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Within the framework of ENPI CBC Med programme : a Spanish  
Italian and Tunisian cooperation

Press release

## **The ECOSAFIMED project promotes sustainable and responsible practices in the fishing sector for the conservation of marine ecosystem**

- **After two years of scientific study, in close collaboration with fishermen, the main result of ECOSAFIMED is a set of guidelines for the artisanal fleet to improve the conservation of benthic communities in the Mediterranean.**
- **The work carried out as part of the project has also identified areas of high ecological value that, in the future, may be the focus of specific management to foster their special protection.**

**28<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.** The project "Towards Ecosystem Conservation and Sustainable Artisanal Fisheries in the Mediterranean Basin (ECOSAFIMED)", carried out in Spain, Italy and Tunisia, is aimed at conserving marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean basin and promoting artisanal fishing practices that are compatible with the protection of marine ecosystem. To this end, the state of the benthic communities in different parts of the Mediterranean has been assessed, while at the same time the impact of certain fishing *métiers* on the benthic communities has been looked into. The study has been undertaken in collaboration with fishermen, as well as various national and international organisations.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and the Environment, through the Biodiversity Foundation, has coordinated this initiative, which has involved other organisations such as the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)-Institute of Marine Sciences (ICM), the University of Genoa (Italy), and the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology (INSTM), in Tunisia. The collaboration between these entities has been crucial to the exchange of knowledge on marine research, both methodological and in the use of innovative technologies, one of the most significant results of the project.

Thanks to the ECOSAFIMED project a proposal of good practices has been drawn up for the artisanal fleet, to improve the conservation of the benthic communities in the



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Mediterranean. The project members have agreed on a series of basin-wide recommendations based on the results obtained in different study areas: Cap de Creus, Menorca channel (Spain), La Galite Archipelago, Esquerquis benches (Tunisia), Gulf of Patti and Ponza Archipelago (Italy).

These proposals have been agreed upon with local artisanal fishermen who took part in the project with the intention of signing agreements that commit them to adopting these best practices, both voluntarily and for the long term.

Throwing back discards of benthic invertebrates and habitat-forming species in less than 30 minutes, in the same place they were caught from, as well as avoiding damaging them as far as possible, is one of the recommendations of the project. Scientific studies have shown that the survival rates of benthic by-catch species increase if they are returned as soon as possible to the sea, reducing their exposure to the air and temperature changes.

The good practices also include a recommendation to avoid fishing in areas where fragile communities have been detected, promoting areas of fishing restrictions where the most valuable and sensitive ecosystems are located, or the use of more selective gear and more efficient net material, as experiments have shown that the type of gear used plays a very important role in the magnitude of the impact on the seabed.

Other measures to reduce the impact that fishing has on the benthic communities include encouraging the periodic maintenance of fishing nets, reducing the impact by decreasing the number of fishing operations carried out in a single location during a season, and decreasing the length of the fishing gear.

Yet, another recommendation that has come out from this initiative is to integrate the knowledge of the fishermen into scientific studies and monitoring activities. The experience gained by the fishermen during their years of working must be considered a fundamental source of information. Data on extraordinary catches, the occurrence of rare species, and the location of extensive populations of structural species, as well as any unusual details, can be of great help to the scientific community in improving the knowledge we have of the seabed, allowing the identification of areas with a high ecological value that can be considered for special protection.

Finally, another recommendation arising from the project is to film videos that, simply and directly, raise awareness about good practices in fisheries. Throughout this project we have been able to confirm that showing videos which clearly demonstrate the scientific basis of certain claims, such as the presence of lost fishing gear, the survival of discarded



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species, and the state of the organisms once thrown back into the sea, receive more attention from the public and get a more positive reaction than any type of graphic or technical report. The videos should be considered a priority communication tool and a key element when it comes to proposing recommendations to the fishermen.

The work carried out as part of the project has also identified areas of high ecological value that, in the future, may be the focus of specific management that fosters their special protection.

### **ECOSAFIMED AND THE ENPI CBC MED PROGRAMME**

With a budget of €1.9 million, the ECOSAFIMED project promotes responsible fishing practices and communication between researchers and the artisanal fishing sector, with the aim of helping to conserve marine ecosystems. The ultimate objective of the project is to produce a series of recommendations for managing the artisanal fisheries studied in the Mediterranean, to ensure their compatibility with good conservation practices for marine habitats.

The project also seeks to identify valuable areas to be proposed as Protected Marine Areas under the auspices of European Directives and/or the Barcelona Convention. ECOSAFIMED is one of the 39 projects to have received funding from the 1,095 projects presented at the second call for the 2007-2013 ENPI CBC MED Programme.

The ENPI Mediterranean Sea Programme is a cross-border co-operation initiative that forms part of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The programme's aim is to promote co-operation between regions on both shores of the Mediterranean, in order to tackle common challenges and assess endogenous potentials.

A total of 14 countries, representing 76 regions and close to 110 million inhabitants, have benefited from the programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, the Palestinian Authority, Portugal, Spain, Syria and Tunisia.

The programme has a budget of €200 million, funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, and the contribution to each project amounts to a maximum of 90 per cent of the total cost.

The projects funded deal with a range of issues relating to promoting socioeconomic and territorial development: supporting innovation and research; sustainable development and energy efficiency throughout the Mediterranean Sea Basin; improving conditions and the



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various forms of movement of persons, goods and capital; and promoting dialogue between cultures and forms of governance.

Information on the ECOSAFIMED project and the ENPI CBC MED Programme is available on the [ENPI CBC MED](#) and the [EuropeAid Office of Development and Cooperation](#) websites.

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Further information:

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