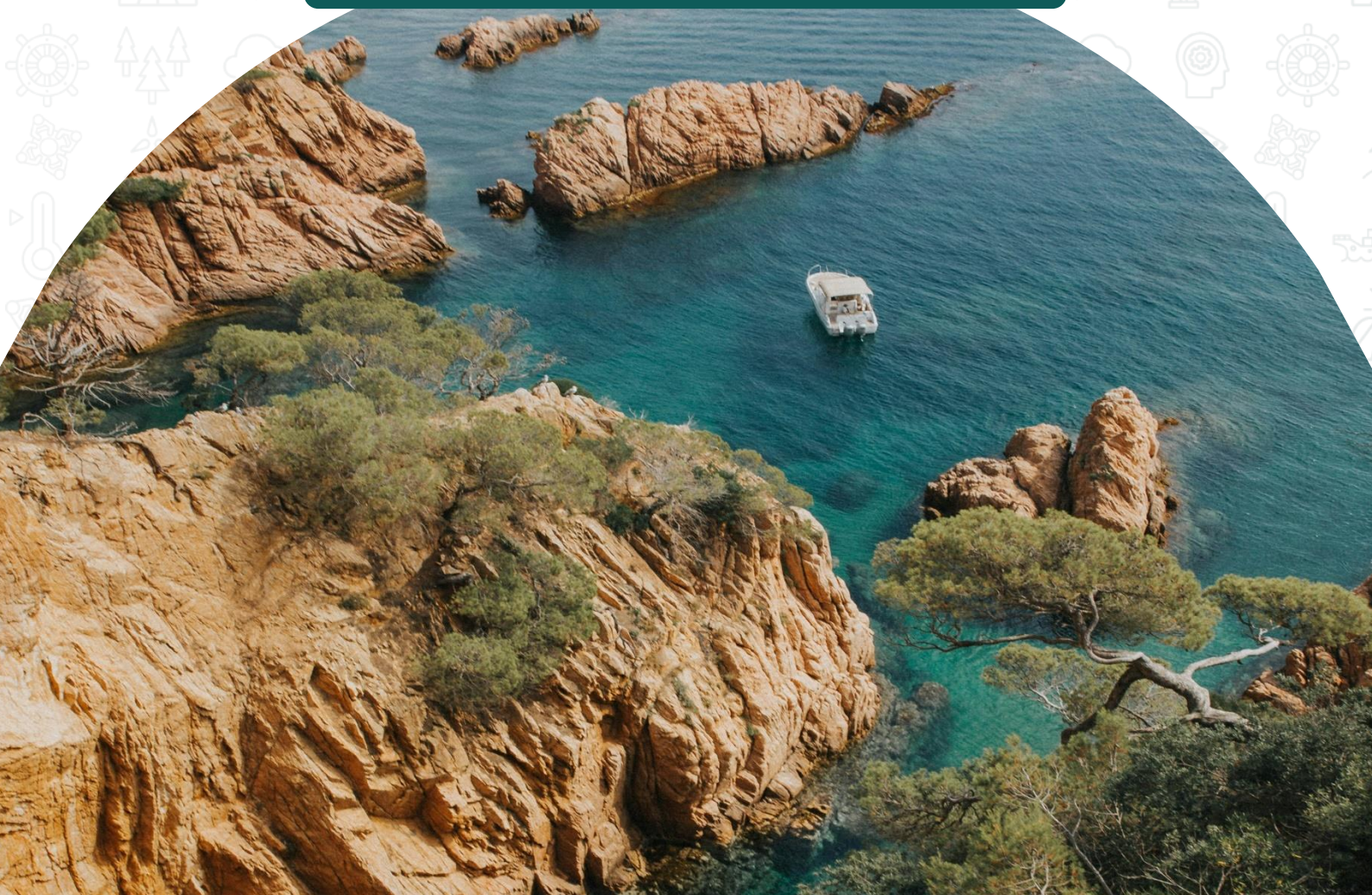


# Mediterranean Case Study

CROSSGOV

**SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY RESULTS**





Written by

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## 1 A three-year Mission Ocean Project

**CrossGov** is a three-year Mission Ocean Horizon Europe project working on enhancing coherence and cross-compliance of marine related policies. Particular focus is on the realisation of the European Green Deal's goals for the protection of marine ecosystems and biodiversity, zero pollution, as well as nature-based climate adaptation and mitigation.

