



UNITED
NATIONS

EP

UNEP/MED WG.474/6



UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

UNEP

29 May 2019
Original: English

Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries
Rome, Italy, 21 May 2019

**Report of the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON),
Biodiversity and Fisheries**

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Report of the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries

Introduction

1. In accordance to the UN Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) Programme of Work and Budget for 2018-2019 (Decision IG.23/14) adopted by the 20th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and its Protocols, the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries, in Rome, Italy, on 21 May 2019, at the Holiday Inn Rome - Eur Parco Dei Medici (Viale Castello della Magliana, 65, 00148 Rome, Italy).

Participation

2. The following Contracting Parties were represented at the meeting: Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Montenegro and Spain.
3. The Coordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and the Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre (INFO/RAC) were represented at the meeting.
4. SPA/RAC acted as the Secretariat for the meeting.
5. The full list of participants is attached as Annex I to the present report.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the meeting

6. The meeting was opened on Tuesday 21 May 2019, at 9.30 a.m. by the representatives of SPA/RAC and the host country.
7. Mr. Khalil ATTIA, Director of SPA/RAC, welcomed the participants and thanked the Government of Italy for hosting the meeting. While highlighting the relevance of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) process in the framework of the Barcelona Convention, he summarized the main steps achieved since 2008 in implementing the EcAp roadmap. He also recalled the main objectives of the meeting, that are: (i) harmonizing the monitoring protocols for the biodiversity component common indicators, and (ii) ensuring a coherent reporting of quality-assured data towards the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR).
8. SPA/RAC Director informed the participants that this CORMON meeting is organized as a follow-up to the previous CORMON meeting (Marseille, France, 12-13 February 2019) and the Meeting of Experts on the finalization of the Classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region and the Reference List of Marine and Coastal Habitat Types in the Mediterranean (Rome, Italy, 22-23 January 2019).
9. Mr. Leonardo TUNESI, representative of the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and Italian SPA/RAC Focal Point, welcomed the efforts made by SPA/RAC for the

implementation of the Barcelona Convention's Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD Protocol), in general, and the EcAp process, including the first phase of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), in particular.

Agenda item 2. Organizational matters

a) Rules of procedure

10. The meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI) would apply *mutatis mutandis* to their deliberations.

b) Election of officers

11. The meeting unanimously elected the following officers:

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| Chairperson: | Mr. Leonardo TUNESI (Italy) |
| Vice-chairpersons: | Mr. Mostafa FOU DA (Egypt) |
| | Ms. Yasmina FADLI (Algeria) |
| Rapporteur: | Ms. Milena BATAKOVIC (Montenegro) |

c) Adoption of the agenda

12. The meeting adopted its agenda on the basis of the Provisional Agenda and Provisional Annotated Agenda, including the proposed timetable, circulated in documents UNEP/MED WG.474/1 and UNEP/MED WG.474/2 Rev.2, respectively.

13. The agenda appears in Annex II to the present report.

d) Organization of work

14. The discussions were held in plenary sessions in line with the agenda. Simultaneous interpretation in English and French was provided during the meeting.

Agenda item 3. Guidance on monitoring marine benthic habitats

15. The Secretariat provided an overview of the Decision IG.23/6 (COP 20) on the report concerning the status of the Mediterranean Sea quality in 2017 (MED QSR 2017: Mediterranean Quality Status Report 2017). It brought to the attention of the participants the background and context of the elaboration of the monitoring guidelines, during this first phase of the IMAP implementation, taking into account a number of technical documents elaborated in the framework of the MAP regional Action Plans on marine vegetation, coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea, and dark habitats.

16. The Secretariat presented the document UNEP/MED WG.474/3 "*Monitoring protocols of the Ecosystem Approach Common Indicators 1 and 2 related to marine benthic habitats*", including guidelines on how to monitor marine vegetation, coralligenous and other calcareous bioconstructions, and dark

habitats. These guidelines were developed in order to better assist countries in the implementation of their national IMAP, as well as to harmonize and standardize monitoring and assessment methods related to the agreed common indicators of marine benthic habitats (Ecological Objective EO1).

17. The Secretariat introduced the information document UNEP/MED WG.474/Inf.3 including the EcAp monitoring protocols for common indicators 3, 4, 5, and 6 related to marine mammals, sea turtles, seabirds and non-indigenous species, respectively.

18. The Secretariat finally introduced the information document UNEP/MED WG.474/Inf.4 on the sub-regional monitoring plan for non-indigenous species for the Eastern Mediterranean countries, which is the outcome of the joint GFCM-UN Environment/MAP sub-regional pilot study for the Eastern Mediterranean for non-indigenous species in relation to Fisheries.

