

Recommendation n° 56

Maritime Action Plan

Considering the presentation on the 18th of June 2024 by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on “*Fisheries management measures at Natura 2000 sites and other EU Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)*”, in the context of the Marine Action Plan meeting, CCRUP is hereby setting out its opinion:

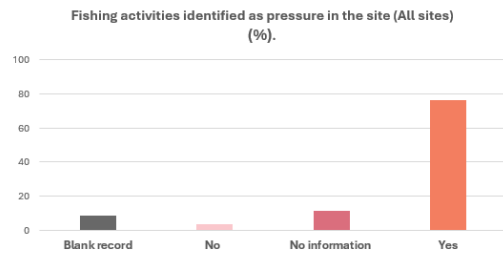
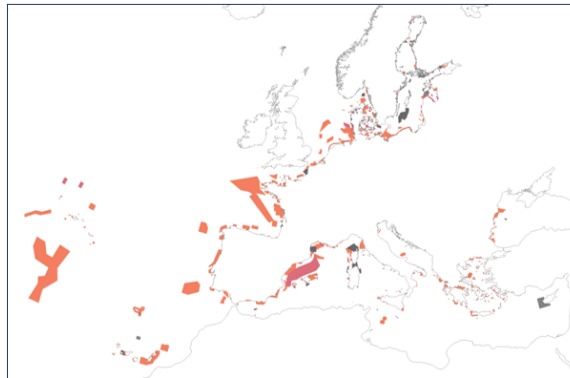
First of all, we would like to alert to **the lack of information on French Outermost Regions (ORs) in the presentation**, being that the maps presented do not even include them.

Secondly, as regards the MPA of the Gran Meteor (*Azores*), we are faced with an incongruence. As shown on slide 7 - Fig. 1: “*Fishing activities identified as pressure in the site*” and on slide 9 (with the same title) - Fig. 2, we can deduce that the Portuguese Member State answered the EEA questionnaire confirming that fishing activity is reported, respectively, as a pressure to 76% of the total area of marine protected areas and 63% of the total area of sites designated nationally. However, due to the fact that this MPA is located outside the Azores’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the Portuguese Member State does not include it in its 2030 biodiversity target.

Therefore, the **CCRUP recommends that if the Portuguese Member State considers this MPA for the Marine Action Plan, it should continue to include it in its national Maritime Spatial Plan (POEM), counting it towards the national biodiversity target for 2030.**

Fishing activities identified as pressure in the site

Fishing activity is reported as a pressure for **76% of total area of marine protected areas**.



For all protected areas in the marine



Fig. 1 - slide 7

Fishing activities identified as pressure in the site

Fishing activity is reported as a pressure for **63% of total area of sites designated nationally**.

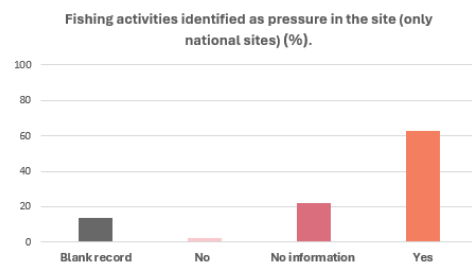
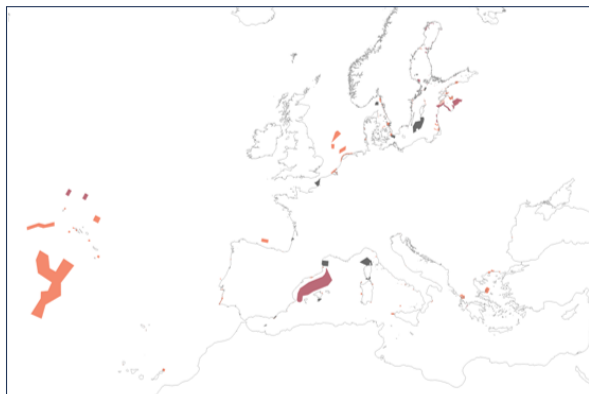


Fig. 2 - slide 9

Thirdly, we do not understand the relation between the two types of graphs presented: the graphs of Member States' responses to the EEA questionnaire (complemented by the map illustration of the data) - Figures 1 and 2 - and the graphs of fishing activities presented by maritime region - Fig. 3. **In this last type of graph, the maritime regions of the ORs are not included.**

An example of this situation is the relationship between slide 9 - Fig. 2 - (already mentioned), which shows the Azores, Madeira, and the Canaries, and slide 10 - Fig. 3: "*Fishing activities identified as pressure in the site - marine regions*", which did not include the maritime basins of the European ORs, considering only the coast of the Iberian Peninsula.

Fishing activities identified as pressure in the site - marine regions

The area of sites where fishing activity is reported as a pressure shows difference across marine sub-regions.

