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Mediterranean Action Plan
Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat
BP 337 – 1080 Tunis Cedex, TUNISIA
E-mail: car-asp@rac-spa.org

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REPORT ON ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY RAC/SPA SINCE THE SEVENTH MEETING OF FOCAL POINTS FOR SPAS (MARCH 2005 – MARCH 2007)

I. INTRODUCTION

The present report was drafted by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) to inform the Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) at their Eighth Meeting (Palermo, 6-9 June 2007) about the activities carried out by RAC/SPA since the Seventh Meeting. The report covers the period from March 2005 to April 2007. As well as information on RAC/SPA's activities, the document includes recommendations that will be proposed to the coming MAP and Contracting Parties' Meetings of Focal Points for the biennium 2008-2009.

In 2003 the Contracting Parties adopted the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAP BIO). Its basic aim was to enable the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD), a Protocol which governs all RAC/SPA's activities, to be implemented.

As a result of the recommendation made to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) at the Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting of Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, 2005), that SAP BIO be further integrated within its activities programme, the mode of presenting the activities report was adapted to suit this approach.

Before the Centre's activities were presented, a survey was done on all the member bodies of the SAP BIO Advisory Committee to see how far this programme was being implemented. RAC/SPA's other activities for the period between the Meetings are then described in four sections. These sections deal respectively with Specially Protected Areas, Action Plans, crossover activities (data management, transfer of knowledge) and other activities. The recommendations and the work programme suggested for the coming biennium appear in a way that takes greater account of SAP BIO priorities.

II. STATE OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION (SAP BIO)

II.1. Development of implementation arrangements, partnerships and activities for SAP BIO activation

II.1.1. SAP BIO Advisory Committee re-launch

The SAP BIO Advisory Committee was re-launched in a first meeting held on 19 April 2006 at CITET (International Centre for Environment Technologies of Tunis) premises in Tunis (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.291/5). A further meeting was held on 1 March 2007 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.309/5). The reports of both meetings were transmitted to the Parties.

The SAP BIO Advisory Committee is a very important coordination body for environmental actions in the Mediterranean region. Its reactivation has also been acknowledged by certain donor agencies, which see in its existence the possibility to amplify synergies, avoid overlapping of activities and properly address the allocation of economic resources to develop conservation actions in the region by multiple actors.

Aimed to optimize the opportunities offered in that direction by the existence of the committee, the second Meeting agreed -among others- the preparation of a synopsis to the Parties regarding the state of the art of SAP BIO implementation and planned actions by the committee member organizations (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.3). Another important action was the development of an operational plan to facilitate the implementation of SAP BIO, whose outline is presented in document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/5.

II.1.2. Information and Assistance to countries to start the implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs)

A meeting of SAP BIO National Correspondents was organised to inform, discuss and get inputs on the actions being carried out with regard to SAP BIO. The meeting was held in Alicante, Spain, on 12-13 May 2006 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.292/4). Representatives from the following Contracting Parties attended the Meeting: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Spain, Slovenia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.

The above-mentioned meeting defined and provisionally adopted the Proposed Mandate for the National Correspondents during the implementation phase of SAP BIO. The proposal is presented in Annex III of document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.292/4, to be discussed by the SPA Focal Points.

Similarly, information memoranda were periodically sent by RAC/SPA to SPA Focal Points and National Correspondents to keep them informed on the progress of activities and get eventual feedback from them, allowing a much needed more fluent information exchange than the one provided by biannual reporting.

Several Parties which requested RAC/SPA involvement were supported to start implementation of some of their NAPs (details on such activities are recounted in the sections below): a seal and turtle survey in the coastal area of Albania and a seal survey in the west coast of Algeria are in line with their NAPs prepared within the SAP BIO Programme; support granted to Libya aiming at implementing NAPs such as the ones on birds and turtles, identifying sites of conservation interest along the Libyan coast and setting up a programme for establishing a representative network of MPAs; support agreed with Montenegro, to be promptly started, regarding identification and creation of priority protected areas is in the same line of action.

Following needs identified during the Meeting of National Correspondents held in May 2006, a team of experts was identified to prepare and implement in 2007 a seminar on Logical Framework Approach and Project Cycle, to assist countries to prepare project requests for their NAPs and other national and sub-regional priorities. The seminar was planned for spring 2007 with the participation of officers-trainees from all the Parties. Upon advice by MAP, this activity was postponed without a concrete date being defined yet.

II.1.3. Regional assessments

To facilitate the development of implementation arrangements and partnerships, an assessment of financial sources and networking partners for coastal-marine protected areas in the Mediterranean was made (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.292/Inf.5). Another assessment was undertaken on Mediterranean countries' needs for legal, policy and institutional reforms to strengthen the management of existing marine protected areas (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.309/Inf.5). Technical reforms' needed at regional and country tailored level have emerged from this study.

II.2. Preparation of a full size project proposal in the frame of a PDF-B project

The preparation through a project PDF-B of a full sized GEF project proposal regarding biodiversity by RAC/SPA, together with its partners, FAO and WWF MedPO, for the "Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem" was finalised. The proposal focused on marine protected areas, fisheries resources preservation and legal reforms needed to achieve the above. RAC/SPA developed together with WWF a proposal section of a full sized PDF to create and develop priority protected areas and adequate capacity building support for that purpose. Actions to pursue an ecosystem approach to fisheries were developed by FAO and GFCM.

RAC/SPA acted as official coordinator, on behalf of MAP, between WWF MedPO, MedPAN and all the consultants engaged in the preparation of the Full Sized Project proposal, including mutual reviews of others' work. All the partners met several times to achieve coherent biodiversity actions in the full project. The SAP BIO National Correspondents were kept informed throughout the elaboration process and their eventual inputs requested. Three Parties provided remarks and inputs. All of them were transmitted to the GEF project manager at MEDU.

The final biodiversity document was merged by MAP with the components by other members of the Strategic Partnership and revised from September 2006. After submission to the GEF Secretariat in Washington on the 23 of March 2006, and merging comments received from it and from DGEF/Nairobi, the December 2006 GEF Council did not include for evaluation the Mediterranean Strategic Partnership Proposal. It was postponed for the June 2007 Council. The final set of documents merging further comments was officially submitted on 26 April 2007 to the GEF Secretariat for the June 2007 GEF Council.

Conspicuous cuts in GEF support for the Mediterranean, including biodiversity are envisaged. One million dollars needed for backing biodiversity project management out of the 5 million expected is a confirmed reduction. For the rest, only amount equivalent to the RAF allocation proposed by beneficiary countries might be assigned. Action by MAP to pursue securing external funding before May 2007 for this regional SAP BIO project was urgently addressed by RAC/SPA, after consultation with the GEF project manager at MEDU.

II.3. SAP BIO implementation constraints

There were three main constraining issues regarding the implementation so far:

(i) Most efforts by RAC/SPA since the adoption of SAP BIO have concentrated on the development of a project proposal to GEF. Since the proposal is adapted to the priorities and willingness of the specific donor, several restrictions arise:

- Beneficiary Parties: Allocated to the GEF beneficiary countries, the project does not embrace many other Parties to the Barcelona Convention, while all of them have adopted the Strategic Programme.
- Embraced priorities: The GEF project addresses issues related to protected areas and related policy as well as fisheries; but many priorities of the SAP BIO are not tackled and, in addition, the ones addressed leave out many countries, so making difficult a proper fully regional approach for those topics, which is the spirit of the Barcelona Convention.
- Level of funding: Even the most optimistic level of financial assistance for this project will not suffice to support most of the investment needs of SAP BIO implementation, which are much higher.

(ii) The proper development of the entire SAP BIO through the activity of RAC/SPA and the partner organisations requires higher magnitudes of economic means and human resources than the ones presently available for such a demanding task. There are activities, such as

seven adopted MAP regional action plans (focused mostly on endangered species), which must keep being implemented through RAC/SPA in addition to the implementation of SAP BIO.

