

# Stakeholder Collaboration for Dealing with Justice in Traditional Swordfish Fishery in Gökçeada, Türkiye



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Gökçeada stands as a unique bastion preserving the exclusive tradition of harpoon swordfishing, a practice solely practiced within its shores in the Northern Aegean. The island's rich history, tracing back to ancient settlements around 6500 BC, showcases a deeply entrenched culture reliant on agriculture, livestock, and an interconnected trade network.

There are a total of 50 small-scale fishing boat owner fishers in Gökçeada, most of whom are part of the Gökçeada Merkez, Kaleköy, Uğurlu and Yeni Bademli Fishing Cooperative (from now on, Gökçeada Fishery Cooperative), established in 2000. However, fishing areas have been under the pressure of all kinds of fishing boats, including the large-scale trawlers and purse seiners from outside.

The challenge confronting fishing activities in Gökçeada stems from multiple issues. These include excessive utilization of fishing areas by non-local fishers, external overfishing, illegal fishing, inadequate monitoring, deficient control and surveillance mechanisms, and the absence of effective fisheries management. Consequently, the once plentiful bluefish stocks, crucial for the island's fishers, have drastically declined, no longer ranking among the top 10 most captured fish species.

The evolution and modernization of fishing fleets, technological advancements, and alterations in fishing practices have significantly impacted the traditional fishing communities in Gökçeada. Concurrently, the influence of tourism and other economic activities has precipitated shifts in the island's fishing industry and socio-economic landscape.

**Photo:** Gökçeada, Kaleköy Port © Vahdet Ünal, 2021

**Location:**  
Gökçeada, Canakkale, Türkiye

**Ecosystem type:**  
Marine

**Main gear:**  
Gillnet, Harpoon, Hook & line, Recreational and Surrounding net

**Target species:**  
Swordfish, Bluefish, Gilthead seabream, Red porgy, Common dentex, Mediterranean chub mackerel Bouge, Salema, Tub gurnard Saddled seabream

**Vessel type:**  
Wooden boats, inboard engine

**No. of small-scale fishers:**  
100



*Gökçeada fishing started to develop after 1984. In 1984, 125 people in total consisting of 25 fishing families from Samsun, Trabzon, Ordu and Giresun provinces of the Black Sea region settled in Gökçeada Yeni Bademli (Kahraman, 2005). Most of today's fishers on the island are relatives of these families.*



The proliferation of both legal and illegal large-scale fishing practices, notably trawling and purse-seining vessels, particularly from Bandırma, alongside recreational fishing, are a significant threat to fish stocks and fisheries in Gökçeada.

Another pressing issue for the island is that of illegal recreational fishing, particularly relating to divers who catch octopus, sea cucumber and fish and do so illegally, e.g., using scuba gear, at night, or sell their catches commercially. For all these reasons, the quality and quantity of fish catches have been declining over the last ten years, even more noticeably over the last five years.

According to the available data and from fisher interviews conducted in August 2020 (Ünal et al., 2022), some of the important problems affecting small-scale fisheries in Gökçeada are:

- Legal and illegal activities by large-scale trawlers and purse seiners from other regions that damage island fish stocks;
- The local commercial extinction of white grouper and dusky grouper, which used to be abundant in the eastern parts of the island and were depleted by illegal trawling activities in a short period;
- The negative effect of intense purse seine lights on fish populations around the island;
- Mucilage and pollution;
- An insufficient infrastructure of the fishing port in Kaleköy;
- Uncontrolled illegal recreational fishing activities around the island;
- Reluctance of management authority to put fisheries management plan into practice;
- Inadequate and unfair fishing rules and regulations;
- All types of illegal poaching; and
- Climate change including water temperature, seasonal changes and increasing populations of alien species.

# Justice in context

## Types of justice:

- Distributive
- **Social**
- **Economic**
- Market
- Infrastructure/wellbeing
- **Regulatory**
- **Procedural**
- **Environmental**
- **COVID-19 related**

### Distributive, Social & Procedural Justice

Fishers established a fishery cooperative in 2000 and want to rent the fishing port, build and operate infrastructure and superstructure facilities. However, they have not yet been able to overcome legal obstacles. Since tourism has developed, the coastal area is considered too valuable to be left to fishers!

### Regulatory Justice

The entire area around the island should be closed to all kinds of large-scale fishing (trawl and purse seiners). This limit was suggested as 3 miles in the fisheries management plan (unpublished but submitted to the General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry).

### Market Justice

Since the Fishery Cooperative does not provide marketing services, fishers must send their fish to Canakkale and Istanbul, where prices are better, through retailers/intermediaries. The fish caught in summer barely meets the island's own needs due to increasing demand from tourism. However, valuable species such as swordfish always go outside the Gokceada, where they reach the highest prices (e.g., Istanbul, Canakkale, Bodrum).

