

Table of contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acronyms and Abbreviations

List of species

SUMMARY	1
RESUMEN	5
RESUM	9
SOMMARIO	13
1. Introduction	17
1.1. European sea bass (<i>Dicentrarchus labrax</i>)	19
<i>Ecology, biology, and commercial value</i>	19
<i>Life cycle and reproduction strategy</i>	20
1.2. Fundamentals of reproductive biology in teleosts	22
1.2.1. Sex determination in teleosts	23
1.2.2. Sex differentiation and gonadal development in teleosts	24
1.2.3. Onset of puberty and reproductive strategies	24
1.3. Endocrine control of reproduction: the Brain-Pituitary-Gonad axis	25
<i>Brain</i>	26
<i>Pituitary gland</i>	28
<i>Gonads</i>	29
1.4. Gonadal functions	30
1.4.1. Gametogenesis in females: the teleost ovary and oogenesis	31
<i>Oogenesis</i>	33
1.4.2. Gametogenesis in males: the teleost testis and spermatogenesis	35
<i>Spermatogenesis</i>	38
1.4.3. Steroidogenesis: biosynthesis and regulatory functions of gonadal sex steroids	40
<i>Biosynthesis of sex steroids</i>	40
<i>Hormonal control of sex steroids in adult females</i>	42
<i>Hormonal control of sex steroids in adult males</i>	44
<i>From gonads to brain: feedback mechanisms in the BPG axis during the reproductive cycle</i>	45
1.5. The BPG axis components during the onset of puberty in European sea bass	47
1.6. Local regulation of reproduction: focus on the gonads	48
1.6.1. Epidermal Growth Factors (EGFs)	49
1.6.2. Insulin-like Growth Factors (IGFs)	49
1.6.3. Transforming Growth Factor- β (TGF- β)	50

1.7. The Transforming Growth Factor- β (TGF- β) superfamily and its molecular players	51
1.7.1. TGF- β family ligands	52
1.7.1.4 Anti-Müllerian Hormone (Amh)	55
Structure, signalling, and functions in mammals	55
Evolution and functional diversification in mammals	56
Amh in European sea bass	58
1.7.1.5 Gonadal Soma-Derived Factor (Gsdf)	59
Molecular features and evolutionary conservation	59
Functional roles of Gsdf	60
Characterization in European sea bass	61
1.7.2. TGF- β receptors	62
1.7.3. The TGF- β /Smad signalling pathway	63
2. Objectives	67
3. Materials and Methods	71
3.1. Animals and sample collection	73
3.1.1. Juvenile specimens	73
3.1.2. Adult specimens throughout the annual reproductive cycle	74
3.1.3. Isolated follicular cells	74
3.1.4. Tissue collection	74
3.2. Histological analysis	74
3.3. Hormones and reagents	76
3.4. <i>In vitro</i> gonad culture	76
3.5. Injection of sbAmh plasmid <i>in vivo</i>	77
3.6. Molecular biology techniques	78
3.6.1. RNA extraction	78
3.6.2. Reverse transcription	79
3.6.3. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR)	79
3.6.4. Quantitative real-time RT-PCR assay (qPCR)	81
3.6.5. Identification and isolation of cDNA sequences	85
3.6.6. Molecular cloning and plasmid generation	87
3.6.7. Plasmid propagation and purification	87
3.6.8. Expression plasmid generation	87
3.7. Biochemical and Immunological techniques	91
3.7.1. Enzyme immunoassays (EIAs)	91
3.7.2. Antibodies	92
3.7.3. Enzyme immunoassays (EIAs)	92
Protein extraction	92
Deglycosylation treatment	93
Western Blot	93
3.7.4. Immunohistochemistry (IHC)	94
3.7.5. Luciferase assay	95
3.8. Cell culture techniques	95
3.8.1. Mammalian cell lines and maintenance	95
3.8.2. Recombinant sea bass protein production	96
Recombinant Gsdf production	92

