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**MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**

Extraordinary Meeting of the Focal Points for SPAs

Istanbul, Turkey, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010

**REPORT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF  
THE FOCAL POINTS FOR SPAs**



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## **Introduction**

1. The identification of areas of conservation interest, with a view to promoting the establishment of a representative ecological network of protected areas in the Mediterranean is among the priorities of the Mediterranean Action Plan. This was confirmed by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention at their 16th Ordinary Meeting (November 2009, Marrakech, Morocco).
2. In this context, a project funded by the European Commission DG Environment is implemented by the RAC/SPA and envisages a process to be developed in two phases. The first phase implemented between 2008 and 2009, included an overview of available scientific findings to identify priority areas for conservation in open seas, which could include areas that may be proposed for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with the provisions of the SPA and Biodiversity Protocol. The second phase, which begun in 2010, aims at further advancing the process with a view to undertaking the necessary actions to prioritise, as appropriate, the identified areas on the basis of scientific and feasibility SPAMI criteria and fill any assessment gaps accordingly for a number of areas, as appropriate.
3. This Extraordinary Meeting of Focal Point for Specially Protected Areas was convened to examine the results of the first phase project and provide guidance with regard to the implementation of the second phase with the view to enabling RAC/SPA to go ahead with implementing the outputs of MAP programme of work related to SPAMI and preparing a final report for the consideration of the 2011 ordinary RAC SPA focal points meeting.
4. It was held in Istanbul (Turkey) at the "The Peak Hotel", the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2010, with the support of the Turkish authorities.

## **Participation**

5. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following Contracting Parties: Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, European Commission, France, Greece, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Morocco, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey.
6. The Coordinating Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MEDU), the UNEP Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (UNEP/DELCO) and the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) were also represented.
7. The following institutions and organizations were represented by observers: ACCOBAMS, FAO, GFCM, CIESM, IUCN, WWF Mediterranean Programme Office, Greenpeace International, MedPAN Association, Turkish Marine Research Foundation.
8. The list of participants is contained in Annex I to this report.

## **Agenda item 1      Opening of the Meeting**

9. Mr Abderrahmen GANNOUN, Director of RAC/SPA, welcomed the participants and thanked the Turkish authorities for their assistance in organizing the meeting. After recalling the context in which the meeting was organised, he stressed the importance of the event, noting that this Extraordinary Meeting of the Focal Points for SPAs was convened to inform the Focal Points about the results of the work carried out by RAC/SPA within the framework of the Project implemented with financial support of the European Commission for the identification of sites of conservation interest in the areas located in the open sea. He emphasized that the project was carried out thanks to the financial support from the European Commission and also thanks to the support of the Steering Committee of the Project whose members were representatives from relevant international and regional organisations.
10. Ms. Tatjana HEMA, on behalf of the Coordination Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan welcomed the participants and emphasised that the meeting was organised within the framework of the implementation of the recommendations and decisions of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention regarding the development of a comprehensive Mediterranean network of protected areas. She emphasised that the programme of work of MAP included ambitious objectives in the field of biodiversity and in particular MPAs and that the meeting was an opportunity to share with the countries the outcome of the work carried out by RAC/SPA over the 2 last years to identify areas of conservation interest in the Mediterranean open sea zones. The meeting was also an opportunity to have the Mediterranean countries in board for further progress in this issue. She stressed that MAP has entered in a new phase while making efforts to implement the ecosystem approach, a work that should be linked with the identification of sites of conservation interest in the Mediterranean areas.
11. Mr Alphonse KAMBU, representative of UNEP Division of Environmental law and Conventions (UNEP/DELC), underlined that the conservation of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) is not only an emerging issue in current marine conservation trends, but also a critically important issue: the UN General Assembly has established a working group on biodiversity in ABNJ; the CBD developed scientific criteria for identifying priority areas for conservation in ABNJ; UNEP looks at working to address the governance of the Global Commons, including in the high seas; the current MAP project is very relevant and timely to be considered at global level regarding the management of high seas public goods. Hence much attention is being given towards RAC/SPA current activity.
12. International cooperation at regional level is fundamental to protect ABNJ. This is the last frontier and should catch the environmental protection. Some of the still pristine ecosystems on Earth are there. Human extractive activities have now sizeable impacts on the Area. Some of these current Mediterranean activities can feed the work in other Regional Seas. In conclusion, he emphasised that this relevant initiative may benefit the global community with lessons on the actions undertaken.
13. Mr. Sabri KIRIS, Deputy General Director at the Ministry of Environment and Forest, on behalf of the authorities of the host country, welcomed the participants emphasising that, since the entry into force of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean" in 1986, Turkey has realized some valuable works with the collaboration of RAC/SPA in particular concerning the Mediterranean Monk Seal and sea turtle conservation issues.

