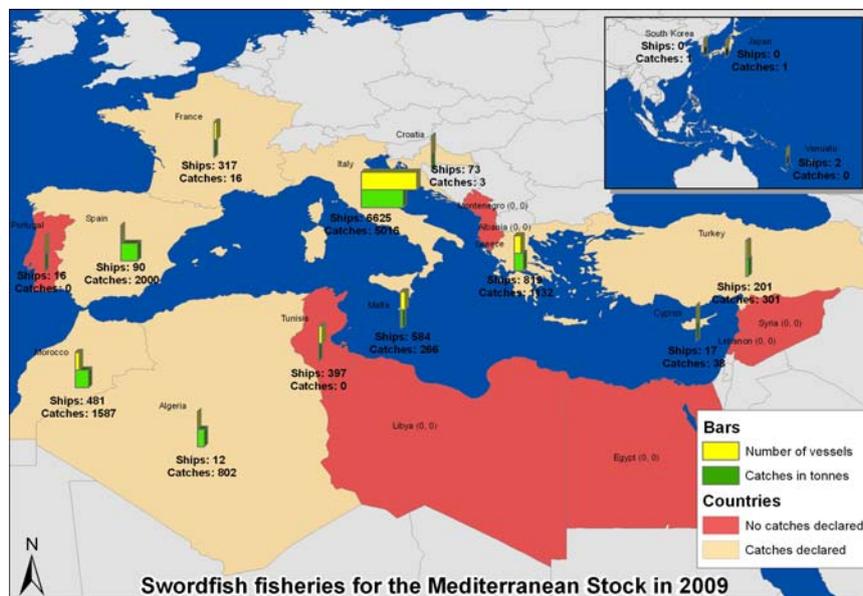


## Mediterranean Swordfish

### The prevalent lack of management in Mediterranean ICCAT fisheries

Mediterranean swordfish is highly consumed in the Mediterranean Sea. Average annual reported catches by Mediterranean riparian States are similar to those of the North Atlantic stock, but management measures are far from comparable.

Despite the exploitation levels experienced by this stock, ICCAT's level of concern regarding this species and its sustainable management has not been in accordance. Mediterranean swordfish fisheries have historically been carried out without proper management measures and with high levels of illegal fishing<sup>1</sup>.



Map showing a comparison between the numbers of vessels authorised to catch Mediterranean swordfish reported in 2010 to ICCAT<sup>2</sup>, and the declared catches for 2009<sup>3</sup>. Data source: ICCAT. [www.iccat.int](http://www.iccat.int)

The historical lack of management and uncontrolled fishing, similar to that for other ICCAT species in the Mediterranean Sea, has led to a sharp decline of the stock's biomass in the last 20 years, and juvenile fish now compose a high percentage of the total catch. Currently, the stock status has been assessed as overexploited<sup>4</sup>.

This scenario becomes even worse if we consider that the ICCAT Mediterranean swordfish fleet is highly overdimensioned (up to 9,634 fishing vessels reported in 2010 vs. 10,358 tonnes of declared catches in 2009<sup>5</sup>) and that high rates of unreported catches and illegal fishing are occurring, mainly through the use of illegal driftnets, which were banned seven years ago through ICCAT Recommendation [03-04].

In 2009, ICCAT Contracting Parties took a crucial step during the Regular Meeting of the Commission when they committed to agree, by 2010, to a sustainable Mediterranean swordfish management plan<sup>6</sup>.

Oceana calls on ICCAT Contracting Parties to follow-up on the commitment adopted in 2009 by ensuring the recovery of Mediterranean swordfish. The marine conservation organisation believes that an appropriate framework for a management plan intended to recover the stock to Maximum Sustainable Yield should:

- **Establish a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limit cutting the average declared catch by 20%.**

According to the 2010 ICCAT Stock assessment, this TAC, corresponding to **11,415 tons**, would ensure the recovery of the stock to sustainable levels.

- **Only authorise surface longline fishing vessels, thereby preventing loopholes, and implement fleet capacity reduction plans.**

ICCAT Contracting Parties reported a total of 9,634 vessels actively fishing Mediterranean swordfish. Oceana considers that this reported fleet capacity greatly exceed the fishing possibilities for this overexploited stock. To cite some examples, Italy harbours almost 70 percent of these vessels, including ex-bluefin tuna purse seiners. At the same time, vessel lists present several inconsistencies such as 201 Turkish flagged vessels authorised to catch swordfish with illegal driftnets.

- **Implement minimum landing sizes in accordance with the most recent scientific information.**

Juvenile swordfish catches have been estimated to represent up to 70 percent of the total catch in terms of number<sup>7</sup>. The implementation of minimum landing sizes and accompanying measures to mitigate juvenile fish bycatch has been demonstrated to be the most effective solution for addressing this problem.

- **Establish bycatch mitigation measures.**

Swordfish longline fisheries not only imply high bycatch of juvenile fish but also of endangered species. Technical measures should be put in place to minimise the catch of juvenile swordfish and endangered species, particularly sea turtles.

- **Create a sanctioning system through TAC access withdrawals for those ICCAT Contracting Parties that keep harbouring illegal driftnet fleets.**

**Seven** years after the driftnet ban for large pelagic species entered into force, this fishing gear is still a plague in the Mediterranean Sea. Oceana has estimated that more than 500 vessels keep using this illegal gear, threatening the conservation of cetaceans and sea turtles, and being a source of unreported landings of overexploited swordfish.

---

<sup>1</sup> Oceana report: "Adrift! Swordfish and driftnets in the Mediterranean Sea". Available in <http://eu.oceana.org/en/eu/media-reports/publications/adrift-swordfish-and-driftnets-in-the-mediterranean-sea>

<sup>2</sup> Vessel list downloaded the 17 November 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Argelia catches correspond to those declared for the year 2008.

<sup>4</sup> 2010 ICCAT Mediterranean Swordfish Stock Assessment Session.

<sup>5</sup> ICCAT Task 1web.

<sup>6</sup> ICCAT Recommendation [09-04] for a Management framework for the sustainable exploitation of Mediterranean swordfish and replacing ICCAT Recommendation 08-03.

<sup>7</sup> Anon. (2008). 2007 Mediterranean Swordfish Stock Assessment Session. Collect. Vol. Sci. Pap. ICCAT, 62(4): 951-1038.