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**Agenda Item 7: Common Indicator 24 (EO10 Marine Litter): Progress and sharing national experience on CI 24 monitoring and assessment - Marine turtles Ingestion and Entanglement**

**Update on the progress made related to Common Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by marine organisms and in the number of individuals**

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SPA/RAC  
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## Note by the Secretariat

The Contracting Parties (CP) to the Barcelona Convention adopted (CoP 19, Athens 2016) the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) (Decision IG.22/7) within the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) process. The IMAP requirements focus on agreed Ecological Objectives (EOs) and their related common indicators.

IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10), having a focus on Marine Litter encompasses 4 Common Indicators. The implementation of IMAP EO10 has advanced significantly since 2016, resulting in national IMAP-based monitoring programmes, development of assessment criteria, and most importantly the preparation of dedicated chapters in the framework of the 2017 and 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Reports (MED QSR).

Based on the experience gained from IMAP implementation at national, sub-regional and regional levels, and on the assessment finding of the 2023 MED QSR (being also based on the findings of the 2017 MED QSR); the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, through Decision IG.26/3 of COP23, called for revising Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and IMAP, and in particular the enhancement of IMAP implementation and strengthening of national monitoring and assessment capacities, with the view to delivering and reporting quality assured data and undertake reliable related assessments.

Building on this process, Decision IG.27/6 adopted at COP 24 approves the MAP EcAp Policy and Roadmap 2026–2035. The Policy and Roadmap set out six implementation steps, ecological and operational objectives, indicators, definitions of Good Environmental Status (GES) and related targets, the timeline, and the governance framework guiding the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp). The Decision also approves the third cycle of IMAP, based on an eight-year cycle, and endorses the assessment criteria, while noting their evolving nature in line with the availability of quality-assured data and progress towards GES.

In this regard, an update on the progress made related to Common Indicator 24: *Trends in the amount of litter ingested by marine organisms and in the number of individuals entangled in marine litter* is presented in this document.

This document is submitted to the present CORMON Biodiversity and Fisheries for information

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## **Update on the progress made related to Common Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by marine organisms and in the number of individuals entangled in marine litter**

### **1. Introduction**

1. The Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) adopted in 2016 (Decision IG.22/7 – COP19) describes the strategy, themes, and products that the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are aiming to deliver, through collaborative efforts, over the second cycle (2016 – 2021) of the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Process, and the undergoing third cycle (2026 – 2035), in order to assess the status of the Mediterranean sea and coast, as a basis for further and/or strengthened measures.

2. The 10th Ecological Objective (EO10) of IMAP has a focus on Marine Litter, having the following outline (Decision IG.27/6):

- Common Indicator 22 (CI22): Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (EO10);
- Common Indicator 23 (CI23): Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and on the seafloor (EO10);
- Common Indicator 24 (CI24): Trends in the amount of litter ingested by marine organisms and in the number of individuals entangled in marine litter (EO10); and
- Common Indicator 28: Trends in the amount of litter coming from riverine sources

### **2. Updates and Developments with regards to Monitoring and Assessment of IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10) - Marine Litter**

3. All Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention since 2016 established national IMAP-based monitoring programmes in relation to the two common indicators 22, and 23 (in particular on beach macro-litter, seafloor macro-litter, and floating microplastics). Contracting Parties are invited to include common indicator 24 related to ingestion and entanglement of marine litter from sea turtles in their monitoring programmes and to undertake pilot monitoring activities in this regard. Riverine litter is considered as part of IMAP EO10, and Contracting parties have been encouraged to apply the approved region-wide Guidelines for Monitoring Riverine inputs of Marine Litter.

4. Guidance Factsheets were prepared in 2017 for Common Indicators 22, 23 and 24 of IMAP EO10 Marine Litter (UNEP/MED WG.439/121). The guidance factsheet for Common Indicator 24 is currently under review and being updated by UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC and MEDPOL.

5. Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD) have been developed and agreed and are operational at IMAP InfoSystem at the level of the region for the 2 common indicators CI22 and CI23 (i.e., beach macro-litter, seafloor macro-litter, and floating microplastics) (UNEP/MED WG.473/82). Moreover, DS-DD have been agreed and are operational also for IMAP CI24 (UNEP/MED WG.534/033).

