

## Mediterranean swordfish recovery plan

Mediterranean swordfish, overfished for decades, is subject to a multiannual recovery plan aimed at rebuilding the stock, adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), which is responsible for its management. The European Parliament is currently considering the Commission's proposal on the transposition of this plan into EU law.

### Background

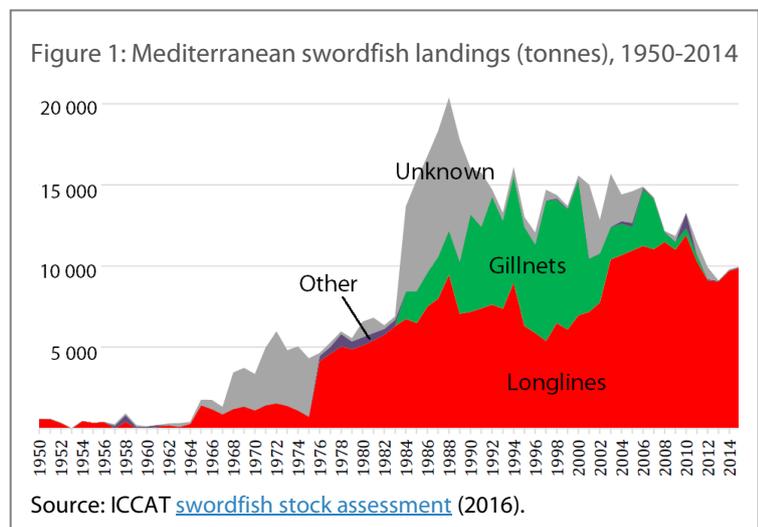
The EU is a contracting party to numerous regional fisheries management organisations, established at international level to decide on common management of fish resources in a specific area. Among these, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), active since 1969, is responsible for the conservation of tunas and tuna-like species in the Atlantic Ocean and its adjacent seas. Recommendations adopted by ICCAT are binding on its (currently) 52 contracting parties, and the EU, a member since 1997, must transpose these measures so that they become mandatory for EU vessels. Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) in the Mediterranean is one of the stocks managed by ICCAT.

### Mediterranean swordfish fisheries

Swordfish fishing, carried out in the Mediterranean since Roman times, is to this day a significant activity across the basin. The total reported [landings](#) increased from 1965 to 1988, reaching a peak of 20 365 tonnes (Figure 1). They have subsequently declined, but have stabilised since 2012 at around 10 000 tonnes. These levels are relatively high, and comparable to those of much larger areas, such as the North Atlantic. In recent years, longlines have been the main fishing gear used. Gillnets, which provided significant landings in the 1990s, have been officially eliminated since 2012, following the ICCAT recommendation for a general [ban of driftnets](#) for large pelagic species in the Mediterranean. Swordfish is also caught with harpoons and traps. In addition, it is often taken as by-catch in other fisheries, in particular albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*).

ICCAT [assessments](#) indicate that the Mediterranean swordfish stock has been overfished since the mid-1980s, and is still subject to overfishing. They also note the high proportion of immature swordfish in catches and the negative impact of this on the future state of the stock. Since 2008, ICCAT has introduced a series of conservation [measures](#), such as seasonal closures, a minimum catching size, a list of authorised vessels and requirements for the technical characteristics of longlines.

An important ICCAT management initiative was the adoption, in 2016, of a 15-year [recovery plan](#) aimed at rebuilding the stock, and reaching a biomass corresponding to the maximum sustainable yield by 2031. The plan introduced a system of total allowable catches (TAC), making swordfish only the second stock regulated by TACs in the Mediterranean, after bluefin tuna. In addition, the plan limited the number of vessels authorised to fish for swordfish by gear type, and expanded the previous technical measures, e.g. by increasing the minimum catching size and introducing a seasonal closure of the albacore fishery to reduce by-catches of immature swordfish. Measures for managing and controlling recreational fisheries were also included. Moreover, the plan established a wide range of control measures, in particular on recording of vessels fishing for Mediterranean swordfish, the use of designated ports, recording and communication of catches, inspection of vessels, data collection and deployment of scientific observers.