The project is implemented through eight case studies, one of which is the Mediterranean Sea case study, which is focusing on the **coherence between fisheries, biodiversity, and climate change policies in an international context**. This case study has been conducted using document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

## 2 A complex policy context

The marine policy landscape of the Mediterranean is complex, due to the interplay between the European Union (EU), Mediterranean, and international-level policies, which bring with them a wide variety of different actors.

While the CrossGov project mainly focuses on the European Green Deal policies, it is recognised that these are only relevant for a minority of the Mediterranean countries and the scope of the case study has been broadened to cover also Mediterranean-scale policies. Therefore, this case study focused on the following institutions and their policies (Figure 1):



### European Union

European Green Deal (EGD), Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (BDS), Marine Action Plan, Habitats and Birds Directives (Nature Directives), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), EU Climate Law



### Barcelona Convention

(UNEP/MAP - United Nation's Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan ) – Post-2020 Strategic Action Plan on Biodiversity (SAPBIO), Specially Protected Areas/Biodiversity Protocol (SPA/BD) and its Action Plans, Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP)



### General Fisheries Commission for Mediterranean and Black Seas (GFCM) –

Decisions, GFCM Strategy 2030



### International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

Decisions





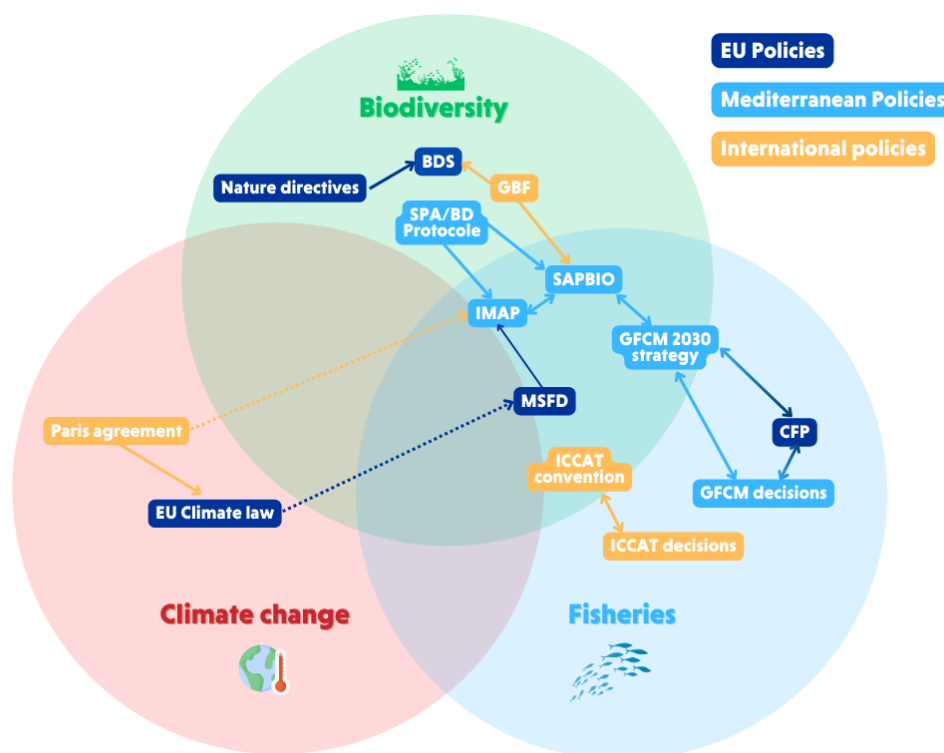


Figure 1: Overview of the marine policies studied within the Mediterranean context, the connections between them and their positioning between the three main policy fields studied. The blue boxes refer to EU policies, green boxes to Mediterranean policies, and yellow ones to larger international policies

