Recreational fishing within Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean

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INTRODUCTION

Recreational fishing is a booming activity in Mediterranean coastal areas, especially in marine protected areas (MPAs). Despite generating a variety of impacts and imbalances on resources and on marine ecosystems, there is much less research into recreational fishing than there is into commercial fishing. The overall aim of this work, which is one of the first of its kind in the Mediterranean, is to provide an outline of the current situation as regards recreational fishing in the Mediterranean MPAs, to compare these areas and to establish common methodological foundations that will facilitate the management of this activity.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a review of approximately 140 studies as well as interviews with managers of 31 Mediterranean MPAs (Fig. 1). The sources used for data gathering are diverse: questionnaires initially distributed by email and fax to MPA managers, direct contact via email with the managers of MPAs, review of scientific literature and grey literature (unpublished studies carried out by the MPAs themselves and which the MPAs have provided us with), review of regulations currently in effect in MPAs and review of information leaflets and other documents relating to activities, zoning, etc. of MPAs.

RESULTS

The results illustrate the diverse impacts caused by recreational fishing on the marine ecosystems of the Mediterranean MPAs. The prime causes of these impacts are (i) the immense pressure exerted by the various types of recreational fishing on coastal marine resources, particularly on vulnerable species; (ii) anchoring on sensitive habitats, in particular those of European interest (Posidonia meadows, coralligenous reefs, etc. in the context of the Nature 2000 Network); (iii) lost or abandoned fishing gear; (iv) the use of exotic baits; and (v) the practice of catch and release. In addition there is a degree of interaction with commercial (artisanal) fishing which is usually a source of conflict over space and resources. Nevertheless, there are also significant economic implications that, along with the social implications, are rarely taken into account despite the huge economic and social importance of recreational fishing in the Mediterranean. Having reviewed the various studies, it became clear that there was enormous variation among existing study methods, making it difficult to make useful comparisons among the results from individual MPAs. Based on the results of this study, we propose a number of recommendations for the study and management of recreational fishing, as well as environmental education. The list of recommendations is directed at the MedPAN network as a whole, the managers of MPAs and their technical staff and the European, national and regional authorities that are responsible for the evaluation and management of recreational fishing.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study supports the idea that MPAs not only help sustain coastal marine resources and biodiversity, preserve habitats and conserve the maritime cultural heritage, but also provide resources for fisheries, in particular leisure fishing, allowing for the enjoyment of these areas and for the development of local economies. For sustainable use of the sea, further research and management actions regarding recreational fishing should be urgently undertaken in Mediterranean MPAs.

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