(iii) There is a need for further political implication of individual Parties on implementing the SAP BIO. The Strategic Programme needs further financial and human resources at country level, this can only be done by raising the internal political priority of the SAP BIO implementation by each Party.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALLY PROTECTED AREAS

As part of its mandate as Secretariat of the SPA/BD Protocol, RAC/SPA is responsible for managing the processes related to Protected Areas and Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs).

When the Focal Points drafted their national reports, they were asked to review the list of SPAs they had given the RAC/SPA. Actually, none had updated these since 2000. According to the data provided by the national focal points, there are now 582 SPAs. There is an important increase compared to the 123 sites notified at the end of 1995 (RAC/SPA, 1997)¹, but it should be stressed the strong heterogeneity of the structures referred under "Specially protected Areas" by the various states, just as of the risks of duplications insofar as the same geographical surface can be quoted several times because it is referred, with different surfaces in several types. A database is being crafted to enable regular easy updating of such information in the future, Nevertheless it is important to stress that the reliability and the interest of this base will depend on the care which the national Focal points will bring to check and to inform information that it contains.

Simultaneously, there was follow-up of the process of implementing SPAMIs; information concerning the introduction of management plans appears in the table 1.

Table 1 : List of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs)

Name of SPAMI	Country	Date of creation	Information on management plan
Isle of Alboran	Spain	2001	Order of 25.5.2005 adopting measures to manage SPAMIs (Official Journal of Andalusia)
Cabo de Gata-Nijar Nature Park	Spain	2001	Natural Resource Plan and Management Plan (Decree 418/1994 of 25.10.1994, Official Journal of Andalusia no. 203/1994, 22.10.1994) Agreement of 27.1.2004 adopting the Sustainable Development Plan (Official Journal of Andalusia no. 45/2004, 5.3.2004) Updating the current Management Plan: new project on public participation procedure (2006-2007)
Levant Almeria Seabed	Spain	2001	Order of 25.5.2005 adopting measures to manage SPAMIs (Official Journal of Andalusia)

¹ RAC/SPA, 1997. The Mediterranean Protected Areas, from Geneva 1982... to Barcelona 1995. RAC/SPA-MAP-UNEP edit., RAC/SPA Publ.,Tunis : 28p.

Table 1 : List of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs)

Name of SPAMI	Country	Date of creation	Information on management plan
Mar Menor and the eastern Mediterranean coast of the Murcia region	Spain	2001	Decree 7/1993, 26.3.1993, protection measures in inland waters Decree 44/1995, 26.5.1995, adopting the Plan on Natural Resources of the San Pedro del Pinatar Regional Park Order 29.12.1998, initial adoption of the Plan on the Natural Resources of the Mar Menor islands and landscapes Order 7.4.2000 controlling fishing activities in the Marine Reserve of Cap de Palos-Islas Hormigas Order 19.7.2001 controlling diving activities in the inland waters of the Marine Reserve of Cap de Palos-Islas Hormigas Draft Management Plan (28.7.2005)
Columbertes Islands	Spain	2001	Management Plan adopted for the terrestrial part (Decree 107/1994, 7.6.1994, Official Journal of the Valencia Region no. 2291, 17.6.1994 Order of 19.1.1999 (Ministry of Fishing) controlling fishing activities Order of 7.12.2000 (Ministry of Fishing) extending the limits of the regulated area in the Marine Reserve Order of 17.1.2002 controlling fisheries and diving
Cap Creus Nature Park	Spain	2001	Order to ban red coral fishing in the Cap Creus Nature Reserves Resolution MAB/26 18/2006, 28.7.2006, Agreement of the Government of Catalonia (20.6.2006) adopting the Special Plan for the Protection of the Natural Environment and Landscapes of Cap Creus
Medes Islands	Spain	2001	Decree 215/1999, general rules for the conservation of the Medes Islands (1999-2000), extended up to the adoption of the Management Plan Draft Management Plan adopted by the Advisory Council of the Medes Islands Protected Area (July 2006)
Port-Cros National Park	France	2001	A development programme approved by the joint order of the Ministers of the Environment and of Finance on 19 June 2000, has become a 5-year management plan, brought up to date in step with the evolution of the environment and human pressure
Sanctuary for the conservation of marine mammals	France, Italy, Monaco	2001	The Management Plan for the International Sanctuary for marine mammals was crafted and approved at the Meeting of Parties in the Island of Elba (September 2004) and adopted at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties in Genoa, 6-7 December 2005
The Kneiss Islands	Tunisia	2001	Management Plan established in 2001 (European Program INCODC), approved by the Sfax Gouvernorat Project of revision within the framework of the GEF project on the rehabilitation of Gabes Gulf
Zembra and Zembretta National Park	Tunisia	2001	Management Plan for the marine part completed as part of the MedMPA project, and the terrestrial part as part of the MedWetCoast project (2003)
La Galite Archipelago	Tunisia	2001	Management Plan completed in 2002 and implemented as part of the project to create to La Galite Archipelago National Park

Table 1 : List of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs)

Name of SPAMI	Country	Date of creation	Information on management plan
Cabrera Archipelago National Park	Spain	2003	Royal Decree 1431/1992, 27.11.1992, adopting the Plan on the Natural Resources of the National Park (Official Journal of Spain, no. 42, 18.2.1993) Royal Decree 941/2001, 3.8.2001, establishing the system of protection for fishing resources in the National Park (Official Journal of Spain, no. 214, 6.9.2001) Management Plan (2006-2012) adopted (Decree 58/2006, 1.7.2006, Official Journal of the Balearics, no. 97, 11.7.2006)
Maro-Cerro Gordo cliffs	Spain	2003	Draft Management Plan on the public participation procedure (2006-2007)
Portofino Marine Protected Areas	Italy	2005	Management disposition are described in the Decree of the Environment Department (article 7)
Kabyles bank Marine Reserve	Algeria	2005	
Habibas Islands	Algeria	2005	

III.1. Assistance to countries in selecting, establishing and managing Specially Protected Areas

In the context of assistance to countries, two main activities were carried on:

(i) Identifying sites of conservation interest along the Libyan coast and crafting, in close collaboration with the Libyan Environmental General Authority (EGA), a programme aimed at setting up in the mean term a representative network of MPAs. As a result of a field prospection assignment in June 2006, the process started with two sites being proposed – Farwa Lagoon and Gara Island. Adopting an identical method to that used for these two sites, the EGA envisages preparing suggestions for three others: two islands in the Gulf of Sirte and one coastal lagoon (Ain Al Ghazala).

(ii) Defining a national plan for the creation of protected areas along the Syrian coast. As a result of the (2003-2005) MedMPA project, the Syrian Government asked RAC/SPA to assist them in organising a national consultative workshop aimed at presenting this project at national level. A Memorandum of Cooperation between RAC/SPA and the Syrian Ministry of the Environment is now being prepared, as well as a provisional programme and a projected list of actors. The national workshop is planned for late 2007 in Lattakia.

III.2. Establishing a work programme for developing a representative network of marine protected areas

In 1999, the Contracting Parties recommended reviving the network of managers of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean Sea (MedPAN Network); RAC/SPA acts as the Network's General Secretariat.

The MedPAN Network was revived in January 2005 (up to late 2007) thanks to Community funding (INTERREG IIIC). RAC/SPA worked closely with WWF France, the body appointed by the Port-Cros National Park (the Network's Executive Secretariat) with operational responsibility for the MedPAN Network, on reviving the Network. In late 2006, a new Memorandum of Cooperation was signed with WWF France to collaborate on creating a permanent coordinating unit for the Network and participating in organising a First Congress of

the Network of Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas, to take place in Porquerolles (France) in October 2007.

Moreover, RAC/SPA participates as an international observer in the main theme-based workshops that the Network regularly organises for its members.

A project for the development of a network of protected areas to be implemented by RAC/SPA in collaboration with WWF MedPO and MedPAN has been included within the GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Large Marine Ecosystem. Also collaboration with FAO and GFCM is ongoing through the GEF Strategic Partnership to promote protected areas in three key zones shallower than 800 m.