### Policy alignment

Therefore in terms of alignments of Mediterranean policies with global and European Green Deal objectives, the focus of this case study is on how 2030 **biodiversity targets** (such as 30:30<sup>1</sup>) and **climate change targets** (Paris Agreement and EU Climate Law) are represented within the Mediterranean region and to what extent they are integrated into Mediterranean **fisheries policies** (under EU Common Fisheries Policy, GFCM, and ICCAT).

### Biodiversity targets

In terms of **biodiversity targets**, Barcelona Convention's post-2020 SAPBIO is the overarching biodiversity framework aligning the Barcelona Convention system with the Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Biodiversity. This alignment extends to the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and so also the European Green Deal (Figure 1). Both Barcelona Convention and the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs – GFCM and ICCAT) are committed to 30:30 targets.

However, the 10% strict protection target from the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 has not been adopted at the Mediterranean level.

Going further, the Mediterranean biodiversity policies are integrated with the main overarching fisheries policy, which is GFCM 2030 Strategy. This strategy mentions only global level policies explicitly, but it is clear that its elaboration was done in close cooperation with the SAPBIO: post-2020 SAPBIO and GFCM 2030 Strategy are aligned in their objectives and timelines, as well as their assessment deadlines, even if assessments are performed separately. UNEP/Map, as Barcelona Convention's Secretariat, has a signed Memorandum of Understanding with GFCM, which is the basis for their cooperation. Both GFCM and ICCAT,

<sup>1</sup> 30% of all seas protected by 2030 under marine protected areas or other effective conservation measures (Global Biodiversity Framework, High Seas Treaty)

as the other relevant RFMO, also work with temporal and spatial fishery closures, with particularly GFCM working on a variety of Fishery Restricted Areas<sup>2</sup>, some of which are also being considered to be recognised as Other Effective Conservation Measures<sup>3</sup> and so contribute to 30:30 targets.

### Climate change

On the other hand, **climate change** does not yet have a dedicated overarching policy at the level of the Mediterranean. UNEP/MAP is actively mainstreaming climate change topics into their policies. Currently, climate change topics are dispersed among different Regional Activity Centres (RAC) of the Barcelona Convention, with Plan Bleu RAC currently hosting Mediterranean climate change assessment. By the end of 2025, a new RAC will be established just on climate change. At the same time, the Barcelona Convention's Ecosystem Approach and Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme, which mirror the EU's MSFD system are being revised, integrating climate change considerations. This partly also includes coordination with GFCM and possible inclusion of considerations of climate change impacts on fisheries.

On the fisheries side, GFCM is also starting to integrate climate change considerations, with the setting up of climate change expert groups to advise them. ICCAT already has a functioning climate change expert group. Therefore, while the global commitments, such as the Paris Agreement are binding for the Mediterranean states, this has not yet been translated into direct Mediterranean level policies, like the EGD's EU Climate Law.

## 3 Progress so far: Protected stocks & fruitful collaborations

GFCM actions have led to an impressive 31% decrease<sup>4</sup> in overexploited stocks across the Mediterranean in the last decade. GFCM has also established some new and in parts strongly protected Fishery Restricted Areas, which are in the process of being recognized as Other Effective Conservation Measures.

Barcelona Convention and GFCM have also already established fruitful collaboration, which was particularly well developed in the MedByCatch and Depredation projects (funded by the MAVA Foundation). Within these two projects, both institutions collaborated well and managed to prepare both new/updated species actions plans Barcelona Convention and fishery decisions in GFCM.

## 4 Challenges: Overexploited stocks, region complexity & funding

### Overfishing and policy integration

Despite, progress made in integrations of policies, collaborations, and ongoing work of mainstreaming climate change into the existing policies, challenges remain. More than 60% of Mediterranean fish stocks

<sup>2</sup> Fishery Restricted Area is a geographically defined area in which some specific fishing activities are temporarily or permanently banned or restricted in order to improve the exploitation patterns and conservation of specific stocks as well as of habitats and deep-sea ecosystems.