6. Threshold Values (TV<sup>4</sup>) and updated Baseline Values (BV) have been agreed and developed for three IMAP EO10 Common Indicators (CIs, 22, 23 and 24).

### **3. The process of upgrading IMAP EO10 Indicator 24 from Candidate to Common**

7. Regarding ingestion and entanglement of marine litter from biota, in particular from sea turtles (Common Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by marine organisms and in the number of individuals entangled in marine litter), a number of important developments have been carried out by

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting of the MED POL Focal Points (Rome, Italy, 29-31 May 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Meeting of MED POL Focal Points (Istanbul, Turkey, 29-31 April 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Marine Litter Monitoring (Videoconference, 31 May 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Threshold values (TV) for IMAP EO10 (Marine Litter) are subject to update for the third iteration of the MED QSR

UNEP/MAP SPA/RAC and MED POL since 2016, with important support provided by the EU-funded Marine Litter MED Projects I (2016-2019), II (2020-2023) and Marine Litter MED PIUS (2024-2017).

8. A report identifying the most representative species for assessing the amount of marine litter ingested by or entangling marine species was prepared in 2017. This report was developed following productive discussions and consultations with regional institutions and experts. It was subsequently reviewed and endorsed during several institutional UNEP/MAP meetings<sup>5</sup>. While a short list of species was elaborated and agreed, *Caretta caretta*, commonly found in the Mediterranean, was identified as the target species where efforts should focus on.

9. Therefore, a protocol for monitoring interactions between marine litter and marine turtles (i.e., ingestion and entanglement) and for harmonizing data collection methods for monitoring and assessment purposes was successfully developed in collaboration with the EU-funded INDICIT-I project. The protocol has been the subject of three training sessions: two conducted in the framework of Marine Litter MED I (Naples in July 2017, and Monastir in November 2018), and a third carried out as part of the implementation of Marine Litter Med Plus (Monastir in November 2025). These training sessions aimed to reinforce national capacities and provide tools for technicians, veterinarians and scientists involved in sea turtle stranding networks and the monitoring of interaction between marine debris and sea turtles (ingestion and entanglement) in the Mediterranean.

10. Meanwhile, a regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Common Indicator 24 was developed in 2019, which includes: (a) an elaboration of the tools required to collect and record standardised data on litter ingestion by sea turtles; (b) a review of the existing networks and methods for collecting specimens, processing samples, and collecting and analysing the data; (c) an evaluation of the current impact of litter on sea turtles, as well as the indicator criteria and proposed methods to assess Good Ecological Status (GES) targets; and (d) an assessment of the implementation costs and recommendations to help operationalize a monitoring programme.

11. Indeed, the regional operational strategy served as a framework and benchmark document for the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. It has guided the Marine Litter MED II beneficiary's countries (Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia) and the Marine Litter MED Plus beneficiary countries (Algeria<sup>6</sup>, Egypt and Libya) in developing their national monitoring programmes as well in reinforcing their national stranding networks and facilitating the organization of several awareness raising campaigns. The national monitoring programmes in Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco were developed and endorsed at national level within the framework of the Marine Litter MED II in 2021 (Tunisia and Lebanon) and 2022 (Morocco), while those for Egypt and Libya, the monitoring programmes were developed and endorsed as part of the Marine Litter Med Plus Project in 2026.

12. National teams and stakeholders involved in monitoring IMAP Common Indicator 24 have benefited from national capacity-building and exchange workshops<sup>7</sup>. These workshops also facilitated constructive dialogue, paving the way for future collaborations at national level.

13. As part of the Marine Litter Med II project, the final technical reports for the three beneficiaries

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<sup>5</sup> MED POL Focal Points (Rome, Italy, 29-31 May 2017); 6th EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 11 Sept.2017); CorMon Biodiversity and Fisheries (Marseille, France, 12-13 Feb. 2019); Joint Meeting of the CorMon Marine Litter and ENI-SEIS II Assessment of Horizon 2020/National Action Plans of Waste Indicators (Podgorica, Montenegro, April 2019); MED POL Focal Points (Istanbul, Turkey, 29-31 May 2019); 14th Meeting of SPA/BD Thematic Focal Points (Portoroz, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019); 7th EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 9 Sept.2019).

<sup>6</sup> The national monitoring programme for IMAP Common Indicator 24 in Algeria is currently under review by the SPA/BD focal point and national authorities.

