

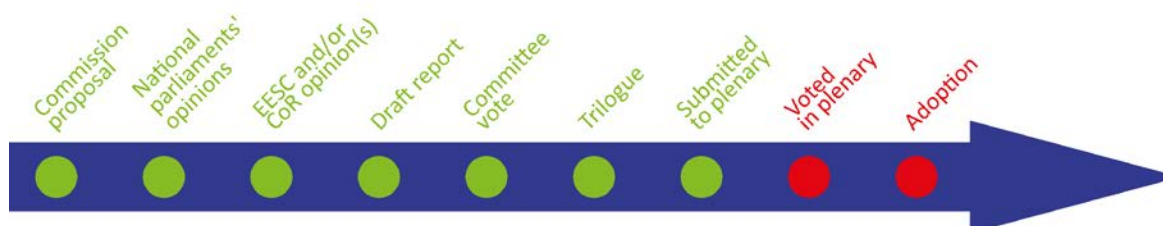
Multiannual plan for demersal fisheries in the western Mediterranean

OVERVIEW

During the April I session, Parliament is due to vote on giving formal approval to a multiannual plan for the western Mediterranean fisheries exploiting several stocks of fish and crustaceans living close to the sea bottom (i.e. 'demersal fisheries'). Most of these stocks have long been overfished and are now in an alarming state. The proposed plan aims to reverse this trend and ensure that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable, and capable of securing economic and social benefits. The plan concerns fishing fleets from Italy, Spain and France, totalling almost 10 900 vessels.

The new regulation will introduce a fishing-effort regime for all trawlers operating in the region, under which the Council will set each year, on the basis of scientific advice, the maximum number of fishing days for each fleet category by Member State. In addition, the plan will restrict trawlers from operating in waters shallower than 100 m located within 6 nautical miles of the coast, for three months per year, to reserve the coastal zone for more selective fishing gear. The plan will also establish regional cooperation among the Member States concerned, with a view to developing provisions on the obligation to land all catches and on the conservation of resources through technical measures.

Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a multi-annual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea		
<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Fisheries (PECH)	COM(2018) 115 8.3.2018
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D, Spain)	2018/0050(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Carlos Iturzaiz (EPP, Spain) Ruža Tomašić (ECR, Croatia) Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE, Spain) João Ferreira (GUE/NGL, Portugal) Marco Affronte (Greens/EFA, Italy) Rosa D'Amato (EFDD, Italy)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	First-reading vote in plenary	