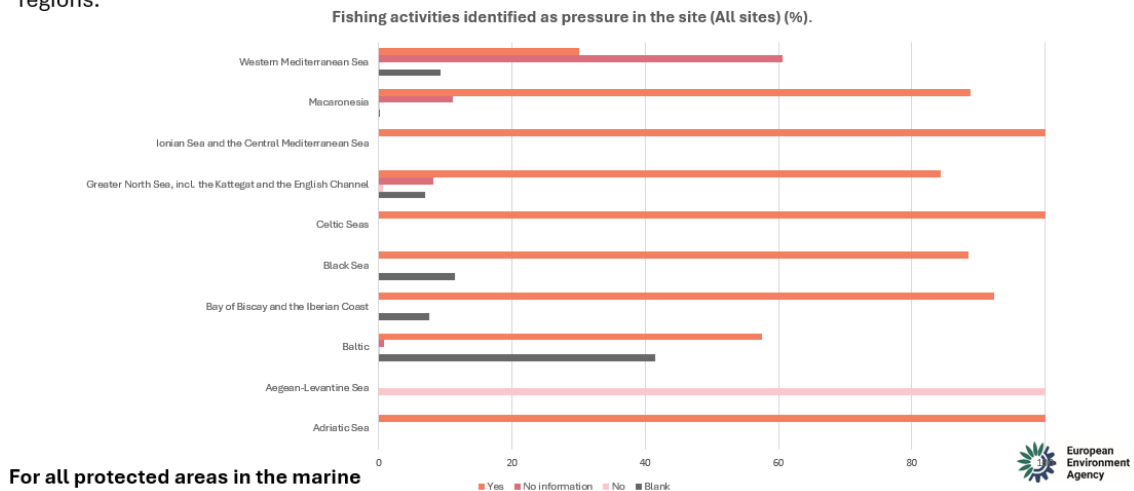


Fig. 3 - slide 10

In light of the above, **the CCRUP recommends the European Commission to request the European Environment Agency to carry out a better-informed review of the Marine Action Plan, duly including the ORs.**

Considering also the remit of this recommendation, and the fact that the marine area identified to the south of the Azores Archipelago (**PMA12-A**) - see Fig. 1, **we recommend that the Portuguese Member State** consider the following:

1. We believe that PMA12-A, designated as «Meteor» (coordinates: 34°51"N/27°26"W), should henceforth be **called «Pico do Sul»**, since this is the common name used by fishers, avoiding confusion with a seamount located further south, also called “Meteor”;

2. Considering that PMA12-A is approximately 180 nautical miles from the Azores Archipelago, with a minimum depth of 1.116 m, few vessels in the Azorean fleet are able to reach this bank. This way, of those that could do so, only a restricted number are interested in the location, since it is only possible to capture pelagics and one demersal species. Further considering that it has not yet been proven that the species that inhabit there, or that pass through there, can repopulate other seamounts within the EEZ of the Azores, **we propose authorisation for the exploitation of these fish resources by the Azorean fleet**, in a controlled manner, preventing other fleets from doing so;
3. Considering that in PMA12-A, fishing is carried out only with drift longlines, aimed at catching black scabbardfish (*Aphanopus carbo*). Considering also that this is a fishing technique that does not come into contact with the seabed, **we would recommend authorising drift longline fishing in this area**, as we believe it helps to reduce pressure on other species and alleviate overfishing in areas that are already exploited;
4. Considering that in PMA12-A, the species of commercial interest are only the large migratory ones, such as swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) and the black scabbardfish, we consider that **the prohibition of fishing for these species**, associated with the authorisation of other types of activities, even with restrictions, **is not sustainable**.

Considering the above, **the CCRUP recommends that the Portuguese Member State maintain the protection level of this maritime area (PMA12-A) as “High Protection”, instead of the intended “Highly Protected”, allowing the use of drift longline gear.**

We also highlight that, in the Azores, several coastal marine sites are included in the Natura 2000 Network. However, the lack of adequate monitoring at these sites is a growing concern. Many protected habitats and species face pressures such as illegal fishing, tourism, invasive species and climate change, but the absence of effective monitoring systems prevents an accurate assessment of impacts and the adoption of

appropriate conservation measures. This gap in monitoring compromises the network's conservation objectives, putting the long-term protection of the region's marine biodiversity at risk. Considering that monitoring is possible through the combination of the deployment of technology and collaboration with local and regional partners, for continuous surveillance, **we recommend that investments be made in this area, in order to ensure that marine sites of the Natura 2000 network of the Outermost Regions remain protected from threats and that conservation measures are adjusted, based on concrete data.**

Sciaena's Opinion

As regards the paragraph: *“Considering that in PMA12-A, fishing is carried out only with drift longlines, aimed at catching black scabbardfish (*Aphanopus carbo*). Considering also that this is a fishing technique that does not come into contact with the seabed, **we recommend authorising drift longline fishing in this area** as we believe it helps to reduce pressure on other species and alleviate overfishing in areas that are already exploited;”* (page 4), Sciaena considers that the authorisation of this technique may jeopardise the definition of the level of protection as "restricted", and it may compromise the conservation targets of said area. In addition, for this type of gear to be permitted, the vessels in question must be duly registered, carry a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) device, or similar, and be covered by on-board observers or remote monitoring technology. Monitoring measures should also be defined to ensure total absence of contact with the seabed. In addition, they consider that the specific management plan for this area should include a restricted protection area, where no activity, including drifting longlines, is permitted. Sciaena is still sensitive to the point of reducing fishing pressure in other areas, but it believes that the analysis of the impact of this measure should be carried out and confirmed within the scope of the Atlantic Marine Protected Areas Network ([RAMPA](#)).