The EU plays a major role in Mediterranean swordfish fisheries, with more than 70 % of the total catches. The Member States involved are Italy, Spain and Greece, which together account for over 90 % of the EU quota, with the remainder going to Malta, France, Cyprus and Croatia (Figure 2). The Mediterranean [swordfish fishing sector](#) in the EU is largely artisanal: vessels under 10 metres in length, operating essentially in coastal waters and landing their catches in local ports, represent up to three quarters of the EU swordfish fleet. Other countries also exploit the stock, in particular Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Turkey.

## Commission proposal

On 24 April 2018, the Commission put forward a [proposal](#) for the transposition of the ICCAT multiannual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish. Part of the plan was already integrated in EU legislation at an earlier stage, as regards the allocation of quotas and the closure of swordfish fisheries from January to March, through the annual Council regulations establishing EU fishing opportunities ([2017/1398](#) and [2018/120](#)). The Commission also adopted delegated regulation [2018/191](#) providing for a derogation from the landing obligation, to allow discarding of swordfish as required by the ICCAT plan. The proposal provides for a derogation to Article 2 of the Basic

Regulation [1380/2013](#), which requires that the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate be achieved at the latest by 2020, and aims for a biomass corresponding to the maximum sustainable yield by 2031, in agreement with the ICCAT plan and the scientific advice underpinning it. The proposal amends the Mediterranean Regulation [1967/2006](#) and Regulation [2017/2107](#), so as to introduce certain more restrictive measures (e.g. on the maximum number of hooks and the minimum catching size).

While essentially transposing the provisions of the ICCAT plan, the proposed regulation is more ambitious in several aspects. Of particular importance are the increased observer coverage, intended to improve data collection, especially on discards and landings, and the reinforced control system, requiring in particular that all vessels of more than 12 metres in length use the vessel monitoring system (VMS). The proposal also requires the specific authorisation of all vessels fishing Mediterranean swordfish, and prohibits the chartering of EU fishing vessels for catching this species.

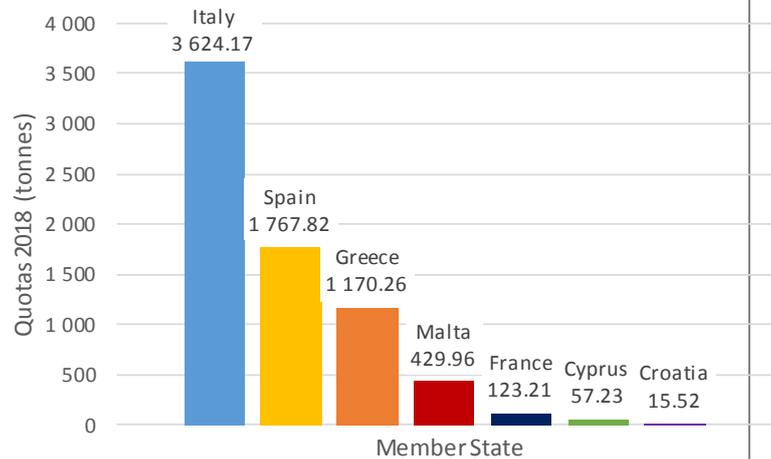
The Commission requests the power to adopt delegated acts on specific points of the plan, in order to swiftly implement future ICCAT amendments to the current recommendations.

## European Parliament position

In the [draft report](#), published on 3 September 2018, the rapporteur Marco Affronte highlights the urgency of adopting the recovery plan, given the critical situation of the stock. He supports the higher standards for data collection and control introduced by the proposal, and tables an amendment for better monitoring of vessels under 12 m in length. The rapporteur advocates a fair distribution of quotas among the different fleet segments, giving consideration to traditional and artisanal fishing, and avoiding monopolisation of fishing opportunities in the case of a quota increase. He also encourages the use of [circle hooks](#), considered to reduce by-catch of sensitive species, such as sea turtles. The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted an [opinion](#) on 23 July 2018. The PECH committee is due to vote on the draft report on 21 November 2018.

Parliament's Committee on Fisheries (PECH) is responsible for considering this proposal, with Marco Affronte (Greens/EFA, Italy) as rapporteur (procedure [2018/0109\(COD\)](#)).

Figure 2: EU quotas for Mediterranean swordfish, 2018



Data source: Council Regulation [2018/120](#).