The objective of further enhancing the presence of high sea zones in the Network is pursued through collaboration with ACCOBAMS on establishing some protected areas on the high seas (see below). Furthermore, contacts were initiated with the DG ENV D2 of the EC, dealing with Water and Marine Environment, to pursue support for MAP for the creation of High Seas Protected Areas, including the identification of priority locations.

III.3. Elaborating draft guidelines for setting up protected areas for the conservation of cetaceans

In the context of the partnership between RAC/SPA and ACCOBAMS, RAC/SPA prepared draft guidelines on creating and managing Marine Protected Areas for cetaceans. The document was prepared from reflections initiated by ACCOBAMS as part of its work programme on Marine Protected Areas, as presented at the Fourth Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Monaco, 5-9 November 2006), provided for information as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.11. This in particular includes criteria for selecting specially protected areas, a special form for proposing such areas drawn up using the annotated form for inclusion on the SPAMI List, and a set of information on sites containing habitats that are important for cetaceans in the zone of the ACCOBAMS Agreement. The draft guidelines (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/8) are submitted for consideration as Item 6 of the provisional agenda.

In this respect, the Focal Points for SPAs and those of ACCOBAMS were invited to work with the two Secretariats to: (i) extend, if necessary, the idea of protecting cetaceans to already existing protected areas, (ii) identifying sites, particularly in the open sea, containing habitats that are important for cetaceans, and (iii) implementing all the necessary measures for protecting cetaceans.

III.4. Elaboration of draft guidelines for managing and monitoring populations of threatened marine and coastal birds and areas of importance for their conservation in the Mediterranean

The monitoring and management of protected areas of important birds coastal and marine are indispensable for ensuring the long-term conservation of these bird species. In addition, one of the main actions to achieve the objectives of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species listed in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol is the elaboration of a set of guidelines for monitoring the populations of these species and for developing of management plans for the coastal areas where they breed. In this regard, RAC/SPA elaborating draft guidelines, presented as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/10, which presents two sets of guidelines in the following order:

(i) Guidelines for a management plan for coastal and marine areas important to birds (nesting, moulting, breeding, feeding, wintering); and

(ii) Guidelines for monitoring threatened populations of marine and coastal bird species in the Mediterranean.

III.5. Improving the management of MPAs and encouraging the creation of SPAMIs in the eastern Mediterranean

Two books on the creation and management of coastal and marine protected areas and on the economic principles for managing protected areas were elaborated. These tools are intended as a guide to managers to help them. They are available in electronic form, on the RAC/SPA web site.

The RAC/SPA, in collaboration with the University of Alicante and the Institute of Studies and Cooperation for the Mediterranean Region (IECOMED) organised a Study and Information Day on Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) in Alicante on 11 May 2006. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention were invited, through their Focal Points for SPAs, to designate participants to the Study and Information Day, whose main objectives were the exchange of information and experiences about SPAMIs in the different countries and the possible ways of promoting and enhancing the SPAMI Network. The Day held three round tables that dealt with the situation and perspectives of present SPAMIs and the priority areas that could enhance the SPAMI Network.

Participants have:

(i) underlined the importance of ratifying the Protocol; therefore, it is crucial that the Contracting Parties who still didn't ratified the Protocol do so, as soon as possible.

(ii) Suggested to enhance the SPAMI Network, specifically in central and eastern Mediterranean, focusing on area protected by the GFCM. Representatives from Cyprus and Syria expressed their willingness to promptly designate new national SPAMIs.

III.6. Elaborating a SPAMI assessment procedure

To continue the reflection on assessing SPAMIs, started during the previous biennium, RAC/SPA entrusted IUCN with the task of proposing an assessment procedure and testing it on two volunteer SPAMIs: Cabo de Gata-Nijar (Spain) and Portofino (Italy). The aim was to allow the pertinence of the selected criteria and the robustness of the assessment to be judged in the light of the results. The approach is described in detail in Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/6. The entire assessment procedure is submitted for adoption by the Contracting Parties.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLANS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THREATENED OR ENDANGERED SPECIES

IV.1. Implementing the Action Plan for managing the Mediterranean monk seal

At the last Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, November 2005), the conservation of the Mediterranean monk seal was widely discussed and gave rise to the Portoroz Ministerial Declaration.

In accordance with the experts' document (UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.232/Inf.6) prepared for RAC/SPA in 2002, efforts focused on improving knowledge on the status of the species, training national partners, public awareness and the identifying of potential critical habitats in low-density areas.

This identification of potential critical habitats concerned:

(i) The Albanian coastline, where an assignment was carried out from 1 to 20 November 2005 by MEDASSET in collaboration with the national government. This action fell

within the context of the National Action Plan (SAP BIO) for declaring a marine national park in the Karaburuni area

(ii) The eastern coastline of Libya lying between Tolmitah and the west of Susah and from Derna to Ras At Tin. A second assignment was carried out under the Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the EGA, the Central Institute for Scientific and Technological Research Applied to the Sea (ICRAM) and RAC/SPA in May 2006. The aim, as well as prospecting marine caves in the sector, was to gather information on recent observations (since 2002) and enhance national skills in order to enable monitoring actions to be set up

(iii) The Akamas region in Cyprus, with habitat inventoring and population monitoring activities

(iv) The western coastline of Algeria: an assignment was carried out in summer 2006 in collaboration with national experts from the Es-Sénia University, Oran (Environmental Monitoring Network Laboratory). During the assignment the presence of monk seals in the area was confirmed, thanks to surveys of fishermen and a meeting with a young seal in distress. A wide awareness campaign was carried out at the same time. A plan was suggested for conserving and managing sites identified as critical for the monk seal in the sector that was being explored.

Also, to satisfy the expectations of the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA organised an international conference in Antalya, Turkey, from 17 to 19 September 2006, on the Conservation of the Monk Seal. This was done in collaboration with the Bonn and Berne Conventions, the Turkish Government, the Principality of Monaco, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and a Turkish NGO (SAD-AFAG). The aim was to promote information on successful examples of monk seal protection, and to exchange experience acquired in monk seal conservation with all the concerned parties and partners. Several dozen participants from the Mediterranean region and elsewhere took part in the Conference. The Conference Report is given for information as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.4.

IV.2. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles

In the period covered by the present report, RAC/SPA's activities focused on the following: (i) assistance for a reduction of mortality; (ii) improving scientific knowledge on certain aspects of marine turtle ecology, in particular nesting activities; (iii) circulating information and exchanging experiences by organising training courses and publishing technical documents; (iv) organising scientific meetings.

IV.2.1. Increasing scientific knowledge on the biology of marine turtles

The rapid assessment survey of important marine turtle habitats in the coastal area of Albania was undertaken by MEDASSET in collaboration with the national authorities. This survey (1 - 20 November 2005), is in line with the National Action Plan prepared within the SAP BIO Programme, aiming at proclaiming the Karaburuni area Marine National Park.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, RAC/SPA supported programmes to monitor the nesting of marine turtles in several sites:

(i) In Libya, by setting up a long-term monitoring programme. Two monitoring campaigns were done on the Libyan coastline. The results of these were presented at a national workshop and the 26th International Symposium on Marine Turtles (Crete, Greece, 3-8 April 2006). These results concerned a Sirta beach that had already been identified during an initial assessment (1996-1999), seeming to show that the Libyan coast could shelter the biggest nesting population of *Caretta caretta* in the Mediterranean

(ii) In Lebanon, in the El Mansoury, Abbasieh and Palms Marine Reserve sites, in collaboration with MEDASSET and the Lebanese Ministry of the Environment

- (iii) In Tunisia, in the Kuriat Islands, to monitor nesting activities
- (iv) Help for the Syrian Government, initially planned for the 2006 summer season, had to be postponed until 2007.

RAC/SPA also supported a programme of monitoring the migration of marine turtles by satellite transmitter in collaboration with the Naples Zoological Station in March 2005. Five turtles were released, three of them fitted with satellite tags. Unfortunately, these were dysfunctional and so only a few positions were recorded; the signals stopped in January 2006.

