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Agenda Item 7: Status of implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Roadmap

7.1. Implementation of the second phase (2019-2021) of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP - Biodiversity and nonindigenous species) in the framework of the EcAp Roadmap

Implementation of the second phase (2019-2021) of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP - Biodiversity and non-indigenous species) in the framework of the EcAp Roadmap

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1. Introduction

1. The 19th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 19) agreed on the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria which set, in its Decision IG.22/7, a specific list of 27 common indicators (CIs) and Good Environmental Status (GES) targets and principles of an integrated Mediterranean Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

2. The UNEP/MAP published the first assessment in the publication '2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2017 MED QSR)'. This included information on the status of the marine and coastal environment in relation to GES and addressed most of the Ecological Objectives (EO) and their agreed IMAP CIs.

3. The exercise resulted in recognizing (in IG.23/6, COP 20, Albania 2017) several challenges that are still to be addressed on the path to the 2023 MED QSR:

- (i) harmonization and standardization of IMAP monitoring and assessment methods;
- (ii) improvement of availability and ensuring of long time-series, quality-assured data to monitor the trends in the status of the marine environment;
- (iii) improvement in the availability of the synchronized datasets for the state of the marine environment assessment, including the use of data stored in other databases where some of the Mediterranean countries regularly contribute; and
- (iv) improvement of data accessibility with the view to improving knowledge on the Mediterranean marine environment and ensuring that the Info-MAP System is operational and continuously upgraded. This is important to accommodate data submissions for all the IMAP CIs.

4. To operationalize the implementation of the above-mentioned Decision (IG.23/6), UNEP/MAP prepared a roadmap for the next MED QSR report in 2023 which aims to deliver the following main outputs:

- Integrated assessment of GES through the analysis of inter-actions between sectors, activities, pressures, as well as the defining of mapping process for IMAP CIs;
- Scales of monitoring assessment and reporting for all IMAP CIs clustered per Ecological Objectives proposed (2021-2022), and as per assessment criteria/ thresholds/ baseline values proposed/ updated for IMAP CIs (2020-2021);
- Full implementation of national IMAPs throughout the Mediterranean supported through country capacity building and technical assistance delivered in the form of training workshops in areas of common capacity needs and knowledge gaps (2019-2021); and
- Application of monitoring protocols, data quality assurance and quality control through IMAP data and information policy and the operational IMAP Info System for reporting data;

5. During the initial phase of the IMAP implementation (2016-2019), the Contracting Parties have made serious efforts towards the design of their respective national monitoring programmes on biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2) and addressing to the extent possible all IMAP clusters.

6. The present report describes the activities made by the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) in assisting the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, during the second phase of IMAP, in aligning the current monitoring activities, developed under the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) and the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAP BIO) with the new requirements of the IMAP including, in particular, the above-outlined outputs highlighted in the MED QSR Decision related to biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2).

7. The appendixes in the present document were discussed, as appropriate, with the informal Online Working Group and the COMON for approval.

2. Overview of the national activities on IMAP implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species

8. Work is ongoing by all the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to progress on national implementation of IMAP, with the support of SPA/RAC, and building on the existing relevant monitoring programmes previously established under the SPA/BD Protocol, and on lessons learnt from other regional and/or global processes.

9. These activities are developed within the SPA/RAC Programme of Work (2020-2021) and with the support of the following two projects:

- Project “Towards achieving the Good Environmental Status of the Mediterranean Sea and coast through an ecologically representative and efficiently managed and monitored network of Marine Protected Areas” (hereafter referred to as IMAP-MPA project), funded by European Union (EU) – the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and the Green MED III: ENI South regional environment and water programme 2018-2022 financial instrument; and
- Project “Support to Efficient Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach-based Integrated Monitoring and Assessment of the Mediterranean Sea and Coasts and to delivery of data-based 2023 Quality Status Report in synergy with the EU MSFD (hereafter referred to as EcAp-MED III)”, funded by the European Union (EU) – Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV).

10. These projects aim to address challenges related to the second phase of the IMAP (2019-2021), with a particular focus on the integration aspect of national IMAP implementation. Indeed, priorities is given to (i) the enhancement of the level of capacity in each country to facilitate the implementation of the system and the report of reliable data for the IMAP CIs (ii) the support to the implementation of a harmonized monitoring and assessment of IMAP CIs of the three clusters; and (iii) the contribution to the preparation and the delivery of the 2023 MED QSR, in line with the agreed roadmap milestones at national, sub-regional and regional levels.

