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## Minutes

### From a meeting of BISAC Working Group 2

March 16, 2021

**Topic: Technical measures - Follow-up to the conclusions for 2020, by-catch mitigation measures, including vulnerable species, current status of implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation.**

On March 16, 2021, through the ZOOM system, a meeting of working group 2 of the BISAC was held on Technical measures - Follow-up of the conclusions for 2020, measures to mitigate by-catches, including vulnerable species, current status of implementation of the technical measures regulation.

The meeting was attended by videoconference and Assoc. Prof. Violin Raykov, Institute of Oceanology, Varna, Mr. Dimitar Valkov - NAFA, Burgas, Mr. Victor Nita from the Institute "Grigore Antipa" Constanta, Mr. Alexandru Simionov - ANPA Constanta, Ms. Maria Moset and Ms. Katarina Barathova- DG MARE, who joined the meeting at a later stage, Mr. Stoyan Kotov - Director of the Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Directorate at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry of Bulgaria, who also joined the meeting at a later stage.

Representatives of: Ecological NGO "MARE NOSTRUM", Association RO - PESCADOR, Association National Association Bulgarian Black Sea Coast, Association Association of Fishery Producers BG FISH, Association "European Association of Fishermen in the Black Sea" took part. Association of small-scale fishing "St. Nikolay Chudotvoretz" and the Secretariat of BISAC. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of BISAC Mr. Yordan Gospodinov. Greetings to the members of BISAC, participants and guests of the meeting followed.

Following is a presentation by Assoc. Prof. Violin Raykov on the topic: Selectivity of trawls as fishing gear for red mullet (*MULLUS BARBATUS L.*) in the Bulgarian fishing zone. The red mullet (*Mullus barbatus*) is one of the most important commercial species for Mediterranean bottom trawling and in recent years has gained commercial interest for fishermen in the Black Sea.

The species is in overexploitation and scientific advice is to reduce fishing mortality. This study aims to present different scenarios of selectivity of the mullet trawl in Bulgarian sea fishing and to advise the responsible authorities on the appropriate technical measures for adaptation and introduction. The research was carried out within the framework of a doctoral program, and the topic of this doctoral program is: Technical innovations in fishing gear in order to reduce discards. The first object of study is the species of mullet. Several scenarios of selectivity of fishing gear for its catch are presented. The experimental experiments were conducted in July and September 2019, aboard the fishing vessel St. Nicholas in the Nessebar Bay at a depth of 36 to 52 m, using an attached trawl. The study itself is a measurement of the mesh size of the tool and the study of several parameters. The main parameter of any such study is called L50 - this is the size of the fish, at which 50% of it is retained by the fishing gear, or 50% possibility of retention in the so-called trawl bag. The level of selectivity (SR) is also measured, as well as the difference between the size of the fish that has a retention capacity of 75% and 25% in the trawl bag. The conclusion that can be made is that the most selective is the mesh size of 18 mm, with this size retaining individuals with a size of 12.4 cm. Studies conducted by the Institute of Oceanology found that there is one very important parameter - this is the size at which the species mass reaches sexual maturity. For mullet, this size is 11.47 cm, which is why the mesh size of 18 mm is the best, because it is a gentle size that does not hold mass immature individuals. This measure is essential to protect the resource from overfishing and depletion in the long term. The only technical measure for exploitation of mullet in the Bulgarian Black Sea is the minimum size of the landing. This study sheds light on the need to introduce new technical measures - mesh size determination, the requirement for selective gear to reduce unwanted catches, specifications for the design and use of gear and measures to minimize the impact of fishing on the marine ecosystem; and Environment.

Following is a presentation by Mr Marian Paiu on "Interaction between fisheries and vulnerable species - a study for cetaceans". The waters of the Black Sea are home to three species of cetaceans: harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin and common dolphin. For each of them there are prerequisites to be caught accidentally in fishing nets. Legislation in all coastal countries emphasizes the need to protect these endangered or vulnerable animals, as well as to report by-catch cases in national registers, which, however, is rare. By-catches of species commonly caught with cetaceans are: Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Cod / Merger (*Merlangius merlangus*), Shark (*Squalus acanthias*), sturgeon (*Acipenseridae*) and stingrays (eg *Dasyatis pastinaca* - marine). Sometimes fishermen catch and discard animals that they do not want, cannot sell or are not allowed to keep, creating what we call by-catches and which they avoid reporting. The most important first step to managing by-catches is to have a comprehensive monitoring and reporting system, in partnership between the public sector, the authorities, research units and NGOs. In conclusion of his presentation, Mr. Paiu pointed out the following conclusions:

- Fishing effort monitoring activities are insufficient to allow a highly reliable assessment of the impact of fishing on cetaceans or vulnerable species. Underestimation or overestimation most often occurs.

- The fisheries sector can take the initiative and implement a monitoring program with special observers to the detriment of standard samples. This practice usually leads to a reduction in by-catch estimates. At EU level, the DCF (Data Collection Framework) system can be used.

- Measures to prevent and reduce by-catches must be implemented, but in line with the actual situation.

- Vulnerable species are not a problem, and they themselves are a guarantee for maintaining a healthy marine system.

