

BRIEFING SERIES: Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities



The fishing effort regime in the Western Mediterranean Sea

Briefing 7 of 11

July 2025

About this Briefing Series

This Briefing Series, supported by the 29 undersigned organisations, is designed to assist the responsible decision-makers in the European Union (the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the Member States) and the United Kingdom (the UK Government and devolved administrations) in managing fishing opportunities in a way that:

- ◆ Finally ends overfishing,
- ◆ Significantly contributes to restoring and/or maintaining all fish stocks above healthy levels and to minimising levels of incidental catches, and
- ◆ Safeguards marine ecosystem functioning and resilience, also in light of mounting pressures like climate change.

The Series consists of 11 Briefings covering the following topics related to the setting of fishing opportunities:^{1,2}

- ◆ 1. [Cover Briefing](#): Key recommendations on setting fishing opportunities
- ◆ 2. [Context and legal framework](#)
- ◆ 3. [“Best available” is not good enough - addressing shortcomings in the current scientific advice](#)
- ◆ 4. [Shared fish stocks](#)
- ◆ 5. [Fishing opportunities in an ecosystem context](#)
- ◆ 6. [Mixed fisheries considerations](#)
- ◆ 7. [The fishing effort regime in the Western Mediterranean Sea](#) (this briefing)
- ◆ 8. [Landing obligation challenges](#)
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- ◆ 11. [Deep Sea stocks](#)

In order to ensure that fishing opportunities support thriving fisheries while safeguarding ocean health, resilience and productivity, we call on decision-makers to follow all of our recommendations across the entire Briefing Series.

About this Briefing

EU Member States have missed the legal deadline in the western Mediterranean multiannual plan (West Med MAP) to reach target fishing mortality by January 2025. This Briefing highlights key aspects of the fishing effort regime in the Western Mediterranean that need further attention and calls on the European Commission, alongside the governments of France, Italy and Spain, to take immediate and robust measures. These actions are crucial not only to recover the fish populations managed under the West Med MAP, but also to safeguard the health, resilience and productivity of the region's marine ecosystems.

While the rest of the Briefing Series is directed at both EU and UK decision-makers, this Briefing is primarily targeted at the EU side as there are no UK fisheries operating in the Mediterranean. It is however worth noting that sustainability of seafood sourced in the Mediterranean may nevertheless be of UK interest from an import perspective. This Briefing features fewer logos than the rest of the Series as not all signatory organisations are active in the Mediterranean.

The EU's western Mediterranean multiannual plan (“West Med MAP”)³ was established in 2019 to safeguard six critical demersal species, ensuring their exploitation levels remain sustainable and conducive to long-term population health. Encompassing 22 stocks of species such as blue and red shrimp, deep-water rose shrimp, giant red shrimp, European hake, Norway lobster, and red mullet, the plan aims to restore and maintain these populations above levels capable of producing the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). Unlike other multiannual plans within the EU, which adhered to the 2020 deadline mandated by the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the West Med MAP provides a transitional phase until 2024, with 2025 as the target year for sustainable exploitation and beginning of the permanent phase.

While the plan has resulted in a 40% reduction in fishing days from 2020 to 2024, the effectiveness of these measures is hindered by a **lack of transparency regarding the “compensation mechanism” that allows Member States to reclaim fishing days.**⁴ As of 2025, no data about the use of the compensation

¹ Over the years, the NGOs working on fishing opportunities have been providing a range of annually updated recommendations for different sea basins and groups of species. Many of our key recommendations and concerns are cross-cutting and do not change from year to year. For 2025 onwards, we have consolidated these points into this Briefing Series which is intended to remain valid for years to come. The Series will be complemented by bespoke regionally or topically specific recommendations as appropriate and current scientific state of the art findings.

² Cross-references will be included throughout the text using the relevant Briefing numbers. Full references to all Briefings are listed in ANNEX 1.

³ Regulation (EU) 2019/1022 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 establishing a multiannual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea and amending Regulation (EU) No 508/2014. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019R1022>. Referred to as “West Med MAP” in this document.

⁴ Starting in 2022, policymakers established for the first time a “compensation mechanism” to incentivise Member States to implement technical measures, including selectivity measures, closure areas, and the fixing of minimum conservation reference size (MCRS). Specifically, the three Member States concerned

mechanism are easily available or accessible, which raises doubts about the actual quality and effectiveness of the implementation of this tool. Furthermore, while the European Commission adopted a bold proposal for the 2025 fishing opportunities - foreseeing substantial reductions in fishing effort in line with scientific advice - the final agreement was significantly weakened. Member States were allowed to recover up to 100% of the reduced fishing days through the compensation mechanism, ultimately falling short of adopting ambitious measures to meaningfully reduce fishing mortality.

