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12th Meeting of the Post-2020 SAPBIO National Correspondents

Videoconference, 16 June 2026

Agenda Item 3: Steps undertaken towards the implementation of the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO) at regional and national levels

Steps undertaken towards the implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO

Note by the Secretariat

1. The present document has been prepared by the Secretariat to support agenda item 3.
2. Since its adoption by Decision IG.25/11 (COP 22), the Post-2020 SAPBIO has served as the key regional strategic framework for marine and coastal biodiversity under the Barcelona Convention. COP decisions have mandated a mid-term assessment of the SAPBIO to track progress towards 2030 biodiversity objectives.
3. The present document provides an overview of the steps undertaken by SPA/RAC to implement the Post-2020 SAPBIO since the mid-term assessment reported to the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (UNEP/MED WG.608/17, May 2025). It focuses on progress achieved under **Action 1** (species and habitats plans), **Action 2** (species recovery), **Action 12** (restoration criteria), **Action 15** (MCPAs and OECMs), and **Action 35** (support to run the SAPBIO), including resource mobilisation efforts.
4. The Secretariat draws the attention of national correspondents to the information documents referenced in the text (UNEP/MED WG.642/inf.3 and inf.4), which contain the detailed criteria for ecosystem inventories and the draft guidance on OECMs.
5. The 12th Meeting of National Correspondents is invited to
 - Take note of the progress achieved;
 - Provide further guidance to SPA/RAC on priority actions for the remaining period,
 - Discuss priorities to guide SPA/RAC in the development of concept notes for resource mobilisation, as suggested in paragraph 30.

Introduction

1. Since its adoption by the Decision IG.25/11, COP 22, the Post-2020 SAPBIO serves as a key reference for the UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy 2022–2027, particularly in relation to marine and coastal biodiversity, and is expected to continue informing subsequent strategic frameworks. Its objectives, actions and targets guide the priorities of the Barcelona Convention system and inform the development of the biennial programme of work, providing a science-based and regionally agreed framework for conservation, restoration and the sustainable use of biodiversity.
2. In this context, the Programme of Work (PoW) of the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) contributes directly to the achievement of the Post-2020 SAPBIO targets, while strengthening the enabling conditions required for effective implementation by the Contracting Parties. Through targeted activities, including the assessment and updating of Regional Action Plans, the species recovery planning, the development of ecosystem restoration criteria, the definition of guidance on marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), and the preparation of project proposals under regional and global funding mechanisms, the SPA/RAC PoW operationalizes the Post- 2020 SAPBIO priorities into country-driven actions.
3. At the same time, it supports the development of key implementation drivers, including capacity-building, data harmonization, scientific cooperation and improved access to financial resources, thereby assisting Contracting Parties in addressing implementation challenges and integrating biodiversity considerations into national and regional policies. Taken together, these efforts contribute to the systematic integration of biodiversity considerations across MAP's operational planning and help ensure coherence between regional priorities and global frameworks, particularly the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), while linking strategic objectives with implementation at the national and regional levels.
4. SPA/RAC conducted a mid-term assessment of the Post-2020 SAPBIO, as mandated by COP decisions, to track progress toward 2030 biodiversity objectives. To support this process, a dedicated Monitoring Framework was developed to assess implementation, particularly start-up activities, and to guide future evaluations in 2027 and 2030. The framework is designed to align closely with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and may include either GBF indicators or region-specific ones developed in consultation with national focal points

Implementation Progress of Post-2020 SAPBIO Actions since the Mid-Term Assessment with focus on start-up activities, by SPA/RAC (UNEP/MED WG.608/17, May 2025)

Action 1 – Species and Habitats Plans: Assessment and Updating of Regional Action Plans

5. The Action focuses on the systematic assessment and updating of existing Regional Action Plans (RAP) for the conservation of species and habitats listed under the SPA/BD Protocol and provides a foundational framework for subsequent recovery, restoration and area-based conservation efforts under the Post-2020 SAPBIO. These include the updating in 2023 and 2025 of the RAP for the conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species; the RAP concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea; the RAP for the Conservation of Marine Turtles; the RAP for Cartilaginous Fishes (chondrichthyans); the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of the Monk Seal; the RAP for the Conservation of Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions; the RAP for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation; and the RAP for the Conservation of Cetaceans (the last two APs scheduled for 2027).
6. Through this action, and based on close consultation with Contracting Parties, partners and relevant experts, the implementation status and scientific basis of each RAP will be reviewed and updated as

necessary. The aim is to ensure that these instruments remain effective, responsive to current conservation challenges, and capable of guiding the implementation of concrete conservation measures at both national and regional level.