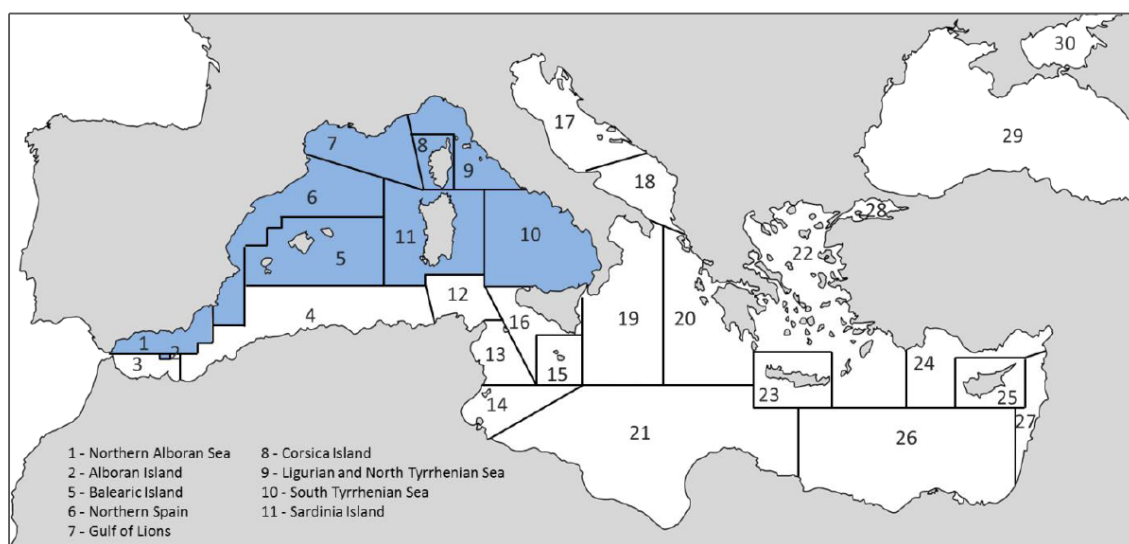
Introduction

Under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), multiannual plans form the framework for management of fish stocks by fishery and sea basin. First introduced in 2002 with a view to developing a long-term approach to fisheries management, multiannual plans became a priority for all EU waters after the 2013 reform, under the current CFP Basic Regulation [1380/2013](#). The overall objective of this new generation of plans is to restore and maintain fish stocks above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), i.e. the highest amount of fish that can be taken from a stock without affecting its reproduction. The Basic Regulation also defines the content of the plans, which must include quantifiable targets (such as fishing mortality rates and spawning stock biomass), and safeguards to ensure that quantifiable targets are met. In addition, it introduces a regional approach taking into account the specific features of each sea basin.

On 8 March 2018, the European Commission proposed a multiannual [plan](#) for fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean. This is part of a series of multiannual fisheries management plans proposed under the CFP as reformed in 2013, which also includes the plans for cod, herring and sprat fisheries in the [Baltic Sea](#), for demersal fisheries in the [North Sea](#) and for demersal fisheries in the [Western Waters](#) (adopted in July 2016, July 2018 and March 2019 respectively), and for small pelagic fisheries in the [Adriatic Sea](#) (currently under discussion by the Parliament and Council).

The proposal covers the western Mediterranean waters across the northern Alboran Sea, the Gulf of Lions and the Tyrrhenian Sea, including the Balearic Islands, Corsica and Sardinia (Figure 1). Demersal fisheries represent a significant part of the sector in this region: according to [2015 data](#), the fishing fleet concerned by the proposal consists of almost 10 900 vessels from Italy (50 % of the total), Spain (39 %) and France (11 %). The total landings of these vessels for the same year reached around 100 000 tonnes of demersal fish and were worth an estimated €675 million.