In order to address key points for the conservation of these reptiles, RAC/SPA supported research by the University of Barcelona focused on genetics. The final results show that the nesting rookeries in the eastern Mediterranean should be preserved to keep the integrity of the present Mediterranean metapopulation; this is particularly critical for the populations of Crete and Cyprus, which form the link between the Levantine and Ionian rookeries.

IV.2.2. Cooperation and exchange of experience

RAC/SPA helped organise the 26th Annual Symposium on the Biology and Conservation of Marine Turtles, and its first meeting in the Mediterranean (Crete, Greece, 3-8 April 2006). 41 Mediterranean participants benefited from this support. At the Symposium, RAC/SPA put together an information stand on the Action Plan for the conservation of marine turtles, and its implementation.

IV.2.3. Assessing and updating the Action Plan

In compliance with the recommendation made at the Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA assessed the Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles, and started updating it. To this end, an *ad hoc* group met in November 2006 in Misurata, Libya, with the financial and logistical help of the Libyan Government. The draft updated Action Plan (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/7) is presented for people to give their opinions and will be submitted for adoption by the Contracting Parties. Insofar as it clearly appears that merely protecting nesting sites may not be enough to save these populations, if they suffer excessive exploitation or sizeable mortality outside the nesting sites, it is necessary to improve knowledge on the distribution of marine turtle populations at sea. Also, to better tackle this problem, a specific provision on this point is presented in the new Action Plan.

IV.3. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea

In the context of implementing the joint work programme as appended to the Memorandum of Cooperation signed in June 2005 with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat, the following actions were, or are being, carried out in close collaboration between ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA:

- (i) Organising a scientific seminar on cetaceans in the countries of the southern Mediterranean; this took place from 9-11 March in Bizerta, Tunisia, in collaboration with the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM) and the Higher Institute of Fishing and Aquaculture (ISPA). Enhancing the forum of exchange between specialists from the southern Mediterranean, this seminar enabled stock to be taken of the state of knowledge on cetaceans in the region, and the requirements of countries for implementing conservation measures and assessing the interactions of these animals with fishing activities
- (ii) Updating the directory of organisations and experts dealing with marine mammal species in the ACCOBAMS area. This directory, now being compiled, should become available to countries via the Mediterranean CHM (Clearing House Mechanism) and/or RAC/SPA's website

(iii) Circulating a questionnaire on fishing-cetacean interaction, the results of which were presented at a joint ACCOBAMS-CGPM workshop on accidental catch, in Rome on 12 September 2006

(iv) Participating in bringing out an educational kit on cetaceans

(v) Participating in setting up a clearing house mechanism for exchange on cetaceans (CHM Cetaceans)

RAC/SPA also contributed to the 4th Meeting of the ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Monaco, 5-9 November 2006) by giving assistance to the Secretariat. On this occasion, two reports were presented:

(i) A progress report on the Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Stranding (MEDACES), drawn up for RAC/SPA by the University of Valencia (Spain) with the support of the Spanish Ministry of the Environment. The report appears as Information Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.14

(ii) A report on national cetacean stranding networks, prepared on the basis of questionnaires filled in by the ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA National Focal Points.

With regard to the small amount of information included in the MEDACES database, ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA asked their Contracting Parties to make these inventorying actions an integral part of their obligations towards the SPA/BD Protocol and the ACCOBAMS Agreement.

Alongside these activities, RAC/SPA participated in organising the Sixth European Conference on Marine Mammals (11-15 September 2006), with the Menendez Pelayo International University and the University of Valencia.

RAC/SPA kept up its support for the project on the dolphin community in Amvrakikos Lagoon (Greece) carried out by Tethys in collaboration with the local government and NGOs. This programme has provided the first pieces of information on the size of the local dolphin population over the period 2002-2006, its movements, its social organisation, its reproduction and its interactions with fishing activities. It has proved to be the densest known population of *Tursiops truncatus* remaining in the Mediterranean.

IV.4. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea

Over the period covered by the report, RAC/SPA focused on implementing the activities in the programme of the Action Plan for the conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea, as brought up to date and adopted at the Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Portoroz, November 2005).

IV.4.1. Implementing the MedPosidonia Project

To more effectively help countries carry out their commitments under the updated programme to implement the Action Plan, RAC/SPA elaborated a Project to develop inventorying, mapping and monitoring the *Posidonia* meadows in four mediterranean countries: Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Turkey (the MedPosidonia Project).

This project, 60% cofunded by the Total Enterprise Foundation for Biodiversity and the Sea (the Foundation), was validated by Total's Board of Directors in late December 2005. Intended to run for three years (2006-2008), it aims to:

(i) Make an inventory and characterization and/or map of the meadow sites selected in consultation with the concerned countries

(ii) Set up meadow monitoring networks and possibly enhance the existing monitoring networks, and

(iii) Communicate on the *Posidonia* ecosystem and on the results of the project.

In mid-2006, a sponsorship agreement was prepared with close collaboration between RAC/SPA and the Foundation. On 30 October 2006, in Tunis, there was a ceremony where the partnership agreement was signed in the presence of partners from the two parties.

Operational planning was designed and a coordinating and validating meeting for the operational programme was held on 30 March 2007 in Marseilles, at the end of the Third Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation, making use of the fact that most of the project's scientific partners in the concerned countries were present.

Memorandums of Cooperation with the concerned authorities in the four countries are being crafted to be able to start field work in summer 2007.

IV.4.2. Organising the Third Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation (Marseilles, 27-29 March 2007)

The Third Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation was held from 27-29 March in Marseilles. This Symposium, organised with the generous contribution of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Regional Council and the Seagrass 2000 Association, attracted 120 participants from 17 Mediterranean countries.

As regards the main discussions and recommendations arising from the Symposium, the organisers mentioned :

- (i) Their interest in greater integration of scientific data within biodiversity conservation and management plans
- (ii) Their expectations regarding development of knowledge and transfer at applied level
- (iii) Their need of practical guides to facilitate decision-making, harmonize methods and encourage comparisons on a regional scale.

Also, it was stated that it would be judicious to be able to benefit from the enhancing of mapping capacities and the setting up of monitoring and follow-up systems.

Difficulties of communication between partners (scientific, management) were mentioned; there was consensus on:

- (i) The usefulness of more active involvement of the Mediterranean region (greater representation of the Barcelona Convention) in defining European strategies (the EU's Marine Strategy and Maritime Policy) on the lines of other international marine agreements (OSPAR and HELCOM).
- (ii) The interest to diffuse the documents on the management of the seagrass meadows (RAMOGE Guide) and to promote the procedures of impacts assessments. For this purpose and in accordance with the recommendations of the national focal points, an actualization of the guidelines for impact assessments on seagrass meadows was carried out (UNEP (DEPI) /MED WG. 308/Inf6).
- (iii) The interest of use of marine vegetation (as a whole) as an environment assessment tool, even if one cannot restrict oneself to this (other bioindicators)
- (iv) The need to update the list of threatened or endangered species in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol in a way that takes scientific advances into account (e.g. the *Cystoseira* genus)
- (V) The need to set up theme-based work groups likely to suggest guidelines on the strategies and tools to develop for the conservation of marine vegetation.

Many debates concerned the level of standardization, with two suggestions:

- (i) Define very precise protocols (as exist for other international agreements)

(ii) Suggest standardized procedures for basic parameters and set up a 'tool kit' that can be adapted to everybody's needs. Similarly, it would obviously be interesting to have an atlas of key plant formations on a Mediterranean scale.

As well as 60 speeches and posters, the Symposium offered an opportunity to let the Mediterranean scientific community see the results obtained as part of the Interreg III B "POSIDONIA" Programme: "Consistency, development, harmonization and validation of the methods of assessing the quality of the coastal environment by monitoring the *Posidonia oceanica* meadow". This programme was realized by IFREMER (the French Research Institute for the Use of the Sea), in collaboration with ARPAL (Regional Agency for the Protection of the Ligurian Environment), the PACA (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur) Regional Council, the ENEA (Agency for New Technologies, Energy and the Environment, La Spezia) and the Universities of Corsica and Barcelona. RAC/SPA was also actively involved in this project as an international partner. The first session of the Third Symposium was devoted to presenting the results of the POSIDONIA Project, and served as closing seminar for this programme.