14. In this context, he enumerated 17 important sea turtles nesting beaches identified along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. He also emphasized that Turkey declared many Specially Protected Areas aimed at the conservation of natural sites and the habitat of endangered species.
15. He informed the meeting that Turkey participated in a three years project carried out between 2006 and 2008 for the inventory, mapping and monitoring of Posidonia meadows in Turkey, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia. Mersin and Gökçeada areas were among the pilot sites studied within the project.
16. He wished to the participants a successful meeting and invited them to a dinner offered by the Turkish authorities, on board of a boat that will bring the participants in a trip in the Bosphorus. He emphasized that the dinner was an opportunity to see the beauty of the strait and Istanbul which is the cradle of civilization and one of the most beautiful cities of the world.

## **Agenda item 2      Rules and regulations**

17. The rules of procedure adopted for the meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI) apply *mutatis mutandis* to the current meeting.

## **Agenda item 3      Election of Officers**

18. After informal consultations, the meeting unanimously elected the following officers:

Chairperson:	Mr. Giulio RELINI (Italy)
Vice-Chairpersons:	Mr. Fehmi SAHIN (Turkey)
	Mr. Abdallah MASTOUR (Morocco)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Robert TURK (Slovenia)

19. RAC/SPA acted as Secretariat of the Meeting

## **Agenda item 4      Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

20. The meeting adopted the provisional agenda contained in document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.348/1 Rev.2. The agenda is attached as Annex II to this report.
21. The meeting approved the organization of work proposed by the Secretariat as contained in the annotated provisional agenda of the meeting (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.348/2 Rev.1).

**Agenda item 5 Identification of potential sites in open seas including the deep sea that may satisfy SPAMI criteria**

22. Under this agenda item, making reference to Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.348/3 Rev.1, the Secretariat described the activities implemented to identify potential sites in the open seas, including the deep sea, capable of meeting the criteria for inclusion in the SPAMI List.
23. Setting the implementation of these activities in a more general context conducive to the establishment in the Mediterranean of a representative network of marine protected areas by 2012, including on the high seas, the Secretariat described the two phases of the implementation of the Joint Management Action between the Mediterranean Action Plan and the European Commission.
24. The Secretariat outlined the aim of this meeting, which was to present to the participants the main results of the first phase of this project and to discuss arrangements for implementation of the second phase.
25. The first phase of the project was implemented in 2008 and 2009 and included the collection of the available scientific data for identifying priority conservation areas situated in the open seas, including the deep seas. To support the presentation of this process of selection, the Secretariat described the Geographical Information System developed in the context of the project, compiling the whole set of data produced.
26. The second phase of the project, to be implemented from 2010 to 2011 would involve the drafting of presentation reports for the areas identified as candidates for inclusion in the SPAMI List.
27. The Secretariat noted the evolution of the project, which was initially focused on areas beyond national jurisdiction but which, as work began and having regard to the ecological and biological characteristics of importance for the conservation of the areas concerned, was seen to require taking in zones situated more generally in the open sea, including the deep seas, without regard to the legal status of those areas.
28. The Secretariat commended the work of the Steering Committee, composed of representatives of international and regional organizations (UNEP, European Commission, FAO, GFCM, IMO, REMPEC, ACCOBAMS, IUCN and WWF) and thanked the different member institutions for their close cooperation.
29. All the data from different studies was compiled in a Geographical Information System (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.348/Inf.7). The set of layers prepared aided to finally define a list of areas of conservation interest in the open seas, including the deep sea. The different layers were displayed in the screen by the Secretariat.
30. The activities of the Project's second phase aim at facilitating the process of designating as SPAMIs sites included in the areas identified in the first phase as of conservation interest in the open seas, including the deep sea. Creating SPAMIs in these areas requires setting up a process of coordination and consultation between neighbouring countries.
31. The Parties that are making the proposal for the SPAMI List will provide the RAC/SPA with a presentation report containing information on the area's geographic location, its physical



and ecological features, its legal status, its management plan and the means of implementing this, and a statement justifying the area's Mediterranean importance. Thus, when a proposal has been made for an area that lies wholly or partially in the high sea or in areas where the boundaries of national jurisdiction or sovereignty have not yet been defined, the neighbouring Parties must consult one another to ensure that the proposed protection and management measures, and means of implementation, are consistent.

