EASME 2017. Framework Contract for the provision of scientific advice for the Mediterranean and Black Seas (2018-2021)

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Two of the core objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) are to "ensure that exploitation of marine biological resources restores and maintains populations of harvested species above levels which can produce the maximum sustainable yield" and “fishing activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with achieving economic, social and employment benefits and contributing to the availability of food supplies”. These objectives become particularly complex in the Mediterranean and Black Sea multi-gear, multi-species and multi-fleet fisheries. In these areas, the scientific advice is provided by the Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), the Scientific Advisory Committees of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), FAO regional projects which have been working on the establishment of regional networks of scientists and institutes involving both EU and non-EU countries, and specific projects and studies by research institutes, universities and other bodies both from EU Member States and non-EU Member States and other research organisms. This complex configuration of assessment bodies has some difficulties in providing full and standardized coverage of all stocks, fisheries and ecosystems, and to react in due time where new requirements for advice arise, which may result in a lack of flexibility for the European Commission in preparing concrete measures for CFP implementation and reacting in a timely manner to specific and sometimes urgent needs or priorities.

Scientific advice is based on the best available data, whose collection is carried out in Mediterranean and Black Sea under the Data Collection Framework (DCF) (formerly Data Collection Regulation and in the future EUMAP). Despite the broad scope of the implemented regulation, information on some stocks and fisheries is still limited. Knowledge on the interactions between fisheries activities and ecosystem has recently expanded thanks to the results of several European projects, though further ecological improvements are needed, especially at fine spatial scales. Thus, fulfilling the objectives of the CFP and the Ecosystem Approach to Fishery (EAF) requires a number of actions. Two of these can be synthesized as follows: from one side exploiting as much as possible all the available information, improving/adapting methods/approaches and developing new ones, on the other side filling the gaps in knowledge, by expanding the collection of relevant data, or understanding the difficulties/limits which hamper the gathering of such information. Involvement of stakeholders is another key point to share knowledge and improve the understanding of management measures, while receiving feedback on potential management options and implementation strategies.

Given this background, EASME has the following four main objectives and tasks: (i) give ad hoc scientific advice in support of the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy (national, European and international dimensions); (ii) improve stock assessment in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea; (iii) contribute to the assessment of impacts of management measures; and (iv) improve the knowledge about the broader ecosystem in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and reduce impacts of fisheries on ecosystems. EASME is a framework project involving 13 research institutions, mainly of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries (Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, United Kingdom and Spain), which will be developed through several sub-projects requested by the Commission, through terms of reference for specific contracts.

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