Figure 1 – Western Mediterranean waters covered by the proposed multiannual plan

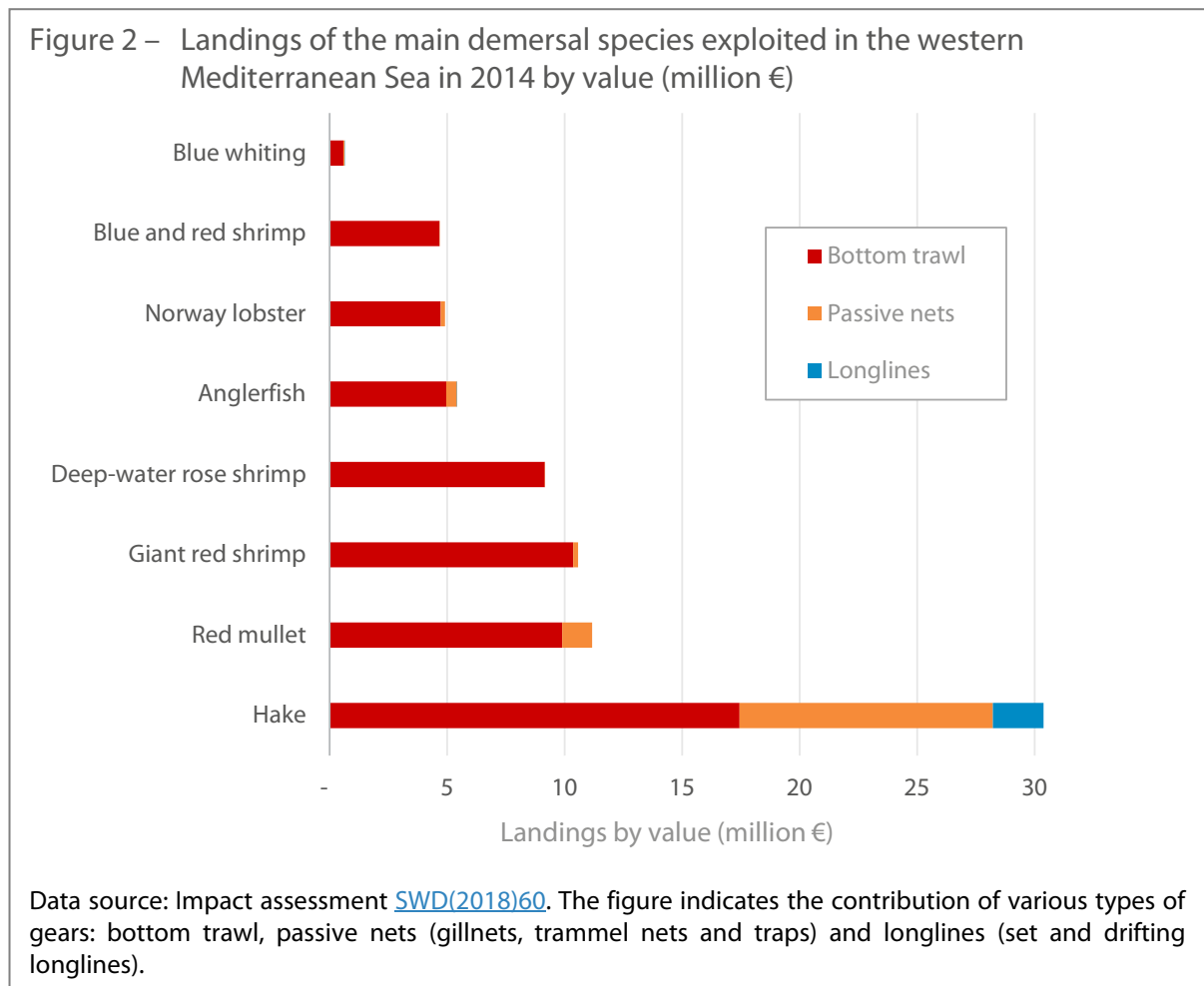


Source: Impact assessment [SWD\(2018\) 60](#). For the purpose of the proposal, the 'western Mediterranean Sea' covers geographical sub-areas (GSA) 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11, as established by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), which are indicated in blue on this map.

Existing situation

Main fisheries

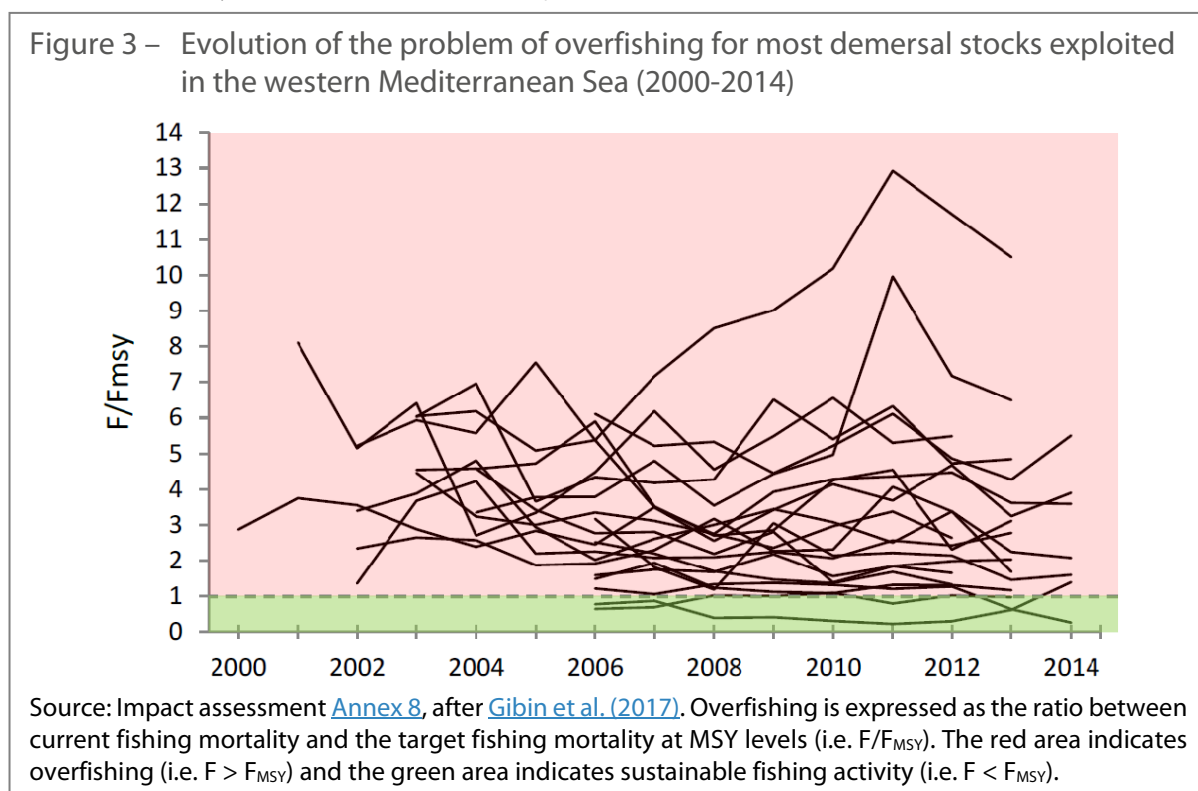
Demersal fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea are highly complex and target a large number of species. The main demersal species caught in this area are hake (*Merluccius merluccius*), red mullet (*Mullus barbatus*), anglerfish (*Lophius* spp.), blue whiting (*Micromesistius poutassou*), giant red shrimp (*Aristaeomorpha foliacea*), deep-water rose shrimp (*Parapenaeus longirostris*), Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*) and blue and red shrimp (*Aristeus antennatus*) (see landing values in Figure 2).



