



**United Nations
Environment Programme
Mediterranean Action Plan**

12 May 2025

Original: English

Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries

Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025

Report of the Meeting

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Report of the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with the Programme of Work (PoW) of the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) of the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) for the period 2024-2025, as adopted by the 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 23, Portorož, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023), SPA/RAC convened the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) for Biodiversity and Fisheries, in Athens, Greece, on 7-8 April 2025.
2. The main objectives of the meeting are to review the following documents:
 - (i) Development of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) ecological objectives EO4 on marine food webs and EO6 on sea-floor integrity;
 - (ii) Monitoring and assessment elements for the IMAP common indicators (CI1 and CI2) on benthic habitats;
 - (iii) Progress update on the candidate Common Indicator cCI24 and the development of common indicators CI1 and CI2 for pelagic habitats; and
 - (iv) Updates to factsheets, data dictionaries, and standards for indicators related to biodiversity (EO1), non-indigenous species (EO2), and fisheries (EO3).

II. Attendance

3. The following Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention were represented at the meeting: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Spain, Türkiye.
4. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented as observers: Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean / Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (GFCM / FAO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
5. The following non-governmental organizations and other entities were also represented as observers: European Topic Centre for Spatial Analysis and Synthesis - University of Malaga (ETC-UMA), Mediterranean Small Islands Initiative (PIM Initiative), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
6. The United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan-Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) Secretariat was also represented, along with the following regional activity centre of the Mediterranean Action Plan: Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication (INFO/RAC).
7. SPA/RAC acted as secretariat for the meeting.
8. The full list of participants is attached as **Annex I** to the present report.

III. Opening of the meeting (agenda item 1)

9. The meeting was opened on Monday, 7 April 2025, at 9.00 a.m. by the representatives of the host country, UNEP/MAP and SPA/RAC.
10. Ms. Aimilia Drougas, National Focal Point for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) from the Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy, expressed her sincere appreciation for the participants' dedication to advancing environmental monitoring and assessment in

the Mediterranean region. She underscored the crucial role of expertise and commitment in strengthening data-driven decision-making for the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. Ms. Drougas highlighted that this meeting provides a valuable platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and the refinement of monitoring methodologies under the Barcelona Convention and its IMAP. Emphasizing the importance of collective efforts, she encouraged open discussion, innovative solutions, and strong partnerships to address pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts, ultimately striving for a healthier and more sustainable Mediterranean. She concluded by wishing all attendees a productive meeting and an enjoyable stay in Athens.

11. Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, Quality Status Report (QSR) Programme Management Officer at UNEP/MAP, speaking on behalf of Ms. Tatjana Hema, MAP Coordinator, conveyed her apologies for her absence due to commitments abroad and welcomed the participants to Athens. He emphasized the significance of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMONs) and UNEP/MAP's efforts to review and update the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) policy implementation including its IMAP, following the mandate received at COP 23 in Portorož, Slovenia. Mr. Ioakeimidis underlined the crucial role of all MAP components and CORMONs in assessing and improving the monitoring and assessment of the Mediterranean Sea and coast, as well as in improving the next assessment products. He noted that this meeting is crucial for strengthening biodiversity indicators and ecological objectives, with the aim of providing important information for the upcoming meeting of Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) in May 2025 and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group in September 2025. He expressed optimism for fruitful discussions and outcomes that will contribute to the decisions expected at COP 24, to be hosted by Egypt in December 2025, and wished the meeting every success in its deliberations.

12. Mr. Mahmoud Elyes Hamza, Director of SPA/RAC, welcomed participants to the second CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries for the 2024-2025 biennium and expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to meet in Athens following the previous online meeting. He outlined the focus of the meeting to review the development of IMAP ecological targets on marine food webs and sea-floor integrity, and to discuss common indicators for benthic and pelagic habitats. Mr. Hamza emphasized the importance of planning for the upcoming biennium, in particular with regard to updating factsheets and data standards for biodiversity, non-indigenous species and fisheries indicators.

13. He acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the GFCM and INFO/RAC, highlighting their roles in promoting sustainable fisheries management and data management, respectively, within the EcAp/IMAP process. He also noted several upcoming meetings, including the 11th Meeting of the National Correspondents 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) and the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points, as important steps in strengthening regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation. Mr. Hamza expressed appreciation for the commitment of all Contracting Parties and experts involved in advancing the objectives of IMAP, and in particular the members of the Biodiversity Online Working Groups (OWGs), and concluded with optimism for productive discussions and outcomes over the course of the meeting.

IV. Organizational matters (agenda item 2)

A. Rules of procedure

14. The meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its related Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI), as amended by the Contracting Parties (UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.1/5 and UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5), would apply *mutatis mutandis* to their deliberations at the meeting.