IV.4.3. Mapping the plant communities in the Farwa and Ain Al-Ghazala lagoons

Following on a request made by the Libyan Government, a Memorandum was signed by RAC/SPA and the EGA to carry out study assignments in two coastal lagoons. This activity rounds off and enhances the efforts made by the EGA to declare marine and coastal protected sites on the Libyan coast.

A team of national and international experts was sent to the spot from 2-14 May 2006. The results of their prospections enabled an ecomorphosis of *Posidonia* macro-atolls to be discovered, described for the first time ever in the Mediterranean, in Ain Al-Ghazala Lagoon.

At the end of this assignment, in collaboration with the University of Corsica, a sample leaflet on the role of marine meadows ("The Oases of the Mediterranean Sea") was designed (in English, Arabic and French). The leaflet is expected to be made available according to the specific features of the meadows at national level and printed and distributed to those countries which wish to use this awareness tool.

IV.5. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of cartilaginous fishes (chondrichthyans) in the Mediterranean Sea

In agreement with the Action Plan implementation calendar, the following activities to be undertaken or supported by the Secretariat, have been carried out:

IV.5.1. Tools

Protocols (standard forms) for: (i) monitoring commercial landings and discards by species and (ii) recording data on rarely observed, endangered and protected species were prepared by RAC/SPA to activate standardization in the region. They were subject to scientific consensus by those who attended the International Workshop organised by RAC/SPA and TUDAV (Turkish Marine research Foundation) at Istanbul in October 2005 (see below). They are presented in the information document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.8.

A guideline document on reducing the presence of sensitive species in by-catch and releasing them if caught has been elaborated for that purpose. The document will serve too to produce printed and electronic awareness material.

RAC/SPA promoted two symposia on Mediterranean chondrichthyan fishes in the region:

(i) The first ever Mediterranean Workshop focused on Mediterranean Cartilaginous Fishes was successfully organised in Istanbul, Turkey (14-16 October 2005). Participant experts from most of the Parties attended the gathering.

(ii) The 9th Annual Meeting of the European Elasmobranch Association (23-26 November 2005), whose topic was "Biodiversity, fisheries and conservation of Chondrichthyans" paid special attention to the Mediterranean elasmobranchs, with RAC/SPA support.

IV.5.2. Management and assessment procedures

A document compiling known information on the status of Mediterranean chondrichthyan species was prepared. A further red list revision regarding the status of Mediterranean cartilaginous, a key need for the Action Plans further implementation, has been elaborated by IUCN.

A training mission to Libya with the participation of an expert consultant for the formation of expertise on cartilaginous research and conservation was implemented. Further to that mission, the RAC/SPA consultant prepared a programme of action for these species in that country.

IV.6. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol

In compliance with the recommendation by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, 2005), and the schedule for implementing this Action Plan, RAC/SPA prepared a report on progress made in implementing the actions advocated at national and regional level. The report appears as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.7 and a new timetable for implementing the Action Plan is given in Annex I to the present report.

IV.7. Implementing the Action Plan on introductions of species and invasive species into the Mediterranean Sea

IV.7.1. Organising a regional workshop on non-native species in the Mediterranean (Rome, 6-7 December 2005)

A workshop on non-native species in the Mediterranean was held on 6-7 December 2005 in Rome, in collaboration with ICRAM. The workshop attracted Mediterranean specialists and representatives from regional and international bodies working on the subject. The workshop's recommendations were:

(i) Ensure that funding exists to develop an adequate knowledge base (distribution, biology, invasive characteristics, impacts and control options of alien species).

(ii) Provide assistance for capacity-building related to developing an adequate knowledge base in the region.

(iii) Provide an open-access, transparent database, balancing scientific rigor with practicability, and timelines, easily accessible through a global database (or linked databases), for receiving and disseminating data.

IV.7.2. Elaborating technical tools on managing introductions of species into the Mediterranean

At the workshop, draft "Guidelines for checking vectors of introductions of marine non-native species and invasive species into the Mediterranean" and "Guide for the analysis of risks and assessment of impacts of introductions of non-native species" were presented and discussed. These two tools, finalized after debate at the workshop, are submitted for the opinion of the National Focal Points for SPAs at the present meeting and are respectively given as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG:308/11 and UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG:308/12.

IV.7.3. Elaborating a Regional Project on fouling and ballast water and sediment

Through its two regional activity centres, REMPEC and RAC/SPA, MAP has been invited to join the second phase of the GEF/UNDP/IMO's Global Programme for Managing Ballast Water (GloBallast), called "Building a partnership to assist developing countries reduce the transfer of harmful aquatic organisms via ships" (GloBallast Partnerships: GBP).

Thus RAC/SPA and REMPEC participated in the consultation process that led to the elaboration of a five-year project (2007-2011). This project should start up after approval of the PDF-B proposal by the GEF Council. RAC/SPA and REMPEC will act as Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean.

IV.7.4. Elaborating a report assessing the implementation of the Action Plan

In compliance with the recommendation by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, 2005), and the schedule for implementing this Action Plan, RAC/SPA prepared a report assessing the implementing of the Action Plan at national and regional level. This report is presented to the present meeting as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG:308/Inf.9, and a new timetable for implementing the Action Plan is given in Annex II to the present report.

V. CROSSOVER SUBJECTS

V.1. Capacity building and training activities concerning Specially Protected Areas and the conservation of species

Several activities to enhance national skills were carried on between the Meetings, concerning in particular:

- (i) Inventorying habitats (Albania, Cyprus, Libya), mapping marine caves (Albania, Cyprus, Libya), and monitoring monk seal populations (Cyprus)
- (ii) Techniques of studying cartilaginous fishes (Libya)
- (iii) Studying marine biodiversity in islands (Tunisia)
- (iv) Taxonomy, with the identification of ascidians species in Tunisian waters, in the context of a training course at Bari University
- (v) An expert (Montenegro) participating at the Sixth European Conference on Marine Mammals, organised by the Menendez Pelayo International University and the University of Valencia, (11-15 September 2006).

As regards conservation of marine turtles, RAC/SPA funded the participation of (3) trainees from Israel, (2) from Libya, (2) from Tunisia, (2) from Malta, (1) from Morocco and (1) from Syria at the training course that took place in the Lara station, Cyprus. This initiative was successfully completed thanks to the cooperation of the Cyprus Wildlife Society (CWS) and the support of Cyprus's Department of Fishing and Marine Research (DFMR). These 10-day training courses were organised during the summers of 2005 and 2006 and will be revived in 2007.

Two training sessions on techniques for rehabilitating marine turtles were organised in collaboration with the Naples Zoological Station. In this context, RAC/SPA funded the participation:

- of (1) Israeli, (1) Lebanese and (1) Tunisian trainees, in 2005
- of (1) Maltese, (2) Croatian and (1) Turkish trainees, in 2006.

An assignment was carried out in Malta to improve the organisation of a marine turtle care centre.

In the context of promoting taxonomy, a training course on techniques of creating, managing and keeping in good condition reference collections of marine plants was organised in collaboration with the Botanic Department of the University of Catania. This course, which took place on 5 December 2005, enabled six participants to be trained: (1) Algerian, (1) Moroccan, (2) Lebanese and (2) Tunisians.

V.2. Activities linked to the processing and management of data on biodiversity

RAC/SPA's activities in this field focused on: (i) collecting scientific and technical information on habitats and species in sites of interest for conservation; (ii) circulating data by setting up a Mediterranean Exchange Centre, publishing scientific colloquiums, awareness and public information actions.

V.2.1. Data collection

As part of its activities concerning the elaboration of technical tools to help Mediterranean countries inventory sites of interest for the conservation of their coastal areas, RAC/SPA crafted an interpretation handbook on coastal habitats (terrestrial and wetland) to supplement a previously written handbook on marine habitats. The handbook has illustrated sheets describing the habitats and the main elements that allow their identification. A French version is available from RAC/SPA.