<sup>3</sup> Other Effective Conservation Measures are areas that are achieving the long term and effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas.

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2023) The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries. FAO, Rome.



remain overexploited and only 50% of commercially exploited fish stocks have the assessments available. In terms of spatial protection, less than 10% of the whole Mediterranean Sea is currently protected (most of this in the northern Mediterranean), with estimates that 1-3% of Mediterranean Sea can be considered actually protected, and only about 0.1% currently enjoying strict protection. Additionally, the fact that the climate change policy is only now being developed, indicates that the progress is delayed already.

Moreover, while the high level policies have been meaningfully integrated and made coherent with one another (e.g., SAP BIO and GFCM Strategy 2030) and there is active engagement of RFMOs in global biodiversity frameworks, this integration starts unravelling when one moves to more specific implementation steps. It has been pointed out that some of the vulnerable species that have been listed as protected under the Barcelona Convention and that have agreed Action Plans since 2012, or that are listed on Annexes of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, have not yet been given the same statuses under GFCM Decisions and in fact some are still targeted and sold openly on fish markets. A policy analysis of the integration of biodiversity commitments into fishery management plans through GFCM Decisions has shown the same patterns (cetaceans and most of birds and reptiles are covered in GFCM Decisions, but only a minority of fish, arthropods, cnidarians, molluscs, echinoderms and plants are covered, and none of the *Porifera*, *Bryozoa*, *Chlorophyta*, *Rhodophyta*, and *Heterokontophyta*, Figure 2).

### A complex region

Implementation of policies in the Mediterranean is challenging, due to the complexity of the region. The implementation of policies is in the national hands and there is limited influence of international organisations over national implementation patterns. Outside of the EU waters or management of tunas (ICCAT), the enforcement mechanisms are scarce. Therefore, numerous interviews pointed out that the Mediterranean functions based on cooperation, communication, and collaboration. There are numerous cases of best practices of such collaborations being very successful and could be further upscaled. Therefore, while this complexity and the need to establish such cooperations can be seen as hindering the policy implementation, others claim that the strength of the Mediterranean and its institutions is in this way of working.

### A funding issue

Last, but not least, funding and resource allocation are arguably the main challenges at the Mediterranean level. The funding issue goes beyond the lacking funds for Mediterranean-level institutions to the fact that experts from the Mediterranean south and east have less opportunities for engaging in international projects and exchanging knowledge and skills than experts from the Mediterranean north. Given the chronic and often severe lack of funding, a considerable part of the implementation is done through project work, which is supported either by the EU, World Bank, Global Environment Facility, international foundations (e.g., Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund, MAVA Foundation), national development agencies, or philanthropists. The funding challenge has also been attributed to lacking finances for the policy instruments underneath the overarching policies and the limiting of their effectiveness, follow up, and support that can be offered to the states, that are often struggling themselves with other development issues.