Given the legal deadline to reach sustainable fishing mortality rates by January 2025, Member States have failed to meet this obligation. Current fishing mortality rates and biomass levels clearly show that more decisive action is urgently needed to prevent further depletion of these fish populations.

To address the ongoing crisis in the Western Mediterranean, **we urge the European Commission, alongside the governments of France, Italy and Spain, to take immediate and robust measures.** These actions, outlined below, are crucial not only for the recovery of the fish populations managed under the West Med MAP but also for the long-term sustainability of the region's marine ecosystems.

Recommendations on fisheries management in the Western Mediterranean Sea

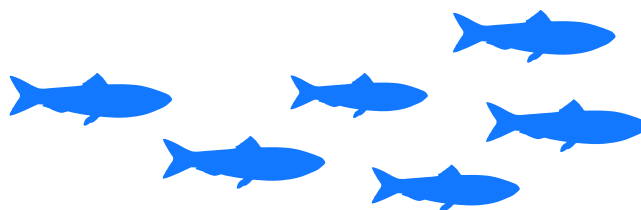
- ◆ **Strengthen efforts to reduce fishing mortality.** Ongoing measures like restrictions on fishing days, catch limits, closure areas, and improvements in selectivity are essential to reduce fishing mortality to sustainable levels. It is crucial to continue these efforts, ensuring that fishing mortality is brought at least within MSY ranges as soon as possible, and does not exceed them again once reached, particularly for stocks that are currently subject to overfishing.
- ◆ **Implement safeguard measures for stocks below B_{lim} and B_{pa} .** Given the critical condition of several stocks, especially those with biomass below B_{pa} and B_{lim} , urgent action is necessary to prevent irreversible damage, as required by Article 6 of the West Med MAP. Specifically, emergency measures must be implemented without delay for stocks below B_{lim} , while other remedial actions are mandated for stocks below B_{pa} starting in 2025.
- ◆ **Adopt tailored management approaches.** Management measures should be tailored to specific geographical subareas (GSAs) and fish stocks. For example, dividing management of certain species like European hake by GSAs or small groups of GSAs could enhance the effectiveness of these measures and better align them with the MAP's objectives.
- ◆ **Keep catch limits and gears included under the West Med MAP as of 2025 and include additional ones as needed.** The inclusion of additional fishing gears, such as gillnets in 2025, under the West Med MAP is critical to more effectively regulate them, especially where they contribute significantly to high fishing mortality. Introducing and keeping maximum allowable fishing effort or catch limits for relevant gears, and adjusting existing catch limits to align with scientific advice, can further control fishing mortality.
- ◆ **Enhance selectivity measures.** There is a need for better-designed technical measures - particularly within the scope of the compensation mechanism - to ensure they effectively reduce juvenile bycatch and prevent overfishing. Improved selectivity measures, including increased mesh sizes and adjusted minimum conservation reference sizes for key species where needed (such as for hake)⁵, are essential to protect vulnerable stocks.

(France, Italy and Spain) are entitled to reclaim a predetermined percentage of allocated fishing days upon satisfying one or more conditions outlined within the annual Council Regulation establishing fishing opportunities for the following year.

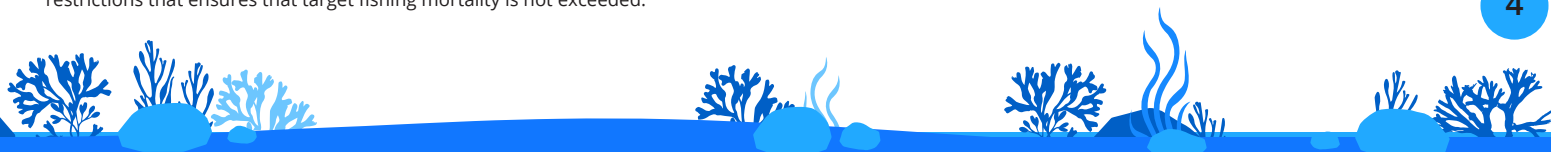
⁵ European hake reaches maturity around 33 cm, which makes it essential to increase the minimum conservation reference size of this species, in line with better examples found in the Atlantic. This is an average calculated with data about the maturity length of 10 populations of European hake in the Western Mediterranean Sea. The data come from Tsikliras, A., Stergiou, K. (2013). Size at maturity of Mediterranean marine fishes. Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries, 24: 219268.