<u>Recombinant scFsh and Amh production</u>	93
<u>Large scale production of recombinant Amh in Pichia pastoris</u>	93
3.8.3. Transactivation assays and cell transfection	97
3.9. Computer-assisted analyses	100
3.9.1. Phylogenetic analysis and genomic synteny	100
3.9.2. <i>In silico</i> analysis of upstream flanking sequences	101
3.9.3. Image processing	102
3.9.4. Statistical analyses	102
4. Results	105
4.1. The Anti-Müllerian Hormone in European sea bass	107
4.1.1. Gonadal expression and protein detection	107
4.1.1.1 Expression of <i>amh</i> and <i>amhr2</i> during gonadal differentiation	107
4.1.1.2 Detection of Amh and Amhr2 proteins in adult sea bass gonads	108
4.1.1.3 Immunolocalization of Amh and Amhr2 in adult gonads	112
4.1.2. Expression of <i>amh</i> and <i>amhr2</i> in isolated follicular cells	116
4.1.3. Functional characterization and steroidogenic regulation of Amh in European sea bass	116
4.1.3.1 Effect of Amh on Fsh-induced steroidogenesis in females	117
4.1.3.2 Effect of Amh on steroidogenesis in males	118
<u><i>In vitro</i> testis culture in European sea bass and Japanese medaka</u>	118
<u>Effect of Amh on steroidogenesis in males: in vivo treatment</u>	120
4.1.3.3 Signalling pathways involved in Amh-induced steroidogenesis	122
<u>Molecular signalling of sea bass Amh: SMAD and cAMP pathways</u>	122
<u>Crosstalk between signalling SMAD and cAMP pathways</u>	123
<u>Involvement of cAMP pathway in sea bass Amh-stimulated steroid production in testis</u>	126
4.2. The Gonadal Soma-Derived Factor in European sea bass	126
4.2.1. Comparative genomic and cis-regulatory analysis	127
4.2.1.1 Comparative genomic analysis: phylogenetic and syntenic study	127
4.2.1.2 Regulatory motifs in the 5' flanking regions of <i>gsdf</i> genes	134
4.2.2. Gonadal gene expression and protein detection	135
4.2.2.1 Tissue distribution of <i>gsdf1</i> and <i>gsdf2</i> mRNA	135
4.2.2.2 Expression of <i>gsdf1</i> and <i>gsdf2</i> during gonadal differentiation	136
4.2.2.3 Expression of <i>gsdf1</i> and <i>gsdf2</i> in puberty onset in males	138

4.2.2.4	Seasonal changes of <i>gsdf1</i> and <i>gsdf2</i> expression in adult gonads	140
4.2.2.5	Detection of endogenous Gsdf proteins in adult sea bass gonads	142
4.2.2.6	Immunolocalization of Gsdf in pre-puberal and adult male and female sea bass	143
4.2.3.	Endocrine regulation of <i>gsdf</i> genes	146
4.2.3.1	Effect of oestradiol (E ₂) on <i>gsdf</i> expression	147
4.2.3.2	Effect of Follicle-stimulating hormone (Fsh) on <i>gsdf</i> expression	150
4.2.3.3	Effect of anti-Müllerian hormone (Amh) on <i>gsdf</i> expression	152
4.3.	TGF- β receptors involved in reproductive functions	153
4.3.1.	Molecular characterization	153
4.3.1.1	Phylogenetic study of TGF- β type I and type II receptors	153
4.3.1.2	Tissue distribution of TGF- β type I and type II receptors	156
4.3.2.	Functional characterization	157
4.3.2.1	Functional characterization of TGF- β type II and type I receptors in heterologous cell systems	158
4.3.2.2	Detailed functional characterization of TGF- β receptors in COS-7 cells	161
	<i>Optimization of receptor ratios and receptor pairing</i>	161
	<i>Assessment of receptor-specific signalling routes using pCAGA-Luc reporter plasmid</i>	163
	<i>Ligand-induced activation using recombinant Amh</i>	165
5.	Discussion	169
5.1.	The Anti-Müllerian Hormone in European sea bass	171
5.1.1.	Developmental expression and role during gonadal differentiation	172
5.1.2.	Protein detection and cellular localization in adult gonads	173
	<i>Ovary</i>	173
	<i>Testis</i>	176
5.1.3.	Functional Characterization and Steroidogenic Role of Amh	178
	<i>In vitro effects in ovary</i>	178
	<i>In vitro effects in testis</i>	179
	<i>In vivo effects in males</i>	181
5.1.4.	Intracellular Signalling Pathways Activated by Amh	182
5.2.	The Gonadal Soma-Derived Factor in European sea bass	185
5.2.1.	Evolutionary origin and genomic distribution of <i>gsdf</i>	185
5.2.2.	Transcriptional regulation of <i>gsdf</i> genes: promoter analysis	187
5.2.3.	Expression and cellular distribution in European sea bass life cycle	189
5.2.4.	Hormonal regulation of <i>gsdf</i> genes	192
	<i>Effect of E₂ on <i>gsdf</i> expression</i>	192
	<i>Effect of Fsh on <i>gsdf</i> expression</i>	194

<i>Effect of Amh on gsdf expression</i>	195
5.3. The Transforming Growth Factor- β type I and type II receptors	196
5.3.1. Evolutionary diversification of TGF- β receptors	196
5.3.2. Tissue expression patterns and sex-related distribution of TGF- β receptors	198
5.3.3. Functional assays in heterologous systems: pairing, signalling patterns, and ligand responsiveness	199
5.4. Future perspectives	202
6. Conclusions	205
REFERENCES	211
Annex 1. Experimental design and complementary data of previous studies analysed in this thesis.	255
Annex 2. Supplementary figures	259
Annex 3. Supplementary tables	274