RAC/SPA supported the Albanian Ministry of the Environment, especially its ALWET project (Capacity building on the conservation of wetland ecosystems in Albania), for acquiring ArcView software to set up a Geographical Information System (GIS) on wetland ecosystems as part of a national inventory of habitats of conservation interest.

To follow up the CAMP Algeria, a pilot activity, using inventorying tools established in the MAP context (Standard Data Form, SDF) and GISs, is being prepared for the Mount Chenoua area (Tipaza *wilaya*) to identify priority habitats and suggest conservation measures.

Concerning the marine turtles, a data base on the veterinary treatments applied within the framework of the recovery Centres was developed (English, French and Spanish) in collaboration with the University of Murcia. It is available in electronic format (CDRom on the conservation of the Mediterranean marine turtles).

Concerning elasmobranchs until now problems exist for the creation of a single database for the region and RAC/SPA is acting on the topic aimed to improve the situation. The Istanbul workshop helped to coordinate the development of complementary, not overlapping, ones. Harmonization discussion on two existing databases to record cartilaginous captures in the Mediterranean was facilitated by RAC/SPA with the creator institutions: the MEDLEM database (MEDiterranean Large Elasmobranchs Monitoring database), of the Regional Agency for Environment Protection of Toscana (ARPAT), Italy, and the SIRENO Database of the Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO). The latter concerns all fish species and it is hoped that a module advocated only to elasmobranchs may be created for the region. Collaboration of GFCM is pursued to work out collaboration on this initiative.

In the context of implementing the Action Plan on introduced species, a directory of concerned specialists and bodies was elaborated. A first version of this directory is available from the Centre and will be put online in the context of the Mediterranean Exchange Centre on Biodiversity (see below).

V.2.2. Circulation of data

As a result of the recommendation by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, and in the context of setting up a Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) on Mediterranean marine

and coastal biodiversity, RAC/SPA put out a tender for restructuring and updating its databases and directories so they can be consulted from a common web portal (<http://medbiodivchm.rac-spa.org>).

An information note on the state of the CHM's implementation is given as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG 308/Inf.13.

As part of its activities for developing national CHMs, RAC/SPA supported the participation of two national heads (Tunisia, Morocco) at a training course on developing national CHMs, in collaboration with the Belgian CHM Secretariat (2-20 October 2006, Brussels). This course aimed at use of the programme perfected by the European Environment Agency (European CHM's Portal Kit; AEE).

After this training, RAC/SPA helped Tunisia design and physically set up its national CHM, at the request of the national Government, and technical assistance is anticipated for developing a Moroccan national CHM.

The Centre published:

(i) The proceedings of the European Conference on Elasmobranchs through the Journal of the French Ichthyologic Society²

(ii) The proceedings of the Second Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation (September 2006), which was sent to participants attending the Symposium. An electronic version is also available for downloading on RAC/SPA's web site

(iii) The proceedings of the workshop, including experts' proposals on main needs for the cartilaginous fish conservation, in collaboration with the Turkish organisation TUDAV. The electronic version can be downloading on the RAC/SPA web site;

(iv) The proceedings of the First Symposium on the Action Plan for the conservation of bird species listed in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol (November 2005)

(v) The proceedings of the Third Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation (March 2007). As well as the proceedings, presentations of various work and the main recommendations made at the end of the round tables were put onto a CD Rom and are available for downloading on RAC/SPA's web site.

Other CD Roms were made on:

(i) The conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles

(ii) The SAP BIO

(iii) The Mediterranean Colloquium on Red Coral, held in Tabarka in May 2006.

In the context of enhancing communication, the Centre started more regular updating of its site, crafting an information letter (flash news) and publishing awareness documents:

(i) The Action Plan for invasive species, illustrated and printed in English and French

(ii) The Action Plan on cartilaginous fishes, illustrated with the most rare and threatened species and including an appendix, kindly allowed by FAO, with an illustrated checklist of all the species met in the Mediterranean

(iii) A translation of the Sea Turtle Handling Guidebook for Fishermen (in Spanish, Albanian and Hebrew). This document and the corresponding Teachers' Manual (in Spanish), was printed by the Spanish Ministry of environment which has assisted its distribution tool

(iv) A poster on threatened elasmobranchs, their problems and possible solutions, printed in bilingual version

(v) A set of posters presenting the various Action Plans on threatened species.

² Cybium, Vol. 30, fasc.4

During the field assignments in Libya, awareness activities on the conservation of marine turtles were offered to people making a living from the sea, and reports of this were made and broadcast on Libyan TV.

VI. OTHER ACTIVITIES

VI.1. Programme of work on protecting the coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions in the Mediterranean

A meeting of an *ad hoc* group of Mediterranean experts was organised in Tabarka (Tunisia, 5-6 May 2006) to take stock of knowledge and the state of conservation of the coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions in the Mediterranean. A draft work programme was established. A consultant was appointed by RAC/SPA to develop this programme in consultation with the group of experts. The project was presented and discussed in the context of the Third Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation. An amended version, UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/9, is presented at the Eighth Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs with a view to being submitted to the Contracting Parties for adoption.

VI.2. Coastal Development Programmes (CAMPs)

VI.2.1. Assistance for implementing CAMP Cyprus

RAC/SPA carried out two field missions in Cyprus to start the implementation of the CAMP biodiversity component, together with a multidisciplinary team including officers of the Cyprus Department of Fisheries and Marine Research, the local NGO CWS as well as an international consultant. The work regarding the impact of human activities on the biodiversity in the area is presently focused on the effects of desalination plant outfalls on the surrounding ecosystem at Larnaca Bay. Results are expected to shed light on the importance that the topic may have at Mediterranean level, given the expansion expected for these installations. A final working meeting of the biodiversity team aims to finalise the biodiversity component along 2007.

VI.2.2. Assistance for implementing CAMP Morocco

RAC/SPA will take part in implementing CAMP Morocco, now being finalized. RAC/SPA's activities mainly aim at:

- (i) Implementing a pilot activity of inventorying marine biotopes, using the technical tools elaborated in the MAP context, in two sites (El Hoceima National Park, Moulouya and Jebel Moussa area)
- (ii) Starting and providing a base and experience for marine area conservation activities, devising measures to protect and manage the marine and coastal part of the CAMP area, particularly the Moulouya and Jebel Moussa areas
- (iii) Helping create a SPAMI for the El Hoceima National Park.

VI.3. Guidelines for amending Annex II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol

Following on the recommendations made by the Contracting Parties at their Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting (Portoroz, 2005), the criteria proposed for amending Annex II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol were revised. A new procedure is submitted for examination by the Focal Points for the subsequent approval of the Contracting Parties (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/13). Moreover, a test to assess the procedure was done on 4 species. This assessment is given as UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.12.

VI.4. Mediterranean Initiative on Taxonomy

To draw up a statement on the taxonomical guidebooks, training and reference collections available on Mediterranean marine flora and fauna, RAC/SPA, in collaboration with a group of experts, prepared a questionnaire which was widely circulated to national and international specialists, institutions and bodies concerned by the subject.

The results of the questionnaires will be compiled and integrated within a reference database that will be made available to Mediterranean countries, the concerned institutions and qualified experts to work to revive marine taxonomy and encourage the implementation of national and regional strategies on the subject.

Also, the situation of reference collections of Mediterranean marine species is now being assessed, in order to suggest a programme to enable them to be made available as back-up tools for taxonomical work. This programme should lead to a presentation at a Mediterranean workshop on taxonomy.

RAC/SPA has supported preparing and publishing a catalogue on loricated Ciliata (tintinnidates) in Lebanese coastal waters.

VI.5. Actions for the sustainable use of biodiversity

In the context of their Fourteenth Ordinary Meeting, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention suggested that the Secretariat pay greater attention to means to implement biodiversity-related sustainable development actions.

