

Recommendation no. 25:
about the *Plan for the conservation of fishery resources and marine protected ecosystems*

Considering the European Commission's public consultation on the future Action Plan to Conserve Fisheries Resources and Protect Marine Ecosystems, the Outermost Regions Advisory Council (CCRUP) recommends to consider the specific characteristics of the Outermost Regions (ORs), both in relation to the European continent, and also, among themselves, considering that the pressure they exert on the marine environment through their small-scale fishing, differs significantly from that exerted in other regions or by vessels from other regions fishing in their waters. We therefore express the following:

Conciliate the use of bottom contact fishing gear with biodiversity objectives:

French ORs:

They consider that there should be no discrimination referring to the use of fishing gear, but rather the impact of its use, depending on the nature of the components, volume of catches, fishing areas and type of species caught, i.e., the interactions of fishing gear with the environment, cannot come from a simplistic logic, but should be subject to a case-by-case analysis, with robust and scientifically based data, and considering the socioeconomic impacts. So, they consider that it is possible to conciliate the use of bottom contact fishing gear with the achievement of biodiversity objectives.

Azores:

Considering that the bottom longline is a fishing gear that contacts the seabed and that, during its use, occurs accidental catches of some deep-sea shark species, the *SOS TubaProf* project is underway since 2020, which aims to collect more data about the catches of deep-sea shark and assess whether their bycatch is sustainable and ways to mitigate these catches. The implementation of this project in the Azores, allows knowing new ways to mitigate the ecological and economic impacts, and ensure the sustainability of the species and fishing activities. This project is carried out in partnership between researchers and fishermen.

So, this project aims to conciliate deep-sea fishing with preserving the biodiversity.

Transition to more selective and less harmful fishing techniques

French ORs:

Considering the proposal to ban gillnets in the EU, we should remember that this practice is mostly used in small-scale coastal fishing in the Outermost Regions or in Estuaries and does not have a major impact on resources.

Azores:

The support system for the voluntary slaughter of less selective fishing gear, such as coastal gillnets and traps, was established as a measure to manage fishing effort.

Hook sizes and net mesh sizes have also changed, making fishing more selective.

Since 2005, trawls have been banned in the Azores, protecting coral communities and other important deep-sea habitats. This measure is a good example of resource conservation.

Canary Islands:

The fishing gear used in the Canary Islands is of the small-scale type and has been adapted and modelled according to the target species to be exploited. The issue of unwanted catches should be addressed for all gears used. However, the following approaches are suggested for the gear:

Bottom longline: Use of materials with limited resistance and associated with the target species: do not use high-tensile or steel strings which prevent the release of deep-sea sharks.

Traps: Use biodegradable materials so that, in case of loss, they are not "ghost-fishing" for a long time.

To avoid the capture of unwanted species, it would be essential to have a manual of good practices for professional and recreational fishermen.

The CCRUP defends that selective and low-harm fisheries are already practiced in the ORs.

Protection of 65% of seabed habitats under the Habitats Directive

Azores:

The Azores have a marine ecosystem characterized by a narrow or absent continental platform, abundant abyssal areas with average depths of 3000m, banks and seamounts. The seabed consists of coral and sponge habitats and hydrothermal vents. The banning of trawling protects these habitats.

The current implementation of marine protected areas in the Azores Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) contributes to the protection of seabed habitats.

Canary Islands:

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are an excellent tool for the management and conservation of biodiversity, habitats, and resources, and it generates socio-economic benefits that, with other strategic measures, are difficult to achieve. It is recommended the implementation and empowerment of MPAs in the Canary Islands within the framework of integrated coastal management, namely:

- planning, definition and conception, adapting them to the current knowledge and characteristics of the Canary Islands, always enhancing the protection of the marine habitat and the existing resources;
- promoting its coordinated participatory management;
- development of a specific multidisciplinary research protocol, with the coordinated participation of different research and management institutions;
- reinforcement of participatory processes and collective action in the concept and management of these spaces, as well as the dissemination channels;

It is not possible to guarantee biodiversity in these marine spaces without daily management surveillance, control, and sustainable management of the exploitation of their resources that exist within their limits.

