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# FAO: Overfishing at 10-year low in Mediterranean and Black Sea

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## Milestone underscores aquaculture's growing importance, report says

Overfishing in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea has reached the lowest level in a decade, though sustainability concerns remain, according to the latest report released by the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

### The 2025 State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries report

(<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/09ce190a-c96b-47ad-a783-ab29f778d1bb>), based on contributions from more than 700 experts, finds that coordinated, science-based management has cut fishing pressure by half over the past 10 years and that several key stocks are beginning to recover.

The report also highlights the growing importance of aquaculture. Marine and brackish aquaculture accounted for more than 45 percent of aquatic food production in 2023, reaching 940,000 tons. Across the sector, fisheries and aquaculture produced 2.06 million tons of aquatic foods in 2023, generated \$21.5 billion and supported 1.17 million jobs.



Overfishing in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea has reached the lowest level in a decade, though sustainability concerns remain, according to the latest report released by the FAO. Photo courtesy of FAO.

“Stocks are not yet where we would like them to be, but they are beginning to recover thanks to science-driven management action and strong stakeholder engagement, while aquaculture, if done responsibly, is proving it can help meet future demand for aquatic foods,” said Manuel Barange, FAO’s Assistant Director-General and Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture. “Maintaining these efforts will be crucial to conserve ecosystems, strengthen livelihoods and ensure the region’s food security through what we call a Blue Transformation.”



(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

Produced every two years, the report draws on official data from member countries and the latest stock assessments, serving as a key reference for policymakers tracking trends across fleets, farms and ecosystems. The report examined 120 stocks, and found that fishing mortality declined sharply from

2013 to 2023, while biomass increased by 25 percent. Several commercial species show marked improvement: red mullet and giant red shrimp have seen reductions in fishing pressure, and stocks under targeted management plans have recovered more quickly.

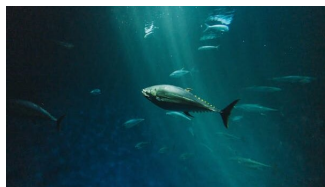
In the Adriatic, common sole recorded a 42 percent drop in fishing mortality and a 64 percent rise in biomass since 2019. In the Black Sea, turbot saw an 86 percent reduction in fishing mortality and a 310 percent increase in biomass since 2013.

But progress remains uneven. Sardine stocks continue to show biomass depletion after years of overexploitation, and European hake displays only modest gains despite a 38 percent drop in fishing mortality since 2015.

These shifts follow a decade of increased regulatory activity by members of the GFCM. Since 2013, they have adopted 11 management plans, established 11 fisheries restricted areas and launched 18 research programs and pilot studies to inform decision-making.

“These results build on regional commitments such as the MedFish4Ever and the Sofia Declarations, and reflect countries’ strong commitment to sustainability,” said Milena Mihaylova, Head of Unit for Fisheries Management in the Mediterranean and Black Sea at the European Commission. “But we cannot assume the work is done. Greater collaboration and continuous action are still needed to ensure long-term sustainability, also at the social and economic levels.”

## FAO: 64.5% of global stocks are sustainably fished, but overfishing persists without management



FAO’s most detailed fishery review shows 64.5 percent of stocks are fished sustainably, but regional gaps and overfishing trends persist.



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Despite recent gains, 52 percent of assessed stocks remain overfished – down from 87 percent a decade ago but still above sustainable levels. The region also faces ongoing challenges, including strengthening compliance with management measures, addressing an aging workforce and uneven profitability and reducing discards and incidental catches of vulnerable species, particularly in identified hot spots.

This edition of the report provides the most detailed look yet at regional aquaculture, which continues to expand rapidly. Including freshwater production, aquaculture generates \$9.3 billion and produces nearly 3 million tonnes of aquatic food. Marine and brackish aquaculture alone is worth \$5.2 billion and employs 113,000 people.

Production is highly concentrated: just 11 species account for 99 percent of output, led by gilthead seabream and European seabass. Eight countries produce over 95 percent of the region’s farmed aquatic food, with Türkiye, Egypt and Greece leading. Aquaculture is now the region’s fastest-growing

source of aquatic food and an increasingly important pillar of food security and coastal economies.

“As aquaculture continues to grow, a coordinated approach is essential to ensure that the sector remains sustainable, productive, competitive and profitable,” said Ahmet Seremed, chairman of the Board of the Central Union of Aquaculture Producers in Türkiye. “At the same time, it should preserve ecological services, ensure animal welfare and contribute to inclusive socioeconomic development in coastal communities.”

The sector still faces major hurdles – reducing environmental impacts, bolstering animal health and biosecurity and navigating fragmented regulations while maintaining public support. Yet demand for aquatic foods in the region is expected to rise as populations grow and consumer preferences shift. To sustain current per capita consumption levels, production would need to increase by an estimated 14 to 29 percent by 2050.

“Aquatic foods, fishers and fish farmers have always played a key role in the region’s coastal communities,” said Miguel Bernal, Executive Secretary of the GFCM. “We need to make sure they continue to do so in the future, through cooperation and effective management.”

**Read the full report (<https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/09ce190a-c96b-47ad-a783-ab29f778d1bb>).**

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