7. A recent paper¹ was published on the updated distribution mapping of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows, coralligenous assemblages and marine caves in the Mediterranean Sea: implications for conservation and restoration, a work undertaken by SPA/RAC with collaboration of Partners and Contracting Parties. The study provides a harmonized and updated spatial assessment of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows, coralligenous assemblages, and marine caves across the Mediterranean, significantly improving knowledge on their distribution and protection. *P. oceanica* meadows cover about 22,379 km², but only around 36% are located within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), with strong disparities among countries and persistent data gaps, particularly in North Africa. Coralligenous assemblages extend over approximately 2,889.5 km² and show higher inclusion in MPAs (67%), although their distribution is uneven and constrained by limited data and inconsistent classification. Marine caves, assessed at basin scale for the first time (2,926 sites), also show relatively high inclusion in MPAs (~68%), but remain underestimated and largely lack dedicated management measures.

8. Despite these advances, the study highlights key limitations across all habitats, including uneven data coverage, methodological inconsistencies, and the absence of information on ecological condition. Current maps mainly reflect habitat presence rather than health or degradation status, limiting their use for restoration planning. Significant knowledge gaps persist in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, and there is a need for standardized classification systems, improved monitoring, and better integration of national and regional datasets to ensure consistency and comparability.

9. For the implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO, the study strongly supports Action 1 by providing a robust regional baseline and identifying priority gaps for improving habitat mapping, monitoring, and data harmonization. It also informs Action 12 by showing that while many habitats fall within MPAs, protection is often not accompanied by effective management. This underscores the need to move beyond spatial coverage toward improving MPA effectiveness, prioritizing restoration, and applying systematic conservation planning to ensure ecological representativeness and long-term resilience of Mediterranean marine ecosystems

Action 2 - Species Recovery

10. Under the Post-2020 SAPBIO, Action 2 focuses on the recovery of endangered and threatened species. It calls for the development and implementation of recovery plans and emergency measures, both in situ and ex situ, for species that require such interventions, with a target of at least two species benefiting from these measures.

11. Following the development of the relevant guidelines, envisaged as initial activities during the 2024–2025 biennium, efforts will now focus on supporting Contracting Parties in the preparation and implementation of recovery plans and emergency measures, as appropriate. The selection of the two species for which such measures will be developed will be determined at the SPA/BD Focal Points meeting, in line with Activity 2.1.1.c of the SPA/RAC 2026–2027 PoW.

12. This action responds to the urgent need to halt biodiversity loss and to support the recovery of the most vulnerable marine species in the Mediterranean, contributing to the achievement of SAPBIO targets and related regional and global commitments.

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12681/mms.43060>

Action 12 – Restoration: Criteria for Full Inventory of Ecosystems with High Ecological Relevance and/or Regeneration Potential

13. Action 12 of the Post-2020 SAPBIO addresses the restoration of ecosystems with high ecological relevance and regeneration potential. It calls for the development of criteria for a full inventory of such ecosystems, in line with the Post-2020 SAPBIO. Priority habitats include *Posidonia oceanica* meadows, coralligenous assemblages, wetlands, and dune systems, which serve as nursery areas, carbon stocks, coastal erosion buffers, and natural disaster risk reducers.
14. During the 2024–2025 biennium, SPA/RAC elaborated the relevant criteria and methodological guidelines to assist Mediterranean countries in undertaking inventories of such habitats, which were foreseen as start-up activities. The criteria are presented in the information document UNEP/MEDWG.642/inf.3.
15. During the current biennium, the focus will now shift to assisting Contracting Parties in completing full inventories of such ecosystems in at least two countries subject to budget availability. This action provides a scientific basis for targeted restoration efforts and directly supports the achievement of global and regional biodiversity targets for 2030.
16. A common regional approach for restoration will maximize impact, ensure ecological coherence, facilitate resource mobilization, and accelerate progress toward national and regional targets. A workshop scheduled for February 2027 will (i) Analyze the current landscape of restoration planning, implementation, and monitoring across the Mediterranean, (ii) Identify key technical, financial, and governance gaps and synergies in existing programmes, (iii) Co-develop the core elements of a draft "Common Regional Framework for Effective Ecosystem Restoration in the Mediterranean.", and (iv) Foster a sustained community of practice among restoration stakeholders in the region. The workshop will be organised thanks to the financial voluntary contribution of the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security (MASE)

Action 15 MCPAs and OECMs :

17. SPA/RAC prepared a draft guidance document on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in line with the Post-2020 Regional Strategy of the Barcelona Convention, specifically to support the application of OECM criteria and identification processes in the Mediterranean.
18. The initial draft was shared with *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) members for feedback and discussed. It was subsequently revised and circulated to SPA/BD Focal Points, incorporating their comments as well as additional input from experts and relevant organizations.
19. In parallel, SPA/RAC supported three volunteer countries in piloting the guidance through national exercises to identify and report OECMs. The current version of the document presented as information document UNEP/MED WG.642/inf.4 integrates the lessons learned and outcomes from these pilot experiences.
20. SPA/RAC conducted an in-depth investigation on the feasibility of establishing transboundary Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including those located wholly or partially in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) in the Mediterranean.
21. SPA/RAC is finalising in collaboration with MEDPAN, the 2025 Status of Mediterranean MPAs report which provides an updated overview of the Mediterranean MPA network and evaluates progress since the 2020 edition. The report goes beyond spatial analysis to examine governance, management, and operational conditions necessary for MPAs to effectively support biodiversity conservation and ecosystem

resilience. Compared to previous editions, it places a stronger emphasis on management effectiveness, governance systems, ecological functionality, and climate resilience. Structurally, the report is organised into four parts: an overview of the MPA network (coverage, governance, protection levels), an analysis of management effectiveness, an assessment of ecological resilience and pressures, and finally, conclusions with key takeaways.