- ◆ **Expand and assess closure areas.** Additional spatial protections are necessary to reduce fishing on juvenile and spawning grounds. Existing closures should be regularly assessed, and new closures should be established based on scientific data. It is also important to ensure that closures effectively reduce fishing pressure rather than merely displace it.
- ◆ **Ensure that a comprehensive and effective control system is in place for Member States to ensure compliance with the entire West Med MAP, including all tools designed in the plan, such as fishing effort restrictions and technical measures.** This system should also monitor the compensation mechanism, which was not part of the original MAP provisions, ensuring that vessels failing to comply with required closures or selectivity measures, through which they obtained additional fishing days, lose these extra days in the following year and repay any granted compensation. Additionally, regular monitoring of all fleets covered by the MAP is essential to ensure consistency between actual and declared fishing days, deterring illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing activities. The Commission and Member States should prioritise investments in technology and capacity building to enhance surveillance and enforcement capabilities.
- ◆ **Work with the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) to move towards fully ecosystem-based and recovery-focused scientific advice on fishing mortality and catches,⁶** as well as incorporating the necessary precaution in the face of uncertainty and knowledge gaps about ecosystem integrity and dynamics. See Briefing 3 for further details on the need for improvements to scientific advice used to inform fishing opportunities.
- ◆ **Ensure alignment with EU environmental legislation.** Management measures under the West Med MAP must be coherent with broader EU environmental objectives, particularly the goal of achieving Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. This alignment is essential for the long-term health and sustainability of marine ecosystems.

Environmental organisations remain committed to the objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy, the UK Fisheries Act, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the UK's Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, as well as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and other international agreements. We will continue to scrutinise the progress in ending overfishing and boosting long-term population and ecosystem health and resilience as we urge the European Commission, the Council of the EU, the Member States, the UK Government and devolved administrations to finally deliver the EU's and UK's transition to truly sustainable fisheries. This Briefing Series provides a clear and comprehensive list of recommendations on how to get there.



⁶ In the case of the species covered by the West Med MAP, reductions in fishing days are the primary tool to reach the target fishing mortality. However, the link between fishing mortality and fishing days is still unclear. Further research should be carried out to provide robust guidance on the setting of fishing effort restrictions that ensures that target fishing mortality is not exceeded.



CONTACT DETAILS

The below contact details refer to the main contacts for each of the organisations supporting this Briefing Series, and are not Briefing-specific. We can help redirect any queries to the most appropriate colleagues for each individual Briefing. This Briefing features only the logos and contact details of organisations active in the EU⁷ and excludes those with a primary focus on UK advocacy, as there are no UK fisheries in the Mediterranean.

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⁷ Deutsche Umwelthilfe (DUH) supports the overall Briefing Series, but has asked that their logo and contact details not be included in this particular Briefing, as they are not active in the Mediterranean.

ANNEX 1 - FULL REFERENCES TO ALL BRIEFINGS IN THIS SERIES

This Briefing Series is supported by 29 organisations, including environmental NGOs and recreational representatives. [Briefing 3](#) is additionally supported by the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE), European Anglers Alliance (EAA), Baltic Salmon Fund and Baltic Salmon Rivers Association. [Briefing 7](#) about fisheries management in the Western Mediterranean Sea features fewer logos than the rest of the series since not all of the NGOs signatory to the Briefing Series are active in the Mediterranean.

Briefing 1: Cover briefing: Key recommendations on setting fishing opportunities. Briefing 1 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-1-cover-briefing-key-recommendations-on-setting-fishing-opportunities/>

Briefing 2: Context and legal framework. Briefing 2 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-2-context-and-legal-framework/>

Briefing 3: “Best available” is not good enough - addressing shortcomings in the current scientific advice. Briefing 3 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-3-addressing-shortcomings-in-the-current-scientific-advice/>

Briefing 4: Shared fish stocks. Briefing 4 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-4-shared-fish-stocks/>

Briefing 5: Fishing opportunities in an ecosystem context. Briefing 5 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-5-fishing-opportunities-in-an-ecosystem-context/>

Briefing 6: Mixed fisheries considerations. Briefing 6 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-6-mixed-fisheries-considerations/>

Briefing 7: The fishing effort regime in the Western Mediterranean Sea. Briefing 7 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-7-the-fishing-effort-regime-in-the-western-mediterranean-sea/>

Briefing 8: Landing obligation challenges. Briefing 8 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-8-landing-obligation-challenges/>

Briefing 9: Depleted stocks with zero or very low catch advice. Briefing 9 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-9-depleted-stocks-with-zero-or-very-low-catch-advice/>

Briefing 10: Stocks not managed by a Total Allowable Catch. Briefing 10 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-10-stocks-not-managed-by-a-total-allowable-catch/>

Briefing 11: Deep-sea stocks. Briefing 11 of 11 in the Briefing Series “Recommendations to the EU and the UK on the setting of fishing opportunities”. July 2025. <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/documents/joint-briefing-series-recommendations-on-fishing-opportunities-briefing-11-deep-sea-stocks/>