32. Thus the activities of the Project's second phase aim at facilitating the process that must end in the drafting of a presentation report by the area's neighbouring Parties and at accompanying the concerned countries in this process of consultation and coordination.
33. For each considered site, it is suggested that an *ad hoc* work group be set up, made up of representatives from the countries neighbouring on the concerned area. RAC/SPA will be responsible for facilitating work of these work groups.
34. The activities to be carried out in the second phase shall include:
  35. Analysis of the legal context of the considered site  
The in-depth analysis of the areas' legal status to check with great attention that the boundaries of the corresponding national jurisdiction or sovereignty are clearly defined and that there is no conflict regarding the concerned areas.
  36. Preliminary definition of the demarcation of the considered site  
Based on the results of the Project's first phase, the boundaries and surface area of the areas selected will be defined in a preliminary manner on the basis of the available knowledge. The final boundaries will be validated during the final consultation phase and will take into account the results of possible field studies.
  37. Organising the collecting of information  
Organising and supporting oceanographic studies and in particular biological surveys in the considered sites is planned to collect data that will permit the demarcation of the area to be refined and the presentation reports to be rounded off. For such an activity, coordination with research bodies with technical means that are specific to the exploring of these areas will be necessary.
  38. Preparing the presentation report  
The presentation reports will be crafted by a group of national and international experts, complying with the format of SPAMI presentation reports adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. It should be noted that in compliance with the arrangements of the SPA/BD Protocol, the SPAMI presentation reports are to be submitted by the concerned Parties.

**Agenda item 6      Discussion on the results and outcomes of the first phase and on the implementation of the second phase of the Project**

39. The meeting was invited to examine the results of the first phase and to discuss the conditions for implementation of the second phase of the project.

40. Several delegates expressed their thanks to the Secretariat and their satisfaction at the quality of work carried out by RAC/SPA in identifying potential sites in open seas, including deep waters, that could meet the criteria for inclusion in the SPAMI List.
41. The representative of Cyprus expressed her country's interest concerning two of the potential SPAMI areas proposed by RAC/SPA for discussion – namely the Eratosthenes Seamount and the North-eastern Levantine Sea. She emphasized that the Eratosthenes area fell entirely within the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus and was therefore an area under its exclusive jurisdiction, within which Cyprus was exercising sovereignty rights in accordance with the relevant UNCLOS provisions. She stressed that according to the SPA Protocol it was the concerned Party, and in the present case Cyprus, that should be proposing the area for inclusion in the SPAMI List. Cyprus accordingly wished for the Eratosthenes Seamount to be removed from the group of potential SPAMIs proposed by RAC/SPA for the open seas.
42. The discussion between the participants highlighted the problem of the lack of data on zones that were often poorly understood from a scientific and ecological standpoint. However, several delegations argued that this element should not be regarded as an impediment to pursuing the second-phase process and activities. Other countries confirmed the need to pursue scientific investigations in the open sea and deep waters in order to fill the knowledge gaps regarding these sites.
43. Whilst agreeing to the importance of continuing with the compilation of more data and information, the GFCM representative suggested that the criteria for the identification of SPAMIs should be further fine tuned.
44. The French delegation reminded the meeting of the stages and efforts of coordination that had been necessary to implement the Pelagos Sanctuary, which had finally been able to be declared a SPAMI incorporating a high seas area despite the fact that numerous ecological, socio-economic and legal data were lacking at the time. He noted that the gaps concerned had been taken into account in the management plan.
45. The French delegation offered to make available to RAC/SPA the data held by the Agency for Marine Protected Areas (AAMP) deriving from the oceanographic campaigns carried out in the canyons of the Gulf of Lyons. It announced the forthcoming organization of a campaign involving the Corsican canyons. AAMP intended to place its experience at the disposal of the Barcelona Convention and RAC/SPA for developing a project to explore canyons on a Mediterranean scale. In this context, it informed the meeting of AAMP's intention to propose a quadripartite agreement on this subject with IUCN, RAC/SPA and ACCOBAMS, with particular regard to a survey for the assessment of populations of marine mammals.
46. With a view to involving other bodies concerned with the question, several delegations called for the participation of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT). Moreover, the International Commission for the Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean Sea (CIESM) had offered to collaborate actively in future stages of the implementation of the Project, and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) had undertaken to pursue its cooperation over the second phase of the Project.

