited due to the war in Ukraine. Some of the ships did not enter the sea because of fear of mines. On the other hand, markets and free trade were disrupted and fuel prices rose a lot. Signals are coming in from many fishermen that they cannot fulfill their allotted quota. There is still a little time until the end of the year, but the fishing conditions are also difficult in December. There is also another type of seasonal fishing that excludes that for turbot, it is about catching bonito, leper, zargan and safrid from parts. For this reason, the BISAC warns that this year it is possible that there will be a failure to fulfill the turbot quota again. Most likely, the fishing sector will once again request the EC to transfer the quota from 2022. On the subject of vulnerable species, all species of sturgeon caught as bycatch are returned to the sea, this can also be verified in fishing logs. In Bulgaria, as well as in Romania, fishermen keep cetacean and sturgeon species. In the future, BISAC will invite representatives of the Blacksea4fish project, as well as participate in their meetings.

Mr. Daniel Buhai: thanks Ms. Pinelopi for the information provided. Especially in Romania, as far as the bycatch of sturgeon in the Danube delta area is concerned, the fishing there is done after the isobath limit, which is 20 m, and the reproduction of this species is below 20 m. The large vessels engaged in fishing for sturgeon sprat and rapan, work after a depth of 20 m and bycatch is minimal. Another very important aspect is the introduction of the monofilament nets for catching turbot, which became possible after a scientific study conducted by the "Grigore Antipa" Institute, together with the "RO-Pescador" association. The survey itself was financed by the members of this association, who provided ships, crew and funds for its conduct. As a conclusion, it can be said that most of the scientific research carried out in Romania is at the initiative and with the assistance of the fishing associations and not by the authorities. Last but not least, the losses suffered by the fishing sector due to the war in Ukraine should be mentioned, for which the EC reacted very quickly and prepared a legislative framework for determining compensations, and the BISAC also sent a recommendation with proposed criteria for granting aid since spring, but so far no framework has been drawn up by the Romanian government for such assistance. With this, BISAC wants to warn about the slow implementation of some measures taken at the European level, which are essential for the sector.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: Bulgarian fishermen are also waiting for aid because of the war in Ukraine, and in a few days the procedure will start. In this case, the governing body in Bulgaria has done its job and by the end of the year there will be a reception of documents for granting compensations. November 25 is the monitoring committee where the criteria will be voted on.

Next is closing the meeting.

Minutes of the meeting: Mrs. Elena Peneva

Chairman of BISAC: Mr. Daniel Buhai