B. Election of officers

15. In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure and with the principles of geographical and equitable gender representation, the meeting unanimously elected the following officers from among the representatives of the Contracting Parties:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Chairperson: | Mr. Abdulmaula Hamza (Libya), |
| Vice-chairpersons: | Ms. Ivana Mitrovic (Montenegro), |
| | Ms. Lara Samaha (Lebanon), |
| Rapporteur: | Mr. Laurent Guérin (France). |

C. Adoption of the agenda

16. The meeting adopted its agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda circulated in document UNEP/MED WG.606/1 Rev.1.

17. The agenda is attached as **Annex II** to the present report.

D. Organization of work

18. The meeting agreed to follow the timetable proposed in the annotated provisional agenda (UNEP/MED WG.606/2).

19. The working languages of the meeting were English and French. Simultaneous interpretation was available.

V. Development of EcAp ecological objectives (agenda item 3)

A. Development of the IMAP Ecological Objective 6 on sea-floor integrity under the Barcelona Convention (agenda sub-item 3.1)

20. The Secretariat presented an updated and improved version of the proposal for IMAP Ecological Objective 6 (EO6) on sea-floor integrity, based on the comments and recommendations of the previous CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (videoconference, 6-7 June 2024), as reflected in the working document UNEP/MED WG.606/3 “Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 6 on sea-floor integrity under the Barcelona Convention”. The document describes the main human activities affecting seabed integrity, identifies possible links with other IMAP ecological objectives and explores the possibility of using assessments based on common indicators. It also proposes habitat types to be assessed, taking into account the relevant spatial scales and assessment areas.

21. The meeting commended the quality of the presented document and the thorough integration of comments from the 2024 Biodiversity and Fisheries CORMON meeting.

22. The meeting recommended that the specificities of the Mediterranean region be taken into account in the development of Ecological Objective 6, while ensuring coherence with other regional seas conventions and the European Union’s (EU) Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

23. In response to concerns about the potential risk of lacking consensus among Contracting Parties on thresholds for the proposed Good Environmental Status (GES) and targets for EO6 - particularly related to the extent of physical loss of natural habitat and the extent of adverse effects on benthic habitat -, especially in non-EU countries where bottom fishing is socio-economically significant, the Secretariat highlighted the necessity of balancing seabed protection with the economic value of fishing activities. A recent study by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on the spatial distribution of fisheries in the northern Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Baltic regions reveals that approximately 90% of fish value is derived from only 30-40% of the fished area.

This indicates that 60-70% of the trawled seabed yields minimal economic benefit. It is crucial to consider these findings within the broader context of Mediterranean countries to assess their implications for seabed protection and the economic sustainability of key fishing areas.

24. Specific comments were made regarding the consideration of cables and pipelines, as well as the anchoring of all types of vessels, including fishing vessels and recreational boating as part of the human activities exerting pressure on the Mediterranean seabed.

25. The meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/3 “Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 6 on sea-floor integrity under the Barcelona Convention” and agreed on its submission to the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

B. Development of the IMAP Ecological Objective 4 on marine food webs under the Barcelona Convention (agenda sub-item 3.2)

26. The Secretariat introduced working document UNEP/MED WG.606/4 entitled “Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 4 on marine food webs under the Barcelona Convention”, prepared with the support of the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on marine food webs. The document summarizes the main outcomes of the OWG recommendations and outlines the most relevant approach for the development of IMAP common indicators for EO4 on marine food webs under the Barcelona Convention.

27. In line with the recommendations of the 2024 CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries, the Secretariat invited all Contracting Parties to contribute to the development of the directory of specialists, laboratories, institutions, and organizations involved in EO4. To facilitate this effort, a questionnaire has been circulated to the SPA/BD Focal Points, CORMON members and members of the OWG. Parties were requested to complete the questionnaire and circulate it widely within their national institutions and among national experts to ensure a comprehensive collection of data.

28. The meeting commended the valuable contribution of the OWG for marine food webs to the development of EO4.

29. One representative indicated that his country suggests that, ideally, it would be necessary to identify how existing data could be used to enable the application of the indicators and to establish common approaches based on existing regional reporting streams that could be applied by all Contracting Parties. A selection of trophic guilds and species representative of the functional groups should also be sought, together with examples of existing data and application of the indicators. This would allow Contracting Parties to assess the applicability of the proposed indicators and to comment accordingly.

30. The meeting noted the difference in capacity between EU and non-EU Contracting Parties and requested the Secretariat to make further efforts to bridge this capacity-building gap.

