

**Report on the implementation of closed fishing seasons for Mediterranean swordfish in 2023
Submitted by the European Union (EU)**

1. INTRODUCTION

Paragraph 13 of Recommendation [16-05] establishing a multiannual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish provides that CPCs shall monitor the effectiveness of the closure periods set out in the Recommendation. CPCs shall submit to the Commission all relevant information on appropriate controls and inspections to ensure compliance with these measures.

The EU has notified the Commission by letter sent on 5 December 2017 (Ares(2017)5949414) of its intention to implement the closure period for Mediterranean swordfish from 1 January to 31 March. The closure period for Mediterranean Swordfish in 2023 was implemented through the Council Regulation (EU) 2022/194 of 30 January 2023 fixing for 2023 the fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks, applicable in Union waters and, for Union fishing vessels, in certain non-Union waters.

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTROL OF THE CLOSURE PERIOD

Regulation (EU) 2019/1154 of 20 June 2019 on a multiannual recovery plan for Mediterranean swordfish transposes recommendation [16-05] in EU law.

Working under the framework of the ICCAT Scheme of Joint International Inspection, the EU has currently in place a Specific Control and Inspection Programme (SCIP)¹ to monitor and enforce the implementation of the Bluefin tuna management plan and the Mediterranean swordfish recovery plan. This programme is a joint initiative bringing together the resources of the European Commission, the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), and the EU Member States involved in those fisheries. To coordinate the implementation of this Decision between EU Member States, EFCA adopts annually a joint deployment plan of inspection (JDP) in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. This Joint Deployment plan (JDP) brings the Specific Control and Inspection Programme into effect focusing its activity on controls at sea and on land.

In 2023, EU Member States implemented the closure by legal acts in accordance with their respective national law and by administrative means, with no fishing authorisations delivered to fish for swordfish in the Mediterranean Sea for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2023 (i.e. the closure period).

The necessary resources were deployed for inspection and control purposes based on risk analysis by the national inspection and observer programmes of the EU Member States to ensure that operators complied with the rules during the closure period.

During the closure period, national authorities of EU Member States performed control activities in their territories including inspections at sea (by patrol vessels and aerial means), in ports, in auctions and in the premises of companies to ensure that no swordfish was present on-board fishing vessels, landed or marketed during the closure period. In addition, EU Member States

¹ Commission Implementing Decision 2018/1986 of 13 December 2018 establishing specific control and inspection programmes for certain fisheries including Bluefin tuna and swordfish

monitored VMS and AIS positions of vessels, and documentary analysis were performed by crosschecking VMS positions, logbooks and sales notes. Vessels authorised to by-catch swordfish were also targeted for monitoring and inspection during the closure period.

Furthermore, increased checks and controls were carried out in the context of the EU Joint Deployment Plan (JDP) coordinated by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). In practical terms and in close collaboration with the Member States and the European Commission, EFCA has coordinated joint inspection and control activities in the Mediterranean.

In 2023, the EU listed 866 ICCAT inspectors from Member States, DG MARE and the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA). In terms of surveillance means to control and inspect fishing activities, 261 fishery patrol vessels and 34 aerial means from the Member States and EFCA were registered in ICCAT.

During the closure period in the Mediterranean (from 01.01.2023 to 31.03.2023), 841 sea inspections², 891 port inspections³, 1504 inspections on business (e.g. fish markets, fish auctions, retail shops), 272 inspections on transports and 156 sightings⁴ were carried out.

A total of 10 potential non-compliances (PNC) were detected, 5 of them were related with drifting longliners inspected at sea/in port. From the remaining 5 PNCs, 1 was detected during port inspections of vessels with other gears⁵, and 4 identified on business.

² Information related to sea inspections of the ISSCFG codes LL, LLD, LTL, LHP, LHM, LX and recreational fishery.

³ Information related to port inspections of the ISSCFG codes LL, LLD, LTL, LHP, LHM, LX and recreational fishery.

⁴ Information related to air/sea sightings of the ISSCFG codes LL, LLD, LTL, LHP, LHM, LX and recreational fishery.

⁵ ISSCFG codes OTB.