11. SPA/RAC followed-up on the existing country specific capacity assessments to further the lessons learnt during the implementation of the EU funded EcAp-MED II Project (2015-2018). This includes reference to all comments, recommendations, and requests made by the Contracting Parties related to their capacity needs. All these information was recorded systematically during the trainings organized in the previous SPA/RAC Programme of Work of 2017-2018 and in the UNEP/MAP Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) relevant meetings (i.e., CORMONs, EcAp Coordination Group).

12. The Southern Mediterranean countries are supported to implement monitoring programmes in selected sites (marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and high-pressure areas). They are supported to apply common and harmonized monitoring methodologies. Best practices and lessons learnt are shared across countries at sub-regional and regional levels and respective countries capacities enhanced.

13. Several bilateral coordination meetings with national Focal Points and stakeholders, as appropriate, have been organized by videoconference: Algeria (2 March 2021), Libya (28 October 2020), Morocco (25 February 2021), and Tunisia (7 October 2020). These meetings were dedicated to support the establishment of the National IMAP Committee, the synchronization of the activities of the various stakeholders in the implementation of IMAP and the identification of their specific needs.

14. In Egypt and Lebanon, the organization of the national meetings and the official designation of the institutional members of the national IMAP committees are still ongoing and are expected to be organized during the last quarter of 2021. Follow-up correspondences and bilateral meetings are frequently organized to support as much as possible the timely implementation of the IMAP process.

15. Finally, based on requests from countries, trainings to reinforce national capacities concerning the implementation of biodiversity/non-indigenous species monitoring protocols will be developed during the summer of 2021, in close collaboration with the concerned national authorities and international partners. These actions will specifically include dedicated trainings, country missions, 'Train the trainers', exchange of specific best-practices (possible South-South, but also North-South cooperation), and assistance in applying the monitoring protocols/policy developments in line with the national IMAPs and specific country requirements.

16. Further specific trainings on data reporting are expected to be organized in summer 2022, in a new and innovative way, aiming at strengthening national capacities to report data into the UNEP/MAP platforms towards the 2023 MED QSR. Each Contracting Party will use its own quality assured data recorded during the implementation of the national IMAP.

3. Overview of the regional activities on IMAP implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species

17. The informal Online Working Groups to the CORMONs, as well as the EcAp Coordination Group Meetings, have been established by UNEP/MAP specifically to coordinate and provide guidance for the implementation of IMAP at all levels including on cross cutting issues. The outcomes and recommendations of these meetings are crucial for the success of IMAP implementation and the delivery of the 2023 MED QSR. These instances are with a fundamental support to reach proposed EcAp/IMAP objectives and priorities.

18. In line with the IMAP timeline, SPA/RAC co-organized the integrated Meetings of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on IMAP Implementation (CORMONs) (Videoconference, 1-3 December 2020) and organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries (Videoconference, 10-11 June 2021) to discuss monitoring and assessment elements on common indicators related to biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2) (UNEP/MAP WG502/inf.12 and UNEP/MAP WG.502/inf.13).

19. Following the recommendations of the Integrated CORMON meetings (December 2020), the informal thematic Online Working Groups (OWGs) were established to provide important scientific feedback and technical support to the IMAP implementation at regional/sub-regional level, in particular on the aspects related to development of methodologies, assessment, scales, integration, protocols and guidelines in line with the approved 2020-2021 Programme of Work.

20. These OWGs were operational for the following EOs/CIs: EO1 CI 3,4 and 5 related to marine turtles (29 March 2021); marine mammals (7 April 2021); and sea birds (16 April 2021) and EO2 CI6 related to non-indigenous species (20 April 2021). OWG on habitats (EO1 CI 1 and 2) is already established and meetings are scheduled during the third quarter of 2021.

21. Cross cutting issues, integration modalities between the IMAP clusters at national level are ongoing. Regional experts/consultants have been onboard to work and elaborate the scales of monitoring and assessment, assessment criteria and threshold and baseline values for marine mammals and sea turtles (IMAP EO1, CIs 3-4-5) since September 2020. During the first quarter of 2021, additional experts were recruited for sea birds (IMAP EO1, CIs 3-4-5), habitats (IMAP EO1, CIs 1-2) and non-indigenous species (IMAP EO1, CI6).

