



## **Statement on proposed long-term measures for European eel in the Mediterranean Sea**

Since 2018, the GFCM has been on the forefront of European eel management and conservation, taking steps going further than those adopted by the European Union, but today we must express some disappointment with the proposed long-term measures, considering that European eel remains Critically Endangered and is not improving.

While we welcome the long-term management framework and the continuation of most of the current measures agreed last year, scientific advice of zero catch released by ICES on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 also shows that recruitment is down to 7.2% and that stock size is estimated to be well below any potential biological limit reference points, emphasising the need for stronger measures.

Even with the impressive work done by the GFCM Research Programme on European eel and the SAC endorsement, the proposed long-term measures do not include any targets for rebuilding the eel population, and there is no obligation to align the fishing closures with migratory patterns.

A majority of the CPCs have also been calling for a ban on glass eel fishing. At its twenty-fifth session, SAC supported a step-by-step approach to further protect eel recruitment and the proposed long-term measures do include a range of new provisions for glass eel. We welcome the limitations allowing only artisanal fisheries with passive gears and the requirement for traceability, but the gradual reduction in fishing mortality agreed last year has been replaced by a shorter fishing period and freezing the number of fishing gears. We believe more could have been done here to secure a future for this species.

We also welcome the possibility to establish closures areas including in freshwaters and transitional waters, and we hope that CPCs make further use of this possibility to protect European eel.

Finally, it is our view that close monitoring of the effectiveness of the management measures is of outmost importance. For the Expert Group on eel to meet only in 2029, when the long-term measures expire, is greatly insufficient and will not provide any opportunities to review progress on implementation or adjust measures that may be ineffective.

Distinguished delegates, it is our strong belief that the long-term measures to be agreed here, while making some progress, do not fully reflect scientific advice and are unlikely to secure eel recovery. We regret that this is the case.

If there is no measurable recovery in the next 5 years, emergency measures should be considered, including a moratorium of eel catches for all life stages for at least 3 years, as proposed by the GFCM eel research programme.