### COVID-19 related Justice

During the COVID-19 pandemic, fish sales in Gökceda stopped completely at first. Gradually, the sales re-started, although they were reduced by 50% compared to before the pandemic. A decrease of 35-50% was also observed in fish prices. These losses were linked to the suspension of economic activities and the closure of restaurants. Exports also stopped as exporters and intermediaries either stopped buying fish for a while or offered very low prices. Therefore, fishers stopped selling to middlemen during the pandemic period. According to fishers' estimates, even when fishing stopped completely, there was no support fund or compensation for the fishers.

## Definition of small-scale fisheries

There is neither a legal definition nor a specific regulation for small-scale fisheries and fishers in Türkiye. The fisheries law does not mention the terminologies of small-scale fisheries or small-scale fishers. There is only one legal communiqué on the small-scale fisheries: Official Gazette, Issue: 31581. ([https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/08/2021\\_0827-6.htm](https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/08/2021_0827-6.htm)). This communiqué also uses the term 'Traditional Coastal Fisheries' instead of small-scale fisheries.

# Dealing with Justice

The management plan for small-scale fisheries was prepared with the participation of all stakeholders, especially fishers, but it was not implemented/put into practice. Local small-scale fishers have reported and prioritized all the issues in this plan based on the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF). They then developed operational objectives and management measures to deal with them, which resulted in a plan that was prepared through a multi-stakeholder participation carried out by Ege University with the support of FAO and with the support and participation of the Ministry. While the plan was presented to the Ministry, it was not taken into consideration, clearly demonstrating that small-scale fishers are not being taken into account.

## Distributive, Social & Procedural Justice

During the pandemic, everyone had to take care of themselves. Nothing was done for the fishers, except for work permits that were issued for a short period.

## Regulatory Justice

Regulations regarding fishing needed to be revised. Fishing rights within the 3-mile borders of the island should have been granted only to island fishers. There were weaknesses in enforcing existing rules and regulations, and the monitoring system was inadequate. Academy, NGOs, Fishers' Cooperative, and other institutions came together and organized workshops within the EAF concept and prepared a Fisheries Management Plan. All these issues related to regulatory justice have been mentioned in the management plan prepared for the island fisheries, but the plan has not been implemented yet.

## Procedural Justice

Gökceada Fishery Cooperative is a member of the Canakkale Regional Fishery Cooperatives, and this regional union is also a member of the Central Union of Fishery Cooperatives (SUR-KOOP). In fact, Gökceada fishers have a mechanism to make their voices heard within this vertical organizational structure, but the problem is that most of the time, the ministry collects opinions and does its own thing. The debate about the influence of large-scale fishers in the decision-making process has been ongoing without any signs it will ever end.

## Market Justice

Fishers are trying to strengthen their cooperatives. They are trying to rent the port in order to provide marketing services, determine prices and play a more important role in the market.

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*A fisheries management plan was prepared for small-scale fisheries in Gökçeada under the leadership of Ege University with the support of FAO and the Ministry, with the participation of all stakeholders. While the plan was presented to the Ministry, it was not considered, clearly demonstrating that small-scale fishers are not being taken into account.*



## Dealing with justice

### Environmental Justice

In the early spring of 2021, a mass of marine mucilage bloomed in the Marmara Sea. The so-called sea snot – a thick, slimy substance made up of compounds released by various marine organisms (see Ünal et al. 2022). By June 2021, it had spread far and wide and drew great public attention as it was floating on the surface waters and blanketing the coasts of Istanbul, Çanakkale (including Gökçeada) and other urban centers surrounding the Marmara Sea. Although mucilage did not directly affect Gökçeada fishers in 2021, the situation faced by fishers in Marmara showed that this problem may also threaten Gökçeada fisheries in the future. Ünal et al (2002) reported that the formation of such a dense mucilage in the sea area surrounding the island will threaten the ecological and socio-economic well-being of Gökçeada fishers. In response, the Ministry doubled the small amount of annual support per small-scale fishing boats based on size groups due to mucilage, paying 225-335 USD per boat, depending on its size.

### COVID-19 related Justice

The fishers had nothing to do but accept the conditions at the time of the pandemic. They had to wait for the pandemic to pass and the market and prices to return to normal.

In conclusion, local fishers of Gökçeada have made many attempts to cope with the injustices that negatively affect the sustainability of small-scale fisheries on the island. However, all of these were stuck in the official institutions that had the authority to manage the sector by law. It is now time to adopt a new fisheries management approach. The EAF-based management plan prepared with the participation of all stakeholders should be reviewed and implemented immediately!



### How to cite

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**Photo:** Swordfish in Gökçeada, Kaleköy Port © Vahdet Ünal, 2021