The LIFE+ INDEMARES project, the areas protected by the Natura 2000 Network and Spanish legislation 41/2010, on 29th of December, about the protection of the marine environment allow the marine SACs to become part, together with other protected spaces at international, community, national or regional level, of the Spanish Network of Marine

Protected Areas (RAMPE).

CCRUP defends the protection of the marine substrate, as it is one of the main carbon sinks and due to the high importance in the stability of the stocks of marine species, namely deep-sea species, **but with the condition that these areas remain open for fisheries and that the implementation of any restrictions should always consider the opinion of the fishing sector.**

Incidental catches of marine mammals, marine reptiles, seabirds, and other sensitive species.

French Guyana:

To avoid the capture of sea turtles, dolphins and sawfish sharks, the [PALICA Project](#) (*Pêcheries Actives pour la Limitation des Interactions et des Captures Accidentelles*) was developed in French Guyana, which aims to limit the incidental catches of these animals. PALICA aims to evaluate and develop the technical, technological and logistical capacities of coastal artisanal gillnet fisheries in order to reduce by-catches of protected species.

Azores:

Since 1998, the Observation Program for Fisheries in the Azores (POPA) has been implemented, using observers on board of regional tuna vessels, with the aim of ensuring the absence of cetacean mortality during tuna captures. This program certifies Azorean fisheries with the *Friend of the Sea* label, as it considers them to be a sustainable and environmentally friendly activity, which does not over-exploit resources or damage associated ecosystems. In addition, POPA is essential for the Azores, as it provides the largest database in Europe on the pole-and-line tuna fishery, also allowing the collection of data on deep-sea species, cetaceans, turtles and birds marine life, abiotic variables, and marine litter.

Canary Islands:

Canary Island fishermen take positive care of their interaction with seabirds and cetaceans because these species often help them search for tuna.

So, since the **ORs use mainly sustainable and selective fishing gears**, there are **few accidental catches of mammals and seabirds**.

However, **CCRUP considers that the implementation of observer programs on board of fishing vessels, is a good tool to obtain data and mitigate the mortality of birds and marine mammals associated with fishing activity.**

Areas closed to fisheries

Considering that areas closed to fisheries limit the catch of fish resources, compromising the social and economic stability of the fishing sector, CCRUP considers that although they may have some benefits, **the establishment of these areas should always be agreed between fishermen, scientific researchers, and governments, to ensure that these areas are effective**, not only for the marine environment, but also **for the coastal fishing communities that depend on them for their living**.

Changes on the fishing gears

French ORs:

The French OR have specific environmental, socio-economic, geographical, and cultural characteristics which sometimes make the application of European measures very complex, namely due to the different fishing pressures and gears used, which are very different from those in continental Europe.

Azores:

They defend that the current restrictions in their region are sufficient, and their implementation has been successful, with no need for further changes.

The CCRUP does not consider the need to make further changes in the fishing gears used in the ORs, as we already consider them to be sustainable.

Mitigation measures to reduce adverse impacts on sensitive habitats and species:

French ORs:

The problem of chlordecone pollution in the Antilles should be considered in future management measures, due to the several consequences of this pollution on the quality of the marine ecosystem.

Azores:

They consider that the ban of trawling gear in their region is a positive measure to preserve sensitive habitats and species.

Among the various measures implemented in the Azores fishing sector, allowing the marine ecosystem to remain healthy and the fisheries sustainable, they highlight the implementation of total allowable catches (TACs), closed fishing seasons, minimum sizes, and the existence of quotas for some of the species in the region.

They propose a higher monitoring of activity in the already established Marine Protected Areas, to verify their effectiveness.

In general, the ORs defend the need to increase the surveillance means to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as the main measure to mitigate the impacts of fishing on sensitive habitats and species.

The CCRUP recommends that the EC should continue with its regionalization policy, adapting measures to each OR, avoiding the implementation of rules with a strong socio-economic impact on small-scale coastal fishing.

The President of the Executive Committee of the CC RUP,

(David Pavón González)