

Opinion 175: Management of octopus in western austral waters

Objective: To standardise knowledge and management of octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*) in western southern waters in application of Article 44.2.a of Regulation 1380/2013.

Addressees: DGMARE, national administrations (France, Spain, Portugal), Group of Southern Member States.

Copies: EFCA, regional authorities, national scientific institutes

Regulatory references :

EU :

- a. Regulation (EU) 2019/1241 of the European Parliament and of the Council. Annex VIII: South-western waters, Part A, Minimum conservation reference sizes

Andalusia :

- b. Orden del 20 de noviembre de 2023 por la que se modifica la Orden de 25 de abril de 2017, por la que se regula la captura de pulpo (*Octopus vulgaris*) con artes específicos en el caladero nacional del Golfo de Cádiz y se crea el Censo de embarcaciones autorizadas para dicha actividad. (BOJA núm.80, 28 de abril de 2017)
- c. Resolución de 23 de abril de 2020, de la Dirección General de Pesca y Acuicultura, por la que se adapta el cese temporal para la captura de pulpo (*Octopus vulgaris*) con artes específicos en el caladero nacional del Golfo de Cádiz

Asturias :

- d. Resolución de 23 de noviembre de 2023 de la Consejería de Medio rural y Política Agraria, por la que se regula la pesca del pulpo común (*Octopus vulgaris*) durante la campaña 2023/2024

France :

- e. Decision no. 107-2024 of 12 June 2024 closing the octopus fishery in territorial waters off South Finistere
- f. 2024-067 "poulpe finistere sud" licence of 14 May 2024 laying down special access conditions for octopus fishing in territorial waters off south Finistere

Portugal :

- g. Portarias nº 217/2023 e 198/2023
- h. Portaria nº 14/2014

Galicia :

- i. Resolución de 16 de mayo de 2023 por la que se aprueba el Plan experimental para la gestión del pulpo (*Octopus vulgaris*) con nasa para la campaña 2023/24

Spanish Basque Country :

- a. DECRETO 102/1997, de 6 de mayo, de modificación del Decreto por el que se aprueba el Reglamento de Pesca Marítima Deportiva en aguas interiores, del Decreto sobre Ordenación del Marisqueo en el País Vasco, del Decreto por el que se regulan las condiciones de inscripción en el Censo de Mariscadores, y por el que se establece el Cuadro General de Vedas y Tallas Mínimas de las especies marisqueras
- b. DECRETO 212/2000, de 24 de octubre, por el que se regula el ejercicio de la pesca con artes menores en el litoral de la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco.

Context :

Since September 2023, the members of the CC SUD, meeting as the Adhoc working group, have been meeting with scientific experts from various national institutes (IPMA, IEO, IFREMER and the University of Oviedo) as well as regional and national authorities, in order to work together to improve octopus management. In fact, since 2021, a change in the distribution area of octopus has been observed in all the waters under the jurisdiction of the CC SUD, with in particular a meteoric increase in its abundance in the northern part (increase by a factor of 10 on the French coast¹) and a stabilisation or even a decrease in the more southerly areas²³ . Faced with these developments and their repercussions on fleets, the members of the CC SUD wanted to exchange information on the management methods used in each region, and share best practice and scientific knowledge.

The octopus fishery in western southern waters is currently regulated at Community level only by a minimum catch weight of 750g (*reference a*). However, given the socio-economic importance of this fishery and the inter-annual behaviour of the species, the regions have introduced various management measures (*references b-k*).

¹ <https://cc-sud.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/DIAP0-GT-Poulpe-CCSUD-Donnees-FR-240923.pdf>

² https://cc-sud.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CCR_S-Pablo_Pita.pdf

³ <https://cc-sud.eu/wp-content/uploads/import/agenda/2023-2024/05-AHPoulpe-MissionOcean/ODJ-Octopus/Apresentac%CC%A7ao-SWW-Polvo.pdf>

Recitals :

A. The biology of the octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*)

The octopus stock in western southern waters is considered to be in good condition⁴ however it is a short-lived species (2 years) whose growth and abundance are highly dependent on environmental conditions⁵ (rainfall, upwelling, temperature...): Abundance can vary by as much as 40% from one year to the next, making it difficult to manage and model.