31. The meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/4 “Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 4 on marine food webs under the Barcelona Convention” and agreed on the proposed common indicators on marine food webs and their submission to the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

VI. IMAP common indicators (agenda item 4)

A. Assessment methodologies: assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2 (agenda sub-item 4.1)

32. The Secretariat presented working document UNEP/MED WG.606/5, entitled “Assessment methodologies, assessment criteria, and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2”. This document outlines the preparation of assessment methodologies, criteria and thresholds for the IMAP biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2 on benthic habitats: Posidonia meadows, coralligenous, and maërl. The Secretariat expressed appreciation for the active contributions of the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on benthic habitats, the Contracting Parties and their experts, as well as the regional partners for their valuable support and collaboration throughout this process.

33. Many representatives commended the work of the Secretariat in developing the assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2.

34. The meeting recommended that net changes, i.e., losses and gains in habitat extent, be monitored to reflect the potential success of habitat restoration efforts made by the Contracting Parties.

35. Additionally, the meeting emphasized the need for increased efforts in mapping benthic habitats to enhance data collection for the assessment of common indicators CI1 and CI2.

36. Furthermore, the meeting encouraged coordinated monitoring efforts among Contracting Parties within the same subregional subdivisions, facilitated as appropriate by SPA/RAC.

37. Referring to recent scientific publications, a delegate made a general comment on the terminology used and suggested replacing the term “maërl” with “rhodolites”. The former term originally referred to biogenic formations found in the Atlantic Ocean, in Brittany, in the north-west of France.

38. The meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/5 “Assessment methodologies: assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2” and agreed on its submission to the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

B. Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats (agenda sub-item 4.2)

39. Under this agenda item, the Secretariat introduced working document UNEP/MED WG.606/6 entitled “Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats”. The document summarizes the main recommendations made by the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on pelagic habitats and describes the proposed approach for taking these indicators forward.

40. The meeting acknowledged the quality of the work done on the development of indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats.

41. The meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/6 “Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats” and agreed on the proposed indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats and their submission to the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

C. Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles (agenda sub-item 4.3)

42. The Secretariat introduced working document UNEP/MED WG.606/7 entitled “Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles”. The document provides updates and developments on the monitoring and assessment of the IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10) on marine litter and the progress made towards transformation into the IMAP EO10 Common Indicator 24.

43. Many Contracting Parties acknowledged the efforts and assistance provided by SPA/RAC in monitoring marine litter ingested by or entangling marine turtles.

44. One delegate recommended that reporting on marine litter should follow the same standards and level of detail across countries for the sake of data consistency and comparability. He also encouraged other regional partners such as ACCOBAMS and BirdLife to work closely with SPA/RAC on these issues in order to achieve a more comprehensive, multi-taxa view of the marine litter problem in the Mediterranean.

45. The representative of the PIM Initiative informed the meeting about the CAIPIM project (Knowing, Acting, Innovating, and Protecting the Small Islands of the Mediterranean and Macaronesia), funded by the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) and coordinated by PIM. This project will focus on various aspects of seabird ecology, such as feeding behaviour, distribution patterns and the impact of plastic pollution on birds listed in the Appendix to the Barcelona Convention. He then expressed the desire of the PIM Initiative to contribute to the IMAP collective effort with data and feedback from the project.

46. The Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS drew the attention of the meeting to Recommendation 16.12 of the last ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee (Barcelona, Spain, December 2024), which recommends the promotion of cetacean species as indicators of pollution and macro-waste (i.e. *Physeter macrocephalus* and *Ziphius cavirostris*) at the ACCOBAMS level. *Tursiops* spp. could be used as indicators at the sub-basin level. The Scientific Committee also encourages the Barcelona Convention and the European Commission (EC) to include cetaceans as indicator species in the IMAP candidate indicator 24 and MSFD descriptor 10 respectively. In this context, ACCOBAMS is ready to provide support for capacity building, in particular with regard to national stranding networks. These actions should be included in the ACCOBAMS work programme for the period 2026-2028.

47. The representative of GFCM highlighted both ongoing and future cooperation with UNEP/MAP and its Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean (MED POL) on marine litter related to aquaculture and fisheries. He informed the meeting about GFCM’s standardized protocols on discards and bycatch, which already include a chapter to collect and report a minimum common information on marine litter. Although reporting on marine litter is not mandatory, many countries are actively collecting this data, which can be used in the 2025 State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries (SoMFi) report. He also mentioned a prototype trawler that has been developed to collect marine litter from the seabed in fisheries areas, with trials currently underway in Italy and planned for Morocco. In addition, he emphasized the importance of Barcelona Convention data on interactions between marine litter and vulnerable species, which could complement existing GFCM data.

48. The representative of ETC-UMA informed the meeting about the MedBioLitter database, an open database and spatial geoportal that compiles current scientific knowledge on marine litter and its interactions with biodiversity in the Mediterranean region, and highlighted its ability to make a significant contribution to regional efforts. Since 2017, the database has been updated twice a year and

now includes over 1,000 records based on 150 peer-reviewed scientific articles, covering more than 200 species impacted by marine litter.

