

New Adriatic Sea fisheries unit inaugurated in Split to strengthen science-based fisheries management

07 September 2026 | News

FAO Director-General says stronger regional cooperation, science and Blue Transformation will secure the subregion's fisheries future



The Adriatic Sea Technical Unit of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was officially inaugurated today in Split, marking a new step in strengthening scientific cooperation and sustainable fisheries management among the countries sharing the Adriatic Sea.

FAO Director-General QU Dongyu attended the high-level inauguration ceremony, held ahead of the 37th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), alongside Croatian State Secretary Ivan Matijević, Director of the Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries Željka Ninčević, and GFCM Executive Secretary Miguel Bernal.

In his opening remarks, the Director-General thanked the Government of Croatia for its continued partnership and commitment to sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Adriatic Sea, as well as for hosting the new GFCM subregional unit in Split.

Qu underscored the importance of the Adriatic and the wider Mediterranean for food security, livelihoods and coastal communities, noting that healthy marine ecosystems and sustainable fisheries remain essential to the well-being and prosperity of the people who depend on them.

The Director-General stressed that growing demand for aquatic foods, intensified fishing pressure and the impacts of the climate crisis are increasingly affecting marine ecosystems. Addressing these challenges, he said, requires countries to work together and ground decisions in sound science.

“Strong science remains at the centre of progress,” Qu said, emphasizing that reliable data, research and innovative approaches to assessment and management are essential to turning knowledge into measurable results.

The Director-General also highlighted FAO's Blue Transformation as a pathway for making aquatic food systems more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable. This approach supports stronger fisheries management, responsible aquaculture development and improved aquatic value chains, contributing to FAO's Four Betters – better production, better nutrition, a better environment; and a better life, leaving no one behind.

Qu pointed to the progress achieved through the collective efforts of GFCM contracting parties over the past decade. Eleven management plans and a range of spatial measures have been adopted to ensure sustainable exploitation and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems and essential fish habitats. As a result, biomass of stocks has increased by around 25 percent, while the share of overexploited stocks declined from 87 percent in 2013 to 52 percent in 2023.

These results, he noted, demonstrate that effective fisheries management can reconcile sustainability with productivity. The Adriatic Sea is a particularly strong example of this approach, having been the setting for the adoption of the first GFCM multiannual management plan in 2013 and subsequently demonstrating the value of spatial management in advancing both conservation and sustainable fisheries.

The establishment of the new Technical Unit therefore represents more than an institutional milestone. According to Qu, it is an investment in science, cooperation and the sustainable future of the Adriatic region.

“We are here in Split,” the Director-General said. “But we are not split - we are in fact more united towards efficient, inclusive and sustainable approaches to the fisheries in the Adriatic sea”.

About the Adriatic Sea Technical Unit

The GFCM Adriatic Sea Technical Unit will provide a permanent subregional presence to strengthen scientific cooperation, support implementation of fisheries management measures and improve coordination among Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia.

The Unit will further contribute to MedSea4Fish, the GFCM capacity development programme, supporting technical expertise, institutional capacity and knowledge-sharing across the subregion.

The inauguration builds on years of cooperation through the GFCM, which has supported Adriatic countries in addressing shared, cross-border fisheries challenges through scientific research, data collection, stock assessments and coordinated management and conservation measures.