Demersal fisheries use various fishing gears, but bottom trawl is by far the most important one in terms of catches and fleet power. Bottom trawlers operate mainly in areas with a wide continental shelf (such as in the Gulf of Lion, between northern Corsica and Italy, and along the Spanish coast of Valencia and Castellón), and on the continental slope. Passive nets produce significant catches in particular for demersal fish species (hake, red mullet, anglerfish, blue whiting). The main part of longlines catches consists of hake (Figure 2).

Most demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean are in an alarming state. Over 80 % of the stocks assessed are overfished, and the biomass of some of them is very low, indicating that there is a high probability of collapse. The ratio between current fishing mortality and target fishing mortality at MSY levels (i.e. F/F_{MSY}) is considered indicative of the magnitude of the problem. For some of the species assessed, the current level of exploitation is several times higher than the estimated MSY targets: up to ten times for anglerfish, up to five times for hake and up to four times for red mullet. These high levels of overfishing have been observed since 2000, when scientific advice started to be delivered on a regular basis. The evolution of the F/F_{MSY} overfishing indicator for most demersal

stocks in the western Mediterranean shows that the large majority of stocks have been continuously exploited well beyond sustainable levels (Figure 3).¹



Fisheries management

The EU legal framework for fisheries management in the Mediterranean Sea is the 'Mediterranean Regulation' [1967/2006](#). Under this regulation Member States are required to adopt national management plans for certain fisheries (but not for those using passive nets and longlines). Currently, demersal fisheries in the western Mediterranean are covered by the national plans for trawlers adopted by [Italy](#) (2011), [Spain](#) (2012) and [France](#) (2013). These plans limit the fishing effort, which is the traditional way of managing fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea. They typically include measures, such as restrictions on fishing gears, on the number of fishing authorisations and licences, and on the number of fishing days.

In addition, the EU adopted a three-year [discard plan](#) in 2016, which it [amended](#) a year later, to implement the landing obligation as established in the CFP Basic Regulation, for certain demersal fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea, including hake, red mullet and Norway lobster in the western Mediterranean.

This framework is complemented by international-level measures adopted by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the regional fisheries management organisation in charge of this area, established under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). For the western Mediterranean, the GFCM adopted a binding [recommendation](#) in 2009 for a fisheries restricted area in the Gulf of Lion, to protect spawning aggregations, particularly for hake and deep sea sensitive habitats.

Preparation of the proposal

The European Commission developed the current proposal against the backdrop of a renewed commitment to restore Mediterranean fisheries, following a high-level seminar held in Catania in February 2016, which came to be known as the 'Catania process'. The process culminated with the signing of the March 2017 [Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration](#) on the sustainability of the

Mediterranean fisheries, which laid down a new strategic framework for fisheries governance in the region.

The proposal is based on wide scientific expertise. In 2015 and 2016, the Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) organised two expert working groups, tasked with producing a biological assessment of the policy options and giving advice on various aspects of the multiannual plan. The STECF and the Scientific Advisory Committee of the GFCM provided regular assessments of the state of the demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean. The STECF also produced an analysis of the management plans adopted by the Member States under the Mediterranean Regulation.² In 2017, the Commission analysed the potential socio-economic impact of the future proposal. The European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture (EUMOFA) provided data on market dynamics in the western Mediterranean. In addition, an independent study carried out a retrospective evaluation of the Mediterranean Regulation.