47. The representative of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat expressed her satisfaction at the presence of 9 areas of importance for cetaceans among the 13 priority conservation areas identified during the first phase of the Project. She likewise stressed the wish of ACCOBAMS to pursue its collaboration within the Project Steering Committee and the working groups to be set up for the second-phase activities.
48. Several speakers stressed the importance of questions relating to the legal status of the areas in question and suggested that searching analysis of these questions should be carried out at the start of the process of preparing presentation reports of SPAMIs situated wholly or partially in the high seas.
49. The discussions led to the formulation of proposals on the part of countries present regarding the pursuit of activities concerning the retained sites (Annex III) under the second phase of the Project. In that context, certain representatives expressed the wish of their countries to undertake activities under the second phase of the implementation of the project.
50. The representatives of France and Spain informed the meeting of their countries' intention to pursue their cooperation with regard to the Gulf of Lyons and to consider the possibility of preparing a proposal for the declaration of a SPAMi in this open-sea, area, which included deep waters.
51. The representative of Spain also referred to the wish of his country to pursue the process of cooperation with Morocco and Algeria concerning the Alboran Sea. Concerning the Balearic Area, he stated that this was situated in the Spanish zone for the conservation of living marine resources and that his country intended to pursue the implementation of the necessary measures in collaboration with the European Commission and taking account of the ICCAT provisions.
52. The representative of Slovenia informed the meeting of the organization in October 2010 of a workshop entitled 'Towards a representative MPA network in the Adriatic' and invited the countries bordering the Adriatic to take advantage of this forum to progress towards coordinated measures for establishing a SPAMi in this high seas region.
53. Following the proposal of some delegations, the meeting recommended that for each site chosen the Secretariat should officially contact the authorities of the countries concerned through the appropriate diplomatic channels. This step being essential to initiate the process of SPAMi creation in areas embracing high seas and would serve to sensitize decision makers and competent national institutions concerning the activities developed under this project.
54. The representative of UNEP/MEDU informed the meeting that at its last Meeting held in Rabat (Morocco, 5-6 May 2010), the Bureau of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols highlighted the need to develop an appropriate approach based on the relevant international frame on issues related to the necessary institutional legal setups with regard to the management of SPAMIs beyond national jurisdiction as well as the necessary linkages with the other UN relevant processes and agencies for this purpose.
55. The Secretariat presented the Concept Note for a study on legal and institutional issues relating to the setting up and management of SPAMIs located wholly or partially in Mediterranean areas beyond national jurisdiction (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.348/4). The representative of the Secretariat said that the proposed study would aim at analyzing the

relevant international and regional conventions that were applicable to the Mediterranean Sea. Later developments would be devoted to the various actors for implementing the various rules applicable to areas beyond national jurisdiction conducive to better governance.

56. The three stages in the working methodology would be: listing the legal provisions dealing with MPAs in the high seas; analysis of the provisions regarding MPAs in the high seas; and development of an appropriate approach concerning legal setups with regard to the establishment and management of SPAMIs beyond national jurisdiction.
57. The GFCM representative highlighted the importance of taking into consideration the regulation of fishing activities and consideration of vulnerable marine ecosystems through existing GFCM binding Recommendations, as well as other international fisheries legal instruments such as the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the recent United Nations General Assembly Resolution on sustainable fisheries which also aim to safeguard vulnerable marine ecosystems. He also suggested that the FAO international guidelines for the management of deep sea fisheries should be consulted in any future work on the subject.
58. In response to a question posed by one representative, the Secretariat indicated that the study would rely on the work of legal experts given the amount of legal materials existing on the question. If necessary, the Secretariat would have recourse to the Focal Points and eventually to the Contracting Parties with a view to providing guidance on the construction of the SPAMIs.
59. A representative of IUCN noted that a taskforce established by her organization had undertaken analysis of the question and could provide help in elucidating some of the issues concerned.
60. The meeting approved the proposed methodology stressing the importance of taking into account the relevant international frameworks and of collaborating with the concerned international organisations.
61. The representative of the European Commission expressed his disappointment regarding the low commitments by the Parties for further action to protect the areas identified through the first phase of the project.

#### **Agenda item 7      Any other matters**

62. No other issues were requested to be discussed under this agenda item.

#### **Agenda item 8      Adoption of the Report of the Meeting**

63. The draft report prepared by the Secretariat was reviewed, amended and adopted by the Meeting.

#### **Agenda item 9      Closure of the Meeting**

64. The Chair closed the meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2010 at 10.10 a.m

## **ANNEX I**

### **LIST OF PARTICIPANTS – *LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS***

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## ANNEX II - AGENDA

- Agenda item 1 – Opening of the Meeting
- Agenda item 2 – Rules of Procedure
- Agenda item 3 – Election of Officers
- Agenda item 4 – Adoption of the Agenda and organization of work
- Agenda item 5 – Identification of potential sites in open seas including the deep sea that may satisfy SPAMI criteria
- Agenda item 6 – Discussion on the results and outcomes of the first phase and on the implementation of the second phase of the Project
- Agenda item 7 – Any other matters
- Agenda item 8 – Adoption of the Report of the Meeting\*
- Agenda item 9 – Closure of the Meeting

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\* If the works of the Meeting related to Agenda items 1 to 7 cannot be finalized in time to allow the preparation and the adoption of the Meeting Report during the same day, the adoption of the Report might be planned for the morning session of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2010.