19. Many participants welcomed the work done and found it relevant for their efforts to further implement the IMAP at national and sub-regional levels. In the meantime, the meeting provided useful comments and recommendations towards the enhancement of the document through reflecting the most recent advances made by scientific research in terms of marine benthic habitats monitoring, and considering countries specificities in terms of policy and regulatory aspects, as well as in terms of ecological characteristics.

20. The meeting raised a few issues mainly on (i) satellite images types and availability of remote sensing data sets for countries, (ii) assessing the use of the lower limit depth as additional information for the improvement of the marine vegetation indicator, (iii) potential threats, (iv) limits and advantages of the proposed methods for coralligenous habitats monitoring, and (v) the need to use non-destructive monitoring methods for such habitats.

21. The Secretariat took note of the amendments raised by the participants and requested the delegates to provide their written comments, if any, by May 25th, 2019, at the latest.

22. The specific comments and amendments made during the meeting, as well the possible written comments, will be reflected in the final version of the guidance document, that will be submitted to the 14th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Portorož, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019) for endorsement.

23. The representatives of two countries strongly reiterated the need to re-establish the informal Online Expert Group on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species (“Biodiversity Working Group”). In that regard, the meeting requested the Secretariat to develop a concept note, including process and timeline, for the establishment of this online Biodiversity Working Group, to be submitted to the forthcoming EcAp Coordination Group meeting (Athens, Greece, 8 September 2019).

24. Under this agenda item, the UNEP/MAP representative made a presentation on cross-cutting issues and scale of assessment. The meeting took note of the presented aspects and asked the Secretariat to share the PowerPoint presentation with the participants.

25. The conclusions and recommendations made under this agenda item appear in Annex III to this report.

Agenda item 4. Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators

26. INFO/RAC representatives introduced the document UNEP/MED WG.474/4 containing an updated version of Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected IMAP Common Indicators (CI): CI1 and CI2 related to marine habitats, and CI6 related to non-indigenous species, after having integrated the comments made by the Contracting Parties during the first CORMON meeting of the 2018-2019 biennium (Marseille, France, 12-13 February 2019).

27. The meeting reviewed the IMAP Data Standards and Data Dictionaries and provided concrete proposals and recommendations towards the development of the IMAP Information System.

28. One representative commented the IMAP Data Standards and Data Dictionaries and drew attention on the need to refer to official national institutions when submitting quality assured data. In this respect, the meeting suggested that National IMAP Committees could be established to act as steering committees for the IMAP implementation at countries level, including for data compilation and reporting.

29. The meeting also provided comments that will serve to revise and timely finalize the presented document for consideration by the 14th Meeting of SPA/BD thematic Focal Points (Portorož, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019).

30. The meeting detailed conclusions and recommendations issued under this agenda item appear in Annex III to this report.

Agenda item 5. Data management policy

31. INFO/RAC representatives introduced the document UNEP/MED WG.474/5 Rev.1 containing the MAP Data management policy.

32. The meeting took note of the document on the MAP Data Management Policy and the steps for its submission for adoption by COP 21 (Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019).

Agenda item 6. Any other business

33. No other matters were raised for discussion.

Agenda item 7. Conclusions and recommendations

34. The meeting reviewed, commented and approved the draft Conclusions and Recommendations as amended, attached as Annex III to the present report.

Agenda item 8. Closure of the meeting

35. After the expression of usual courtesies, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 21 May 2019.

Annex I
List of participants

List of participants

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES REPRESENTANTS DES PARTIES CONTRACTANTES

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| ALBANIA / ALBANIE | Mr. Rezart KAPEDANI E-mail: r.kapedani@gmail.com |
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**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME - COORDINATING UNIT AND
COMPONENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**
**PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT - UNITÉ DE
COORDINATION ET COMPOSANTES DU PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE**

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| <p>UNEP/MAP – United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan</p> <p><i>PNUE/PAM – Programme des Nations Unies pour l'Environnement / Plan d'Action pour la Méditerranée</i></p> | <p>Ms. Jelena KNEZEVIC Monitoring and Assessment Officer E-mail: jelena.knezevic.un.org</p> |
| <p>INFO/RAC – Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre</p> <p><i>CAR/INFO – Centre d'Activités Régionales pour l'Information et la Communication</i></p> | <p>Mr. Arthur PASQUALE E-mail: arthur.pasquale@info-rac.org</p> <p>Ms. Lorenza BABBINI E-mail: lorenza.babbini@info-rac.org</p> |

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| <p>SPA/RAC – Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre</p> <p><i>CAR/ASP – Centre d'Activités Régionales pour les Aires Spécialement Protégées</i></p> <p>E-mail: car-asp@spa-rac.org</p> | <p>Mr. Khalil ATTIA Director E-mail: director@spa-rac.org</p> <p>Mr. Mehdi AISSI Project Officer - EcAp-Med E-mail: mehdi.aissi@spa-rac.org</p> <p>Ms. Asma YAHYAOUI Associate Project Officer - EcAp-Med E-mail: asma.yahyaoui@spa-rac.org</p> <p>Mr. Atef OUERGI Programme Officer - Ecosystem Conservation E-mail: atef.ouerghi@spa-rac.org</p> <p>Ms. Souha EL ASMI Programme Officer - Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) E-mail: souha.asmi@spa-rac.org</p> |
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Annex II
Agenda of the meeting