22. In the context of the mid-term evaluation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy of the Barcelona Convention for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), SPA/RAC, in collaboration with MedPAN, is launching the organization of the Mediterranean MPA Forum. This Forum aims to once again bring together the Mediterranean MPA community in order to:

- collectively assess progress in the implementation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy of the Barcelona Convention for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean and MPA forum Roadmap;
- review objectives and recommendations in light of evolving challenges facing MPAs in the region and the updated status of Mediterranean MPAs;
- identify key limiting factors affecting their achievement;
- showcase existing actions that concretely support the implementation of strategic frameworks;
- lay the foundations for the next Forum and the development of the future strategies (Post-2030).

23. The Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs, adopted at COP 22 (2021) of the Barcelona Convention, provides the main framework for achieving the 30x30 target in the Mediterranean by strengthening biodiversity conservation through improved coverage, representativeness, connectivity, management effectiveness, governance, and regional cooperation. It sets the goal of protecting at least 30% of the Mediterranean Sea by 2030, while expanding highly protected areas to support ecosystem recovery.

24. The strategy is supported by a dedicated Evaluation and Monitoring Framework, mandating SPA/RAC to conduct a mid-term evaluation in 2026 and a final evaluation in 2030, based on clearly defined indicators, targets, and means of verification for its 20 outputs.

25. The mid-term evaluation will be conducted in alignment with the assessment of the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable management of natural resources in the Mediterranean (Post-2020 SAPBIO) — whose first collective assessment is scheduled for 2027 — sharing indicators and preparatory work to ensure methodological coherence and optimize data use. The evaluation will also seek synergies with related processes and stakeholders — including the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) work on fisheries OECMs; SPA/RAC and the Network of Marine Protected Area Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN) joint initiatives such as the Mediterranean MPA Forum and its post-2020 Roadmap, and joint tools like MAPAMED and the Mediterranean MPA status report — to avoid duplication, maximize uptake of findings, and align recommendations for priority actions on MCPAs and OECMs.

Action 35 SUPPORT TO RUN THE SAPBIO:

26. A Resource Mobilisation Strategy was developed to support the Post-2020 SAPBIO by identifying priority conservation actions, estimating funding needs, and preparing a portfolio of fundable projects focused on MCPAs and OECMs. It involved mapping donors, consulting stakeholders, and ensuring alignment with regional and national priorities. The strategy was finalized through a donor conference to mobilize financial support and connect priorities with long-term implementation funding.

27. Efforts to mobilise financial resources for the implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO and the Post-2020 Regional Strategy on MCPAs and OECMs, continued notably through participation in consortia under funding opportunities under both the NextMED Programme and Horizon initiatives. Under NextMED, this involves engagement in projects such as **MedAllianceMPA**, which focuses on accelerating climate change resilience and adaptation in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas through ecosystem-based approaches, and **MEaDows4Coast**, which promotes nature-based solutions using seagrass meadows to enhance coastal resilience under climate risk. In parallel, within Horizon calls, participation has included initiatives such as **ROWER (Restoring Oceans and Waters in European Regions)**, **REBORN (Revealing Biodiversity for Resilient Aquatic Ecosystems)**, and **POSEIDON IA**, which aims to develop predictive ocean systems for energy-intelligent operations in the Mediterranean Sea basin. Among these, only the ROWER project was successful, has secured the financial agreement, and its implementation is scheduled to start in October 2026.
28. Additional efforts to mobilise financial resources include the submission of targeted project proposals to international funding mechanisms. In this context, “Monitoring Strandings to Protect Vulnerable Marine Species in the Med” was submitted in June 2025 to the Fondation Prince Albert II de Monaco under its 2025 call for projects. Furthermore, two proposals were submitted to the Monk Seal Alliance: “Unveiling Mediterranean monk seal status along Syrian and Lebanese coasts” and “The Mediterranean monk seal connectivity in the Levantine Basin”, both aiming to strengthen knowledge and conservation actions for this endangered species in the region.
29. UNEP-MAP and SPA/RAC contributed to a proposal to GBBF as part of the Regional Seas Branch of UNEP with proposal to assist eligible countries to achieve target 2 and 3 and is also contributing to the elaboration of proposal for the next round of GEF targeting the global and regional targets 2 and 3.
30. SPA/RAC proposes that priorities for its next fundraising activities to support the implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO should be on strengthening the efforts of Parties in (i) ecosystem restoration and (ii) conservation through protected and conserved areas and other effective area-based measures (OECMs). . The 12th Meeting of National correspondents will be invited to further discuss these priorities in order to guide SPA/RAC in the development of project concepts notes.