

## **National Code of Good Practice**

## **Fishing & Invasive Alien Species**

Common concerns over the significant detrimental impacts of invasive alien species may bring together interest groups to draw attention to those man-mediated actions or interventions that may facilitate the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. In parallel with the drawing up of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species, a series of sector-specific codes are being drawn up to raise awareness and promote good practice to curb the risks associated with introducing and using alien species that exhibit an invasive potential. The mandate for such codes is found in Malta's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2012-2020). The present document puts forward a series of recommendations to serve as a code in activities of fishing. The recommendations, which adopt the principle of self-regulation, aim to provide practical and concise guidance in establishing common standards of good practice and responsible attitudes and behaviours when fishing. The recommendations do not replace established national legislation that regulates activities that use alien species. The recommendations are intended to be complementary to the legally-binding obligations defined in national legislation to entice compliance, and also to support the implementation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species. Wide dissemination of this code to the target stakeholders is of essence in order to create partnerships and encourage voluntary adoption in order to overcome any malpractices that may occur as a result of lack of knowledge or understanding of the risks that alien and invasive species may pose.

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## National Code of Good Practice – Fishing & Invasive Alien Species

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### Further Reading:

*European Code of Conduct on Recreational Fishing and Invasive Alien Species* – Owen, 2014, Council of Europe Document T-PVS/Inf(2011)26rev<sup>1</sup>

*European Charter on Recreational Fishing and Biodiversity* – Brainerd, 2010<sup>2</sup>

*European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species*, Council of Europe document T-PVS/Inf (2016) 13<sup>3</sup>

**F**ishing is practiced in Malta not only as a form of subsistence (**capture fisheries** which is artisanal in nature) but also as a past time (**recreational fishing**) by individuals (recreational fishing boat owners, sport fisherman, sports anglers and even divers) who use rods, hooks and lines. The majority of Maltese fishers operate on a part time or leisure basis. Fisheries management within the European Union is governed by the **Common Fisheries Policy** (Regulation EU No 1380/2013) and other regulations issued within its framework. At a national level, fisheries and fishing are regulated by the **Fisheries Conservation and Management Act**<sup>4</sup> (Act 425) and subsidiary legislation enacted thereto. The national fisheries legal framework is administered by the **Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DFA)**. The Fisheries Resource Unit (FRU) within the DFA is responsible for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector. This Unit also provide support for scientific advice as regards the Common Fisheries Policy. The **Fishing Vessel Regulations 2004, as amended**<sup>5</sup> (S.L.425.07), requires that vessels used for fishing are licensed for such an activity and registered in the Fishing Vessels Register.<sup>6</sup> The latter categorises registered vessels into: MFA - Full-time Professional Fishing Vessels; MFB - Part-time Professional Fishing Vessels; MFC - Non-commercial Fishing Vessels i.e. recreational; and MFD - Auxiliary Vessels (work boats) used in fishing operations. In the region of 64% of licensed fishing boats fall in the MFC category showing the importance of recreational fishing nationally.<sup>7</sup>

There is no angling in freshwater and riparian ecosystems since Malta does not have rivers and lakes. Moreover the only native freshwater fish is the killifish (*Aphanius fasciatus*), which is endangered and as such is legally protected. The deliberate introduction of alien species in inland water ecosystems in the past did not occur for the purposes of angling but rather to control mosquitoes through the release of *Gambusia* species in reservoirs and their ultimate presence in watercourses, such as at Chadwick Lakes/Wied il-Qlejgħa.

Anglers and fishers play an important role in observing, detecting and reporting alien species they encounter whilst fishing. In fact, several records of new marine alien have been documented in literature thanks to specimens brought to the attention of local scientists by individuals. Case examples include the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680746983>

<sup>2</sup> Available at:

<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=1979230&SecMode=1&DocId=1617470&Usage=2>

<sup>3</sup> Available at: *European Code of Conduct on Recreational Boating and Invasive Alien Species*, Council of Europe document T-PVS/Inf (2016)

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8891&l=1>

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=10743&l=1>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=16686&l=>

<sup>7</sup> Malta's Operational Programme for the EMFF

- All reported sightings or landings of the lesser amberjack (*Seriola fasciata*) and the African hind (*Cephalopholis taeniops*) made during the past years were recorded, by interviewing local professional and sports fishermen, fishing authorities and SCUBA divers;<sup>8</sup>
- The spotted scat (*Scatophagus argus*) was recorded for the first time from Malta and the Mediterranean from fish offered for sale at a Maltese fish market. Interviews with fish sellers and fishermen showed that this fish is caught occasionally in small numbers in trammel nets from shallows on seagrass meadows in the southeast of Malta and that it has been present since at least 2007;<sup>9</sup>
- The work documenting the increasing occurrence of the blue-spotted cornet fish (*Fistularia commersonii*) is based on sightings or captures of the species from the coastal waters of the Maltese Islands by fishermen and SCUBA divers;<sup>10</sup>
- Work that confirmed the presence of dusky spinefoot (*Siganus luridus*) and suggests the absence of marbled spinefoot (*Siganus rivulatus*) was assisted by photographs of landed or living specimens submitted by fishers, divers and other sea users.<sup>11</sup>

While deliberate introduction of alien species for angling and for fisheries is very remote in Malta, the following recommendations are intended to engage interest and participation from Maltese anglers as well as commercial fishers to report on the occurrences of alien species when encountered during angling and fishing activities as part of citizen science and especially to facilitate the timely detection of marine IAS of EU and national concern:

✓ BE AWARE of what are Invasive Alien Species (IAS) and the problems they may cause, which may also impinge on sustainable recreational and commercial fishing.

✓ BE AWARE of the List of IAS of Union concern and the national list of species deemed to be invasive alien species and the legal obligations that apply to these species.

✓ REPORT immediately any encountered occurrences/presence of IAS of EU and national concern to the Competent Authority.

✓ COLLABORATE with scientists in recording new alien introductions.

✓ VOLUNTEER in programmes to eradicate, monitor and research aquatic invasive alien species, where possible and if feasible.

✓ PREVENT the release, spread and translocation of invasive alien species (e.g. via fishing gear/equipment including fishing tackle; and fishing vessels including engines) – Check, clean and dry all clothing and equipment. Cleaning of vessels from hull fouling should follow the general binding rules on hull cleaning, as well as the guidance note that have been adopted by the Environment and Resources Authority (ERA).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A tale of two Atlantic fish migrants: records of the lesser amberjack *Seriola fasciata* and the African hind *Cephalopholis taeniops* from the Maltese Islands. Deidun, Castriota & Arrigo, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> An overlooked and unexpected introduction? Occurrence of the spotted scat *Scatophagus argus* (Linnaeus, 1766) (Osteichthyes: Scatophagidae) in the Maltese Islands. Zammit & Schembri, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> On the increasing occurrence of the Bluespotted Cornetfish *Fistularia commersonii* (Rüppel, 1838) in the Central Mediterranean (Osteichthyes, Fistulariidae). Deidun & Germanà, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> One *Siganus* or two? On the occurrence of *Siganus luridus* and *Siganus rivulatus* in the Maltese Islands. Schembri, Deidun & Falzon, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> <https://era.org.mt/en/Documents/GN%2017%20Hull%20cleaning.pdf>

These recommendations, if followed by all relevant recreational and commercial fishers would help in the timely detection of new alien species in Maltese waters. Continued dialogue and cooperation between Government, fishers, scientists, the two fisheries cooperatives (the Għaqda Koperattiva tas-Sajd Ltd, and the National Fishing Co-operative) and the Federation for Recreational Fishing is of essence to prevent the spread of IAS in Maltese waters.