## ANNEX III

### LIST OF PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREAS LYING IN THE OPEN SEAS, INCLUDING THE DEEP SEA, LIKELY TO CONTAIN SITES THAT COULD BE CANDIDATES FOR THE SPAMI LIST

EBSA	Priority conservation areas	Criteria	Remarks
Alborán Sea	<p>Alborán Seamounts: The seamounts in this portion of the Alborán Sea support a wide array of marine biodiversity, and the site contains sea bird and cetacean critical habitat. The southwestern portion of the Alborán Sea is highly productive and is also a transit corridor for bird, mammal and fish species travelling between the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Sea</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological diversity Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Vulnerability Uniqueness</p>	
Balearic Islands area	<p>Southern Balearic: This area of the Western Mediterranean contains seamounts and provides critical spawning habitats for bluefin tuna and critical sea bird and cetacean habitats as well.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Vulnerability Uniqueness</p>	
Gulf of Lions area	<p>Gulf of Lions shelf and slope: This highly productive shelf region of the greater Gulf of Lions also contains deep sea canyons that have a high biodiversity significance. The area also shares important cetacean habitats with the contiguous Pelagos Sanctuary, and is probably inhabited by the same cetacean populations that occur in the Sanctuary. It thus represents the natural continuation westward, involving waters off France and Spain, of cetacean conservation measures foreseen in the Pelagos Sanctuary. It is also an important sea bird area.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Vulnerability Uniqueness</p>	Contiguous to the Pelagos Sanctuary
Tyrrhenian Sea	<p>Central Tyrrhenian: This portion of the Tyrrhenian Sea, adjacent to the Pelagos Sanctuary, is highly productive, supporting sea bird, marine mammal and shark species.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Vulnerability Uniqueness</p>	Contiguous to the Pelagos Sanctuary
Tunisian Plateau	<p>Northern Strait of Sicily (including Adventure and nearby Banks): This portion of the south-central Mediterranean contains critical sea bird and cetacean habitats, deep sea corals, seamounts, and highly productive, very shallow offshore banks.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Uniqueness Biological productivity Vulnerability Importance for life history Importance for threatened species</p>	

	<p>Southern Strait of Sicily: The Tunisian Plateau region of the Sicily Strait supports a high productivity and nursery areas for several shark species as well as critical sea bird habitats.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Vulnerability</p>	
Adriatic Sea	<p>Northern and Central Adriatic: This portion of the Adriatic has a high natural productivity that supports an extensive food web, including sea birds, loggerhead sea turtles and several shark species. Considering the high level of degradation of the North-western Adriatic Sea, establishing a protected area in this site would require significant marine restoration effort.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species</p>	
Ionian Sea	<p>Santa Maria di Leuca: In addition to supporting a broad array of Mediterranean diversity, this northern extent of the Ionian has significant deep sea coral habitats.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Fragility Naturalness Importance for life history Importance for threatened species</p>	
	<p>Northeastern Ionian: The northeastern Ionian Sea includes cetacean critical habitats and important nursery areas for several shark species.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Importance for life history Importance for threatened species</p>	
Aegean Sea	<p>Thracian Sea: This portion of the Aegean Sea is highly productive and includes key habitats for sea birds, the Mediterranean monk seal and other marine mammals, as well as deep sea coral habitats. The corresponding EBSA encompasses the Greek National Marine Park of Alonissos and the Northern Sporades.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Biological productivity Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Uniqueness</p>	
Levantine Sea	<p>Northeastern Levantine Sea and Rhodes Gyre: This area encompasses important bluefin tuna spawning grounds as well as key marine mammal habitats. This oceanographic feature is the most productive in eastern Mediterranean pelagic waters and is likely to provide critical habitats for both fishery species and marine mammals.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Importance for life history Importance for threatened species Biological productivity Uniqueness</p>	
Nile Delta Region	<p>Nile Delta Region: This southern portion of the Levantine Sea includes recently discovered cold seeps, as well as important sea turtle - and possibly cetacean - habitats.</p>	<p>Ecological value: Uniqueness Importance for threatened species Importance for life history</p>	