→ **Management measures must therefore be flexible and adaptable on an annual case-by-case basis.**

Annual variations will be exacerbated by climate change, which has already been observed in Galicia⁶. The mature size of both male and female octopus is in excess of 1 kilogram.⁷

→ **An increase in the minimum catch size therefore seems appropriate, to improve the resilience of the species in certain regions. However, more studies, particularly on the impact of climate change on the abundance and growth of the species, are needed to harmonise this across the EU.**

Occidentales Sud.

B. The socio-economic and cultural importance of the fishery

While the octopus fishery has developed opportunistically on the coast of Brittany (France) over the last two years, it is firmly rooted in the culture of the Iberian Peninsula. This fishery, this species, is part of the cultural identity of these regions, both in terms of gastronomy and its importance in the local employment chain. Empirical and scientific knowledge therefore varies greatly between the different regions. Climate change is going to reshuffle the cards, and knowledge needs to be updated to enable players in the sector to anticipate changes and be more resilient.

⁴ Pirhadi, N., Parrondo, M., Romero-Bascones, A. *et al.* Genetic monitoring on the world's first MSC eco-labeled common octopus (*O. vulgaris*) fishery in western Asturias, Spain. *Sci Rep* 13, 2730 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-29463-6>

⁵ Sobrino *et al.* 2020. DOI: 10.1016/j.fishres.2019.105382

⁶ EFECTOS DO CLIMA SOBRE O POLBO COMÚN. J. Otero, A.F.G. González, A. Guerra and X.A. Álvarez-Salgado

⁷ Otero *et al.* 2007, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2007.01.007>

- **coordinated research effort between the various Member States needs to be put in place to improve the resilience of the sector and ensure that local traditions and identities are preserved.**

C. The octopus market (*Octopus vulgaris*)

Octopus benefits from a growing world market worth over 8 billion USD, of which Southern Europe is one of the main export and import markets. So it's important for the regions involved to think about their sales strategies on this scale.

The first sale of octopus is generally fresh and at auction. Octopus is categorised according to its weight, so each quality has a higher or lower price; the heavier the individual, the higher the price per kilo.

- **Harmonising sizes would facilitate trade between regions.**

On the other hand, the members of the CC SUD have noted that an environmental label (MSC) based on dynamic co-management for part of the Asturias fleet has made it possible to increase the value of octopus (+15 to 20% of the price) throughout the⁸ zone.

- **Enhancement with an environmental or regional label would give octopus a higher profile.**

Finally, the members of the CC SUD have noted that a number of octopuses are being placed on the market which have not been inspected and which do not comply with European or regional standards. This undermines the results of the management efforts made by the rest of the fleet.

- **An improvement in the effort to control the management rules put in place is necessary.**

⁸ <https://cc-sud.eu/wp-content/uploads/import/agenda/2023-2024/05-AHPoulpe-MissionOcean/ODJ-Octopus/MSC-2023-09-12-Asturias-Octopus-Presentation-EN.pdf>

CC SUD proposals :

1. Development and funding of joint scientific studies on the impact of climate change on octopus and the introduction of dynamic management measures.
2. Continued exchanges between stakeholders, managers and scientists within the CC SUD
3. Improved transparency and application of import and local fisheries control measures.
4. Standardization of quality/size standards for uniform marketing between Member States.

Adoption procedure :

Initiative	Exchanges	Drafting V1	WG discussion	Electronic consultation	CC Market consultation	Opinion adopted
GT TRAD 4 May 2023	GT Adhoc 12/09/2023 19/02/2024 23/09/2024	By the secretariat on the basis of the Ad-Hoc WG	Traditional Fisheries WG 24/10/2024	from 28/10/2024 to 08/11/2024	From 31/10/2024 at 15/11/2024	COMEX November 2024