To this end, a consultant was asked to prepare a document on applying the Addis Ababa Principle to the Mediterranean region. RAC/SPA also participated in meetings of experts aimed at:

- (i) Publishing guidelines for implementing sustainable aquaculture, at the invitation of IUCN
- (ii) Working on defining supplementary indicators to monitor the sustainable development of coastal areas, at the request of the Plan Bleu
- (iii) Developing a process to assess elements of biological qualities, at the invitation of the European Environment Agency.

VI.6. How RAC/SPA envisions improving its efficacy

For the Seventh Meeting of Focal Points in Seville, 2005, RAC/SPA had prepared a brief document on the Centre's role and its relations with its partners in the region. After presenting it, the Secretariat was invited to further reflection. To this end, the Secretariat produced a document to enhance RAC/SPA's efficacy in the context of its mandate (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/Inf.10).

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations on each of the sections of the Activity Report are brought together in the present section. These recommendations, as well as RAC/SPA's work programme for the biennium 2008-2009 (the main lines of which are given in Annex III to the present report) are organised to reflect SAP BIO priorities.

VII.1. Inventorying, mapping and monitoring marine and coastal biodiversity

VII.1.1. Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

I.P:1- Continue inventorying sensitive species and habitats, using the tools developed in the MAP context

VII.1.2. Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

I.S:1- Elaborate and improve tools for developing the inventorying and mapping of key habitats for conservation

VII.2. Protecting habitats of species and sensitive sites

VII.2.1. Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

II.P:2- Adopt criteria for amending Annex II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol

II.P.3- Adopt the SPAMI assessment procedure

II.P.4- Collaborate to create high sea SPAMIs, embracing appropriately sensitive habitats beyond 12 nautical miles, as well as multiparty SPAMIs including high seas areas, in collaboration with pertinent institutions.

II.P.5- Favour the development of projects to be implemented by countries unified by thematic and/or sub-geographical fields, and possibly merging within them complementary actions on species included in current regional action plans, so as to further apply the Ecosystem approach also to MAP species-focused plans (cetaceans, turtles, birds, etc.).

II.P.6- Bear in mind guidelines for the conservation of threatened species when creating and/or managing SPAs

II.P.7- Adopt updated Action Plans concerning threatened species and the work programme on the coralligenous and implement activities within the time limits set out in the schedules for them

VII.2.2. Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

II.S.2- Promote the creation of high seas SPAMIs, embracing appropriately sensitive habitats beyond 12 nautical miles, as well as of multiparty SPAMIs including high seas areas, in collaboration with pertinent institutions.

II.S.3- Implement the project for the creation and management of protected areas, developed through the GEF project PDF B, adapted to the funds made available, in collaboration with pertinent partners (FAO-GFCM, WWF-MedPO, etc.). Etendre le projet à l'ensemble des Parties contractantes et soutenir les initiatives visant à mettre en place un réseau représentatif d'AMP.

II.S.4- Work to implement the activities provided for by the Action Plans and work programme concerning threatened species, within the time limits set out in the schedules for them, and assess the implementation of the Action Plan on the monk seal in order to identify future activities to be carried out.

VII.3. Assessing and mitigating the impacts of threats to biodiversity

VII.3.1. Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

III.P:8- Work to reduce the impacts of fishing on sensitive habitats and threatened species, in collaboration with the pertinent institutions, and improve and implement *ad hoc* regulatory measures

III.P.9- Adopt the updated Action Plan concerning introductions of species

III.P.10- Bear in mind the guidelines on checking vectors of introduction of non-native species and those on impact studies on marine meadows when elaborating national plans to protect marine biodiversity

VII.3.2. Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

III.S:5- Collaborate with the pertinent institutions to reduce fishing impacts on sensitive habitats and threatened species

III.S.6- Assess the impact of climate change in the context of the activities of the work group on the sustainable use of biodiversity

III.S.7- Collaborate with REMPEC to assess the risks of sensitive habitats and/or MPAs being accidentally polluted and on implementing the *GloBallast Partnerships* Project (IMO-GEF-UNDP)

III.S.8- Work to implement the Action Plan on introductions of species, within the time limits set out in the schedules for them, initiating a warning system on invasive non-native species by collecting, compiling and circulating data

III.S.9- Collaborate with RAC/PAP in implementing the CAMPs planned for the biennium.

VII.4. Developing research to supplement knowledge and fill in gaps on biodiversity

VII.4.1. Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

IV.P:11- Implement taxonomist training programmes to increase the number of specialists

VII.4.2. Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

IV.S:10- Enhance scientific watch and facilitate access to scientific information, particularly on taxonomy

IV.S.11- Identify indicators of ecological health and of efficacy of management measures to start up biodiversity assessment procedures

VII.5. Training, coordination and technical assistance

VII.5.1. Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

V.P:12- Support and participate in the Mediterranean Exchange Centre on marine and coastal biological diversity

V.P.13- Adopt the mandate for the National Correspondents appointed to the implementation phase of SAP BIO

V.P.14- Bear the SAP BIO operational plan in mind, and participate in implementing it with the necessary human and financial means, in collaboration with the partner institutions, promoting the integration of priority activities identified within the SAP BIO programme within the country's environmental priorities

VII.5.2. Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

V.S:12- Continue developing the Mediterranean Exchange Centre on marine and coastal biological diversity and take the necessary steps to permit optimal use of its web portal

V.S.13- Help the countries build capacity on the scientific and technical aspects of biodiversity conservation

V.S.14- Develop and implement the operational plan to boost the implementation of SAP BIO, in collaboration with partner institutions.

VIII. ANNEX I - NEW SCHEDULE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIRD SPECIES LISTED IN ANNEX II TO THE SPA/BD PROTOCOL

Action	Deadline	By Whom
1. Development guidelines to assist countries in their efforts to afford adequate legislative protection to endangered species	By year 2008	RAC/SPA
2. Protect legally all bird species in Annex II.	By year 2008	Contracting Parties
3. Adding new species to Annex II ³	By year 2009	Contracting Parties and RAC/SPA
4. Public awareness and Information campaigns	Starting from Year 2008	RAC/SPA , Partners and Parties
5. Organise specific training courses and workshops in coordination with international and/or national NGOs.	Starting from Year 2008	RAC/SPA and Contracting Parties
6. Pursue the setting up of a regional network for monitoring populations and distribution of Mediterranean threatened bird species, in co-ordination with other organisations.	By year 2011	RAC/SPA & Partners
7. Establishment of research programmes to fill gaps in knowledge of threatened species.	By year 2008	Contracting Parties
8. Establishment of National Action Plans for the conservation of endangered and threatened bird species in the Mediterranean.	By year 2012	Contracting Parties
9. Identification and mapping of areas important for birds on land and at sea -(of breeding, feeding, moulting and wintering areas)	By year 2012	Contracting Parties
10. Legal establishment protected areas with adequate management plans at breeding sites.	By year 2012	Contracting Parties
11. Preparation of a report on progress in the implementation of this Action Plan.	By year 2013	RAC/SPA

³ The implementation procedure of this action will be started once the common criteria for the modification of the Annexes II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol, presented as document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/13, is being adopted by the fifteenth Contracting Parties Meeting.