Agenda

- Agenda item 1.** Opening of the meeting
- Agenda item 2.** Organizational matters
a) Rules of procedure
b) Election of officers
c) Adoption of the agenda
d) Organization of work
- Agenda item 3.** Guidance on monitoring marine benthic habitats (common indicators 1 and 2)
- Agenda item 4.** Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators
- Agenda item 5.** Data management policy
- Agenda item 6.** Any other business
- Agenda item 7.** Conclusions and recommendations
- Agenda item 8.** Closure of the meeting

Annex III
Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

Following the review and discussions of all agenda items, and as a follow-up to previous CORMON conclusions and recommendations (Marseille, France, 12-13 February 2019), the CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (“the Meeting”), held in Rome, Italy, on 21 May 2019, agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

Agenda item 3. Guidance on monitoring marine benthic habitats

1. The Meeting welcomed the document on “Monitoring protocols of the ecosystem approach common indicators 1 and 2 related to marine benthic habitats” (UNEP/MED WG.474/3) and agreed to provide the Secretariat with their written comments and suggestions, if any, by 25 May 2019, at the latest.

2. The Meeting reviewed the marine benthic habitats monitoring protocols and provided specific comments and amendments that will be reflected in the final version of the guidance document that will be submitted to the 14th SPA/BD Focal Points meeting (Portorož, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019) for endorsement. The main comments raised are related to:

- Guideline for monitoring marine vegetation: The meeting mainly raised comments on (i) satellite images types and availability of remote sensing data sets for countries, and (ii) assessing the use of the lower limit depth as additional information for improvement of the indicator.
- Guideline for monitoring coralligenous and other calcareous bioconstructions: The meeting raised comments mainly on (i) potential threats, and (ii) limits and advantages of the proposed methods. They also stressed the need to use non-destructive monitoring methods.

3. The Meeting recommended to take into consideration the blue carbon concept in the IMAP, or the possibility of estimating the production of carbon produced by *Posidonia oceanica* (epigean and hypogean production) at the Mediterranean Basin scale. This would serve to elaborate new information on this topic for the Mediterranean and to use it as a new element to outline the importance of the role of *Posidonia* meadows and ask for the enforcement of protection measures, and to have a new element to evaluate the effects of climate change.

4. Concerning the identification of the most appropriate survey tools at national level, based on the provided guidance, the Meeting recommended to the Secretariat to consider the specificities of the countries in terms of policy and regulatory aspects, as well as in terms of ecological characteristics.

5. The Meeting reiterated its request to the Secretariat to re-establish the informal Online Expert Group on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species (“Biodiversity Working Group”). To this end, the Secretariat will develop a concept note, including process and timeline, for the establishment of this online Biodiversity Working Group, to be submitted to the forthcoming EcAp Coordination Group meeting (Athens, Greece, 8 September 2019).

6. The Meeting also requested the Secretariat to encourage regional and sub-regional cooperation and exchange of best practices, in particular through tools sharing, knowledge transfer and specific training sessions on data collection and processing.

7. Concerning the presentation made by the UNEP/MAP representative on cross-cutting issues and scale of assessment, the Meeting took note of the presented aspects and asked the Secretariat to share the PowerPoint presentation with the participants.

Agenda item 4. Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators

8. The representative of INFO/RAC presented the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators reviewed after the discussions of the CORMON meeting of Marseille (February 2019). The meeting agreed to submit this document for endorsement by the 14th SPA/BD Focal Points meeting (Portorož, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019).

9. The representative of INFO/RAC informed the Meeting that for the purpose of testing the pilot IMAP information system platform related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species cluster, three voluntary countries will be invited, in close consultation with SPA/RAC.

10. The Meeting highlighted the importance of the validation at national level prior to uploading data on the IMAP information system platform.

11. Concerning quality assured data, the Meeting suggested that in each country a National IMAP Committee, could be established to act as a steering committee for the implementation phases, including data compilation and reporting, as provided for by the “Guidelines for the preparation of the country specific EcAp monitoring programme for biodiversity and NIS” (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.430/Inf.3).

12. The Meeting recommended to ensure that the data collected concerning commercially important non-indigenous species in the framework of the IMAP Common Indicators, should be catalogued under both EO2 and EO3.

Agenda item 5. Data management policy

13. After the brief presentation made by the representative of INFO/RAC, the meeting took note of the document on the MAP Data management policy and the steps for its submission for adoption by COP 21 (Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019).