The following is a statement by Mr. Dimitar Valkov: The catch of cetaceans and its reporting is a concern for fishermen. For another year, NAFA data show that there is no catch of dolphins, which is in total contradiction with the data presented in the presentation of Mr. Payu. There is a need for joint work between the administration, scientific institutes and professional organizations, on the basis of which there should be some reliable data on the accidental by-catch of dolphins. NAFA has been trying for several years to encourage fishermen to use repellent devices called "Pingers" placed on nets. For many years in a row, when allocating the individual quota for turbot, NAFA has given an advantage to fishermen who place such devices on their nets. As for the presentation of Assoc. Prof. Raykov for catching mullet, in the last year there is an initiative from a part of the Bulgarian fishermen, who started to replace their trawls with a mesh size of 18 mm. Until now, 16 mm mesh size has been widely used for this type of catch, but fishermen themselves understand that using a more selective method of catching would help them catch larger individuals for which they receive more good price.

Discussions follow:

Mr. Todor Georgiev: As for the repellent devices, the so-called pingers - dolphins are very intelligent animals and initially run away from pingers, but later realize that this is a signal of the presence of fish in the nets. So this is not a good solution.

Mr. Stoyan Kotov: Regarding the pingers: currently the Ministry of Agriculture and Food is funding a project under the measure to increase knowledge of the marine environment, which is being implemented by Sofia University, and within a year there will be results on the impact of such repellents on cetaceans in the Black Sea. This is a targeted project that tracks species with GPS data and monitors their reaction and behavior when they hear pingers. Otherwise, the topic of selectivity has always been accompanying the first priority of ODA, and the tendency is to have funding for this type of action again in the next programming period. So far, there has been little success with regard to the comprehensive application of this type of measure and the adoption of more selective methods and the improvement of the selectivity of appliances in the context of ODA. In the course of the informal negotiations to be held with the EC for the next programming period, it will become clear to what extent details need to be entered regarding the actions to increase the selectivity of fishing gear. There are currently isolated private investments related to improving selectivity, but this cannot be defined as a mass phenomenon or an expressed desire from the part of the sector.

Mr. Dimitar Valkov: It is important when talking about investments in ODA, which are related to improving selectivity, it should be borne in mind that they must always exceed the already legally regulated such minimum requirements. For example, as was the case with turbot nets ten years ago - then the transition from less selective to more selective ones was not funded by the program because it was a regulatory obligation.

Mr. Alexandru Simionov: With regard to fishing gear, bottom trawls are banned in Romania. Since 2014, monofilament nets have been approved to help dolphins get out of them.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: we will rely on the scientific community to give an opinion on the selectivity of the devices and this to be within 2021. The Bulgarian administration together with business and science prepares a report on proposals for recommendations, which focuses on the pingers, the thickness of the fiber, the mesh. Fishermen are also interested in the conservation of species and the sustainability of fishing, but at the same time to preserve livelihoods.

Ms. Mihaela Candea-Mirea: The regulation on technical measures is very extensive and the BISAC does not have the opportunity to cover everything in one meeting, and given the two very specific presentations, we can send a recommendation from this working group to the fisheries sector on how it can be changed mesh of mullet nets. Another recommendation to the fisheries sector could be for by-catches of cetaceans - to encourage them to report these by-catches.

Mr. Todor Georgiev: a letter was sent by the National Association of the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast (NABC) to the BISAC in connection with Regulation 1241/2019 concerning the ban on catching bonito (*Sarda sarda*) with floating nets. They have no official answer from anywhere and they regret that Mr. Violin Raykov had to leave the meeting because they have questions for him as well. As for dolphins, there are some environmental NGOs that overexpose the topic. Years ago, there was a high mortality of dolphins on the Bulgarian and Romanian coasts, and later it was proved that this mortality is due to the measles disease, and not from the activity of fishermen.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: It is important to note the lack of reporting of by-catches of cetaceans and to convince fishermen to report it. Dolphins die for many reasons - military exercises, accidents, oil exploration, entanglement in nets or other fishing activities and more. As for the topic raised by NABCH, Mr. Gospodinov proposes to organize an extraordinary meeting, because this topic is not on the agenda and in the work program. At the meeting of Working Group 1, when the issue was raised, we had an inquiry from DG MARE as to why we were going beyond the topics on the agenda. We must adhere to the announced program.

Ms. Mihaela Candea-Mirea: In response to the NABC in connection with their letter on the species of bonito (*Sarda sarda*) and the ban on its catch with floating nets under Regulation 1241/2019, she said that this topic was discussed in Working Group 1 of 24 February 2021, although it was not on the agenda of the meeting. Ms Pinelopi Belekou was also present at the time and her answer was more than clear that the Regulation very well explained the measures and prohibitions, and it was not possible to change that regulation.

On the other hand, we have an answer from Mr. Raykov on the topic, which is recorded in the minutes of the meeting of 24 February. If the NABC thinks that they have not received an adequate answer, they can ask questions in particular to be included in a possible meeting.

Mr. Marian Paiu: Mr. Georgiev obviously did not understand the presentation well and draws the wrong conclusion that environmental organizations benefit from dolphin mortality. The idea of the NGO Mare Nostrum is to help fishermen and persuade them to report by-catches of cetaceans.

Ms Maria Moset: The desire of DG MARE is to participate in this meeting and to discuss technical measures and the Technical Measures Regulation. She regrets that she joined a little later and failed to hear the presentations of Assoc. Prof. Raykov and Mr. Marian Payu.

Mr. Yordan Gospodinov: if the authors of the presentations allow, BISAC will send the presentations to DG MARE, will also send the minutes of the meeting.

The meeting closes.

Prepared the protocol: Mrs. Elena Peneva

Chairman of BISAC: Dr. Yordan Gospodinov