IX. NEW IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE FOR THE ACTION PLAN CONCERNING SPECIES INTRODUCTIONS AND INVASIVE SPECIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Action	Deadline	Responsible
1. Preparation of National Reports (paragraph 15)	2008	Contracting Parties
2. Setting up a mechanism to promote and coordinate the actions listed in paragraph 18	2008	Contracting Parties
3. Inventorying introduction vectors (paragraph 18)	2008	Contracting Parties
4. Establishing a directory of relevant specialists and organisations (see paragraph 18)	2008	Contracting Parties
5. Elaborating education and awareness material (paragraph 25)	2008	RAC/SPA
6. Developing programmes to raise the awareness of the general public and target groups, including decision-makers, concerning the risks associated with species introduction (paragraph 18)	2009	Contracting Parties
7. Setting up a group of experts who will be responsible for assessing suggestions for introduction, and analysing risks and possible consequences (paragraph 18)	2009	Contracting Parties
8. Compiling an inventory of introduced species. Identifying and inventorying public and private actors whose activity could introduce marine non-indigenous species (paragraph 18)	2009	Contracting Parties
9. Setting up the Regional Mechanism for collecting, compiling and circulating information on invasive non-indigenous species (paragraph 22)	2009	RAC/SPA
10. Launching the procedures for enacting or strengthening national legislation governing the control of non-indigenous species introduction (paragraph 17)	2010	Contracting Parties
11. Developing programmes for data collection and monitoring (paragraph 16)	2011	Contracting Parties
12. Strengthening and where necessary setting up systems to control the intentional import and export of non-indigenous marine species (paragraph 18)	2011	Contracting Parties
13. Developing and implementing risk-assessment techniques (paragraph 18)	2012	Contracting Parties
14. Elaborating the National Plans (paragraph 19)	2012	Contracting Parties

X. ANNEX III - MAIN LINES OF RAC/SPA ACTIVITIES FOR THE PERIOD 2008-2009

X.1. Introduction:

The secretariat has prepared a draft activities programme for the 2008/2009 biennium to be funded by the Mediterranean Trust Fund (MTF). The programme was developed to facilitate the effective implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity, adopted in 1995 and the Action Plans for the conservation of threatened and endangered species, adopted within the MAP framework while taking into account the Strategic Action Programme for the conservation of biological diversity in the Mediterranean, adopted in 2003.

Moreover, in proposing these actions account was also taken of the following elements:

- Priority given to concrete actions of regional (or sub-regional) scope liable to develop tangible results
- The workload occasioned by the proposed activities, which must be commensurate with the capacity of the RAC/SPA permanent team
- Cooperation with international organisations, which should increasingly move towards partnerships rather than towards sub-contracting.
- The establishment of an application procedure designed to fund large-scale actions.

X.2. General Objective:

In addition to activities intended for MTF funding (see table below), further activities, either entirely or partially financed by various sources, could be implemented during the 2008/2009 biennium. These would specifically refer to:

- The inventory and mapping of key habitats project
- The implementation of the SAPBIO Operational Plan
- The project for the creation and management of protected areas within the framework of the GEF PDF-B project
- The "GloBallast Partnerships" project
- The MEDPOSIDONIA programme
- The impact of climate change on priority habitats, in particular coralligenous formations.

Furthermore, should new partnerships be formed, activities that do not figure in the present draft could be launched during the 2008/2009 period in as far as they fall within the general objectives of the present programme.

In the light of the positions expressed during the National Focal Points Meeting, the RAC/SPA will present its updated draft budget at the next MAP meeting planned for October 2007, before forwarding it for approval to the 15th ordinary meeting of Contracting Parties to the Barcelona convention, to be held in December 2007. The RAC/SPA budget concerning activities although slightly higher, is comparable to that of the preceding biennium, while the general budget has been increased to boost the centres human resources and enable it to better carry out its mission of scientific watch and implementation of the Mediterranean exchange centre on biodiversity. Indeed, although the national RAC/SPA focal points adopted the terms of reference regarding the hiring of an expert responsible for managing the information system and databases, to date the position has not been filled, even though the need for it has been confirmed.

The purpose of the slight increase in the activities budget is to provide for the implementation of effective actions identified within the context of SAPBIO.

X.3. Main topics of work

The activities, under consideration for biennium, will be integrated in the following topics:

1. Inventory, cartography and monitoring of the marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean

Goal : Help the states to have the necessary information available to draw up or adjust their conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity programmes

2. Conservation of the habitats, the species and the significant sites

Goal : Help states to actually implement the SPA/BD protocol and reduce the erosion of biodiversity

3. Evaluation and reduction of the impact of the threats on the biodiversity

Goal : Develop activities to anticipate or mitigate threats to biodiversity

4. Development of research to improve knowledge and fill gaps with respect to biodiversity

Goal : Improve knowledge on biodiversity on the regional level, promote the availability and exchange of information between all partners and devise tools to assess the state of biodiversity on the regional level

5. Capacity building to improve coordination and technical assistance

Goal : Encourage information exchange and provide more training in methods regarding species conservation and management of SPAs

X.4. Expected outputs

The programmed actions aim at reaching at the regional level, the goals and targets for 2010 of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

For the marine and coastal biodiversity, these targets are for example to ensure the effective conservation from at least 10% of each of the marine and coastal ecological zones or to effectively protect the areas from importance for the biodiversity and/or particularly vulnerable ecosystem, such as seagrasses, cold water coral reefs, or seamounts (UNEP/CBD/COP/8/31):

The expected outputs, with the collaboration of the contracting Parties, over the period 2008-2009, are of:

To organize a conference of donors to set up a policy of request of financing for sub-regional projects, privileging the ecosystemic approach

To contribute to the creation of new ASP, with a better geographical distribution.
To support the creation of representative AMP, by in particular integrating pelagic habitats and/or important sea areas for the conservation of the threatened species.

To establish a regional state of reference on the distribution of the key habitats and to create a data base on the biodiversity in the Mediterranean, accessible via the RAC/SPA website.

Main objective	Aim	Activities/Actions planned	Expected results	Budget (* 1000 €)		
				2008	2009	Total
Inventory, mapping and monitoring of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean	Help the states to have the necessary information available to draw up or adjust their conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity programmes	Inventory of available data Development and improvement of tools for the inventory and mapping of habitats	* Reference state regarding the distribution of key habitats * Promotion of the FSD publication of technical guides * Strengthening synergy with other regional systems (Natura, Emeraude, Medwet) Project applications	40	15	55
Conservation of habitats, species and sensitive sites.	Help states to actually implement the SPA/BD protocol and reduce the erosion of biodiversity	Creation of SPAMIs, particularly in the high seas Implementation of the SAPBIO Operational Plan Creation of a representative network of SPAs	* Identification and implementation of necessary processes for the creation of SPAs in the high seas * Strengthening cooperation with the ACCOBAMS agreement, IUCN Mediterranean, WWF MedPo * Donors conference * Meeting of the SAPBIO consultative committee and national correspondents * Application for sub-regional projects for the conservation of threatened species or the management of sensitive sites * Strengthening the MedPAN network * Creation of new SPAs	263	185	448

		Implementation of Action plans concerning threatened species	* Actions identified in the Actions Plans concerning threatened species			
			* Carrying out the MedPosidonia programme * Participation in the CAMPs			
Evaluation et mitigation of the impacts of threats to biodiversity	Develop activities to anticipate or mitigate threats to biodiversity	Reduce the impacts of fishing on sensitive habitats and threatened species Assessment of accidental pollution risks on sensitive habitats and/or on SPAs Implementation of the GloBallast Partnerships program Implementation of the action plan on introduced and invasive species Assessment of risks to the sustainable use of biodiversity and the impact of climate change	* Collaboration with CGPM and ad-hoc institutions to implement the necessary measures * Define and identify sensitive habitats * Cooperation with REMPEC, IMO * System for the collection and dissemination of data on non-indigenous species * actions to raise awareness on the risks linked to non-indigenous species * Establishment of the Working Group *Project Applications	73	65	140
Development of research to improve knowledge and fill gaps with respect to biodiversity	Improve knowledge on biodiversity on the regional level, promote the availability and exchange of information between all partners and devise tools to assess the	* Strengthen the scientific watch and improve the accessibility of information * Creation of a Mediterranean regional observatory for biodiversity	* On line consultation system * Regional bibliographical data base Taxonomy reference state	40	25	65

	state of biodiversity on the regional level	* Strengthen the Centre for information exchange on Mediterranean marine and coastal biodiversity	* National CHM			
		*Identification and testing of indicators on the stateiodiversity	* Indicators determined and application for a testing project			
Capacity building to improve coordination and technical assistance	Encourage information exchange and provide more training in methods regarding species conservation and management of SPAs	Implementation of training on techniques for the conservation of biodiversity	* Standardisation of enumeration methods * Identification of important habitats for threatened species	23	29	52
Organisation of the ninth meeting of National Focal Points					70	70
						830