The Commission carried out stakeholder consultations in 2016-2017, mainly within the relevant advisory council and through a public consultation.

- The Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC) represents all stakeholders concerned by the proposal – the fisheries sector, trade unions, environmental organisations, consumer groups and sports/recreational fishing associations. After four meetings dedicated to the future multiannual plan, which involved representatives of the Commission, the European Fisheries Control Agency, the national administrations and the scientific community, MEDAC adopted its [opinion](#) in November 2017. The opinion recommends, among other things, using fishing-effort limits in accordance with scientific advice, and extending the bottom-trawls ban (currently prohibiting their use in waters shallower than 50 metres), to increase the protection of coastal habitats.
- The Commission also held an internet-based [public consultation](#) on the plan between 30 May and 30 September 2016. Most respondents regarded an EU multiannual plan for the western Mediterranean as the best long-term solution. Nearly all supported the combination of a fishing-effort regime with technical conservation measures as the best management tool in the area. The consultation also proposed alternative measures, such as setting catch limits (total allowable catches, or TACs). This measure was supported by environmental organisations and some citizens, but not by fishermen's associations or public administrations, due to concerns over the complexity of applying it in multispecies fisheries.

The Commission also prepared an [impact assessment](#) in support of the proposed multiannual plan. The assessment identifies two major problems affecting demersal fisheries in the western Mediterranean. These involved, on the one hand, high levels of overfishing, resulting mainly from excessive use of fishing capacity, and on the other hand, an ineffective regulatory framework with a limited scope of application, slow and poor implementation, as well as a lack of stakeholder ownership. The impact assessment recommends adopting an EU multiannual plan over the alternative options of maintaining the status quo, and amending the existing framework of the national plans. The main reasons for this choice include a higher probability of attaining sustainable fish stocks, improved socio-economic performance of the fleets involved by 2025, and a fisheries-management system that would ensure a single regulatory framework across the area, a long-term perspective and more transparency between the Member States involved.³

The changes the proposal would bring

The proposed multiannual plan is intended to address the main problems identified during the preparatory phase, with a view to ensuring that fishing activities are environmentally sustainable and capable of securing economic and social benefits. It is also expected to facilitate the implementation of the landing obligation and enable a regionalised approach, by involving the Member States concerned in the design of management measures.

The proposal applies to commercial and recreational fisheries exploiting demersal stocks of six fish and crustacean species: hake, red mullet, deep-water rose shrimp, Norway lobster, blue and red shrimp, and giant red shrimp. It also applies to by-catches taken when fishing for the above stocks, and to other demersal stocks for which the data available are not sufficient to assess their state. However, several species driving significant demersal fisheries in the area, assessed as overfished and identified by the impact assessment as within the scope of the multiannual plan option, are not included in the proposal: the anglerfish (Figure 2), the striped red mullet (*Mullus surmuletus*), the common sole (*Solea vulgaris*), the gilt-head seabream (*Sparus aurata*) and the European seabass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*).

The main elements of the proposal include:

- introducing a fishing-effort regime at EU level for all trawlers operating in the region. Each year, on the basis of scientific advice, the Council would decide upon the maximum number of fishing days, also referred to as allowable fishing effort, for each fleet category by Member State. However, the proposal indicates that if scientific advice shows that the fishing-effort regime is not sufficient to meet its objectives, the Council would adopt complementary measures based on total allowable catches (TAC);
- reducing fishing activities significantly in the first year of the plan in line with scientific advice, given the worrying situation of most demersal stocks;
- restricting trawlers from operating above a 100-metre water depth, from 1 May to 31 July each year, to reserve the coastal zone for more selective gears – a measure that would protect nursery areas and sensitive habitats, and enhance the social sustainability of small-scale fisheries. Additional closure areas are promoted with the aim of protecting high concentrations of juvenile fish and spawning grounds.
- establishing a regional cooperation framework among France, Italy and Spain, under which they may put forward provisions for the landing obligation and technical conservation measures.