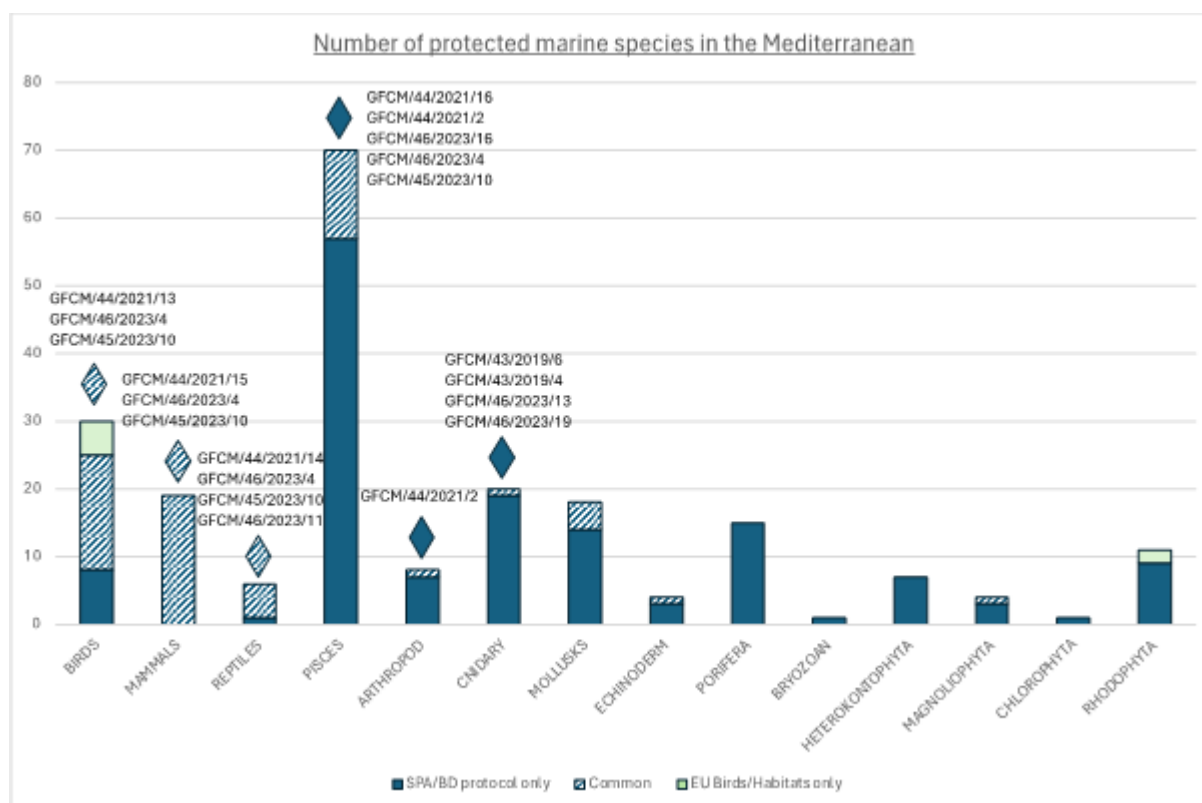


Figure 2: Representation of the number of species protected within the SPA/BD Protocol only (blue), Natura 2000 areas under Habitats and Bird Directives (green)<sup>5</sup>, or covered by both (dashed blue) as well as GFCM Decisions corresponding to a given fauna or flora category (diamonds)

## Policy coherence

On the topic of policy coherence, the main challenge seems to be the persistence of sectoral silos. This is evident from the highest levels, since collaborations between European Commission's DG ENV and DG MARE are not fully integrated when it comes to fishery management, with officials in both DGs sometimes arguing for different approaches. While the EU is the contracting party to the Barcelona Convention, ICCAT, and GFCM, represented by the European Commission, the unaligned positions can present an issue. This split continues to national administrations with highly segregated biodiversity and fisheries authorities, often in conflict with each other and stuttered communication between them. While Barcelona Convention representatives make a point of attending GFCM meetings, and numerous environmental and conservation non-governmental organisations and marine protected area managers are also present in those meetings and those of relevant fishery advisory council (e.g., MEDAC – Mediterranean Advisory Council), the more environmental/conservation-oriented decisions still often fail to get support at the GFCM level. These silos then result in the situation when one ministry agrees the protection of species, but their fishery counterpart is either unaware or opposed to the passing of relevant fishery measures to manage them, which is where coherence disintegrates.

This can be linked to the lack of political will as a root cause. Funding allocations, adoptions of more biodiversity-friendly GFCM Decisions, and further protected area designations are all dependent on sufficient political will.

<sup>5</sup> A note that the Figure only considers species for which a designation of a Natura 2000 area is required (i.e., species listed in the Directives' Annexes), but Birds Directive protects all naturally occurring bird species in the EU.



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