<sup>7</sup> Subregional training on marine turtle monitoring and conservation (Lampedusa, Italy, 15–20 November 2021); national training on testing the protocol for monitoring interactions between marine litter and marine turtles (Tunisia, 21–22 December 2021); and national training workshops on the monitoring of interactions between marine litter and marine turtles, held in Lebanon (Tyre Coast Nature Reserve, 7, 15 and 17 September 2022; and 15–20 June 2023), Morocco (M'diq, 25 September 2023; Fnideq, 18 November 2023; and Belyounech, 19 November 2023), Egypt (Marine Turtle Rescue Centre, Ashtoum El-Gamil Protected Area, Port Said, January 2026), and Libya (Omar Al-Mukhtar University, eastern Libya, 13 December 2025; and Besida Civil Society Organization, western Libya, 25 December 2025).

countries (i.e., Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco<sup>8</sup>) reflecting the lessons learnt and gained experience from the implementation of the pilot national monitoring programmes were delivered in December 2023 and validated by SPA/RAC. These reports include an analysis of the data collected, which have been stored in the respective IMAP InfoSystem Modules (excel files), deriving from stranded/entangled marine turtles in line with the approved regional protocol. In summary:

- a. 139 stranded sea turtles' necropsies were completed by TCNR (Lebanon) during 2022-2023, and 356 ingested plastic items (divided into five plastics categories) were recorded, with a total dry weight of 102 gr;
- b. 65 stranded sea turtles' necropsies were completed by the rescue center of Monastir (Tunisia) and 15 loggerhead turtles were entangled in debris or showed signs/scars of entanglement. A total of 99 ingested plastic items were recorded.

All generated data have been integrated into the IMAP InfoSystem by the responsible national officer in each country.

14. Moreover, the Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DS) for IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10) Common Indicator 24 have been developed by MED POL, SPA/RAC and InfoRAC, already in 2022 and were reviewed and approved during the CORMON Marine Litter Meetings held on 31 May 2022 (Videoconference) and on 3 March 2023 (Athens, Greece). The approved Document was edited to meet the requirements of the IMAP InfoSystem, several online consultation meetings were organized throughout the year (2023) between MED POL, SPA/RAC and InfoRAC, to enable the preparation of the relevant Module (excel reporting template), which will enable the uploading of the collected data.

15. Strong synergies have been established with the EU-funded projects INDICIT I and II as well as with the INTERREG-MED Plastics Busters MPA Project regarding the elaboration of update Baseline Values (BV) and the establishment of Threshold Values (TV) for IMAP Common Indicator 24. Both consortia have shared with UNEP/MAP an important amount of data required for this exercise. A relevant inventory has been prepared supplemented by national data from Lebanon and Tunisia.

16. Further to the collection of data and the preparation of the data inventory, a proposal for updating the 2016 BV and establishing TV for IMAP Common Indicator 24 was completed. The first Iteration was submitted and reviewed during the CORMON Marine Litter Meeting (online, 29 January 2025; UNEP/MED WG.601/4). A second review iteration took place during the Joint CORMON Pollution Marine Litter Meeting (27 - 28 May 2025, Anavyssos, Greece; UNEP/MED WG.626/7). The updated document was subsequently submitted for the MED POL Focal Points meeting (17-19 June 2025, Athens; Greece, WG.627/Inf.10). The revised values which Contracting parties are encouraged to apply (Decision IG.27/6, COP 24, Cairo, December 2025) are as follows:

<b>IMAP Common Indicator 24</b>	<b>Updated BV (2025)</b>	<b>Proposed TV (2025)</b>
<b>Common Indicator 24 (Ingestion)</b>	0.07 g dry weight ML ingested	0.01 g dry weight ML ingested
<b>Common Indicator 24 (Entanglement)</b>	35% affected sample	9% affected sample

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the work conducted in Morocco, it mainly focused on the preparation of the national Monitoring Programme for IMAP Cand. Indicator 24, including: (a) an analysis and preparation of an inventory of existing data; (b) the status of the stranded turtles (2020-2022) along the Moroccan-Mediterranean coast; and (c) the organization of exchanges and awareness workshops to inform the local community about the impact of marine debris on sea turtles and their involvement within the collection of the relevant data. Moreover, one pilot necropsy was completed on a specimen which was collected during the study period (September-December 2023).