Advisory committees

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an [opinion](#) on the proposal on 11 July 2018 (rapporteur: Gabriel Sarró Iparraguirre, Diversity Europe – Group III, Spain). The EESC supports the adoption of a multiannual plan that includes measures capable of reversing the overfishing of most stocks of demersal species. The Committee considers the use of a fishing effort regime to be appropriate, and welcomes the possibility of introducing a catch limit (TAC) system in the event of failure of management by effort. It also considers that the plan should aim to secure sustainable fisheries from an environmental, social and economic point of view, and that the measures adopted must be proportionate, so that the socio-economic impact is manageable and viable for Mediterranean fishermen. The EESC recommends including EMFF support measures to offset the fishermen's losses from reduced fishing effort, to broaden support for temporary cessation of fishing activities and to reconsider support for permanent cessation. The Committee opposes the 3-month prohibition on the use of trawlers at less than 100 m water depth, which it considers disproportionate and unjustified.

National parliaments

[Scrutiny](#) of the proposal by the national parliaments is in progress, although since the legal basis ensures exclusive EU competence, objections on grounds of subsidiarity are not possible.

Legislative process

The Commission presented the proposal to the Council on 19 March 2018. According to the Council [press release](#), the Member States' delegations welcomed the proposal, with some of them asking

the Commission to consider the specific features of the sea basin in question, and others to guarantee a certain continuity with the measures already undertaken at national or regional level.

On 31 March 2018, the PECH committee held a first exchange of views on the proposal. The rapporteur, Clara Eugenia Aguilera García (S&D, Spain), published her [draft report](#) on 19 July 2018, and on 19 September 2018 the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted a [position](#) in the form of amendments. A workshop to add information to the discussion took place during the PECH meeting on 22 November 2018. On 10 January 2019, the PECH committee adopted its [report](#) by 18 votes to 5 and 1 abstention, and approved the mandate to enter into interinstitutional negotiations. The later was subsequently confirmed during the January I plenary session.

After one trilogue meeting, on 4 February 2019, Parliament and Council reached a [provisional agreement](#), approved by the PECH committee on 19 February 2019 by 15 votes to 6 and 2 abstentions. Among other changes to the proposal, the agreed text redefines the deadline for achieving the target fishing mortality in line with the MSY, which should be reached by 2020 only 'where possible, and at the latest by 1 January 2025'. The agreement maintains Parliament's position on several points, largely intended to minimise the impact of the proposed measures on the fishing sector, in particular:

- It rejects the introduction of complementary management measures based on TACs, citing implementing difficulties and problems for the mixed fisheries concerned;
- It allows EMFF support to be granted for permanent cessation of fishing activities related to the implementation of the plan, by derogation to Article 34(4) of the EMFF Regulation 508/2014 which stopped such funding after 31 December 2017;
- It limits the proposed 'significant' reduction of fishing effort during the first year of application of the plan at 10 % of the maximum effort recorded during the baseline period of 1 January 2012 - 31 December 2017. The reduction does not apply to geographical sub-areas (GSA) where effort was already reduced by more than 20 % during the same period;
- It declines to empower the Commission to adopt delegated acts on specific technical conservation measures in the absence of a joint recommendation from the Member States concerned.

In addition, the 3-month prohibition on trawlers in waters shallower than 100 metres will apply only within 6 nautical miles of the coast, and the Member States may choose the months concerned.

The new regulation is due to be the subject of a vote of adoption by the Parliament during the April I part-session, and then referred to the Council for final adoption. It will enter into force on the 20th day after its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union.

EP SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

[Multi-annual plan for western Mediterranean demersal fisheries](#), Initial appraisal of a European Commission impact assessment, EPRS, European Parliament, June 2018.

OTHER SOURCES

[Multi-annual plan for the fisheries exploiting demersal stocks in the western Mediterranean Sea](#), European Parliament, Legislative Observatory (OEIL).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Impact assessment SWD(2018) 60, after [Gibin et al. \(2017\)](#).
- ² [STECF 49th plenary meeting report](#), pp. 76-115.
- ³ For an initial appraisal of the European Commission impact assessment, see [Multi-annual plan for western Mediterranean demersal fisheries](#), EPRS, European Parliament, June 2018.

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2019.

ep@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)



Second edition. The 'EU Legislation in Progress' briefings are updated at key stages throughout the legislative procedure.