22. Decision IG.23/6 on the 2017 MED QSR (COP 20, Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017) recommended, as general directions towards a successful 2023 MED QSR, the harmonization and standardization of monitoring and assessment methods of the agreed common indicators.

23. The monitoring protocols on habitats, species and non-indigenous species were previously endorsed by the 14th meeting of the SPA/BD thematic Focal points (Portoroz, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019) and the 7th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 9 September 2019). Minor adjustment needs of monitoring parameters on benthic habitats, i.e. marine vegetation and coralligenous and other calcareous bioconstructions, were highlighted. Consequently, the Meeting requested the Secretariat to bring them to the attention of respective CORMONs in 2020 and 2021.

24. SPA/RAC updated the monitoring protocols on benthic Habitats, which provide detailed methodologies and protocols for monitoring benthic habitats, that can be helpful to national managers and decision makers (e.g., environmental authority representatives, researchers, Marine Protected Area (MPA)'s management unit(s)) for implementing a monitoring programme on CI 1 and CI 2, on yearly basis, in at least two monitoring areas, one in a low pressure area (e.g. Marine Protected Area/Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)), or in sites of high conservation relevance (e.g., Natura 2000 sites), and one in a high pressure area due to human activity (see Appendix A).

25. The first drafts of the deliverables on scales of monitoring and assessment, assessment criteria and threshold and baseline values on marine mammals, sea turtles and non-indigenous species have been prepared and were reviewed and discussed by the informal OWGs and the CORMON (see Appendixes B, C and E).

26. Guidance factsheet on non-indigenous species (IMAP EO2, CI6) were revised considering the "Study on trends and outlook of marine pollution from ships and activities and of maritime traffic and offshore activities in the Mediterranean". The revision process also has been based on the conclusions of the 2017 MED QSR, and other documents of ongoing processes (in particular on multi-scale approach for monitoring and assessment and the definition of "significant acute pollution" events under the Bonn Agreement) provided by the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the

Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC). The revised Guidance Factsheet of CI6 were reviewed by the OWG and the CORMONs (see Appendix D).

27. The elaboration of baseline for non-indigenous species at national, sub-regional and regional levels is ongoing considering the results of similar work made in the framework of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The National non-indigenous species' inventories were already received from the Contracting Parties and are being reviewed and validated in close collaboration with the national experts designated by the Contracting Parties (see Appendix F).

28. In May 2017, the European Commission endorsed the Decision on GES of marine waters, which contains a number of criteria and methodological standards for determining GES, in relation to the 11 descriptors of GES laid down in Annex I of the MSFD - Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848. This Decision also contains specifications and standardized methods for monitoring and assessing marine waters. SPA/RAC developed a comparative analysis of the methodology applied for the development of the 2017 MED QSR and the corresponding elements of the revised GES Decision 2017/848/EU to identify concrete steps towards enhancing synergies between IMAP and MSFD (UNEP/MED WG.502/inf.10).

29. The Regional Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges (IMAP Best Practices Meeting, Rome, Italy, 10-12 July 2018) requested the Secretariat to more in-depth discussion on the better interlinkages between activities/pressure/impacts and clarification of definition of impacts noting that such a definition should primarily focus on biodiversity.

30. SPA/RAC reviewed the suitable tools to show the environmental status of the biodiversity EOs across the Mediterranean Sea and Coasts, and pressures/impacts/state interactions and discussed it during the CORMONs (UNEP/MED WG502/inf.11).

The appendixes in the present document were discussed, as appropriate, with the informal Online Working Group and were submitted to the COMON meeting (10-11 June 2021) for consideration, discussion and agreement on their submission to this Meeting, and as appropriate to the EcAp Coordination Group and the MAP Focal Points meetings.

Revised version of these appendixes taking into consideration the comments highlighted during the CORMON meeting will be available before the present Meeting.

Appendixes

- Appendix A: Update of Monitoring Protocols on Benthic Habitats
- Appendix B: Monitoring and Assessment Scales, Assessment Criteria, Thresholds and Baseline Values for the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals
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