49. The meeting reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/7 “Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles” and agreed on its submission to the CORMON Meeting on Pollution and Marine Litter (Athens, Greece, 6-7 May 2025), the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the 12th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

VII. Proposal to revise IMAP on Biodiversity (EO1), Non-indigenous species (EO2), and Fisheries (EO3) (agenda item 5)

A. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-indigenous species (EO2) (agenda sub-item 5.1)

50. To introduce this agenda item, the Secretariat introduced working document UNEP/MED WG.606/8 entitled “Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-indigenous Species (EO2)”. This document outlines the proposed approach for updating the common indicator factsheets related to biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2).

51. One delegate asked that the document include an explicit reference to the mobilization of Online Working Groups (OWGs) and CORMONs, as well as details of the timetable and key steps for mobilizing these groups in particular.

52. The meeting requested the Secretariat to edit and make available in a well-presented format the updated factsheets on common indicators.

53. The Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS informed the meeting of her organization’s willingness to cooperate in improving the implementation of cetacean-related criteria in the context of the Barcelona Convention’s EcAp/IMAP process for coordinated monitoring and assessment in the Mediterranean, in conjunction with the EU MSFD.

54. She announced that the ACCOBAMS Surveillance Initiative ASI-II campaign, which aims to continue synoptic monitoring efforts across the Mediterranean, will start in 2026. The official launch of ASI-II will take place at a side event at the Third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in June 2025, providing an opportunity to raise the profile of the project and mobilize new funding and collaborations.

55. The Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS also announced that a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) had been signed between ACCOBAMS and SPA/RAC in March 2025, reaffirming ACCOBAMS’ commitment to work closely with Parties and partner organizations to ensure consistent and effective implementation of the cetacean criteria under the Barcelona Convention EcAp/IMAP and the EU MSFD.

56. The representative of WWF thanked the Secretariat for its continued commitment to advancing the implementation of the IMAP monitoring framework, particularly through the coordination of guidance updates for the Common Indicators and also acknowledged the important work undertaken for the elaboration of the regional baseline on non-indigenous species during the first cycle of IMAP, which will serve as a key reference for monitoring biodiversity shifts in the Mediterranean.

57. WWF welcomed the opportunity to actively contribute to the ongoing process of updating the guidance factsheets for the IMAP common indicators, specifically Indicators 1 and 2 on marine

habitats and Indicators 3 to 6 on marine turtles, marine mammals and seabirds, and invited the Secretariat and the CORMON group to further develop the indicators and to consider indicators for non-commercial fish, which are currently lacking, given that the SPA/BD Protocol lists several pelagic fish species, including plankton feeders and top predators, which are not currently monitored and will therefore also be relevant to other ecological objectives under development, such as EO4.

58. With specific regard to the current update of guidance factsheets, WWF stated that its on-the-ground capacity, including through its initiatives in North Africa and the Eastern Adriatic, can provide technical input and practical insights that can help strengthen the scientific robustness and field applicability of the monitoring protocols.

59. The representative of IUCN thanked the Secretariat for presenting document UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.3 entitled “Mediterranean Monk Seal: A comprehensive set of monitor and research techniques for the study and conservation of *Monachus monachus* in the Mediterranean Sea” as an information document to this meeting, and encouraged the Contracting Parties to use it as a reference to strengthen national and regional monitoring efforts for this endangered species. She informed the meeting that this document developed by IUCN with the contribution of the Mediterranean monk seal experts, provides a robust and practical framework to support the study and conservation of the species in the region. It added that the document is in its first version and is assigned to be adaptable allowing users to tailor protocols to specific conditions and that an expert group is being developed at the moment to keep working on it.

60. The representative of GFCM emphasized the critical importance of collecting data related to ecological objectives EO1 and EO2, in particular on vulnerable species and demographic data on natural mortality. This information is essential for monitoring fisheries and their interactions with vulnerable species. These demographic and biological data are essential when carrying out assessments and defining thresholds for the bycatch of vulnerable species. Data derived from EO1 can therefore be particularly relevant to GFCM’s work. He also mentioned the ongoing cooperation on non-indigenous species (NIS) (EO2) and announced that a pilot study was underway to monitor fishery-related NIS in the Eastern Mediterranean, starting with a sub-regional observatory in Türkiye, where data from EO2 would continue to be crucial to their efforts.

61. The meeting welcomed the willingness of the partner organizations in updating the common indicators factsheets related to biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2).

B. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Fisheries (EO3) (agenda sub-item 5.2)

62. Referring to document UNEP/MED WG.606/9 entitled “Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to fisheries (EO3)”, the representative of GFCM briefed the meeting on his organization’s current contributions to IMAP regarding the monitoring and assessment of fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea, in particular on common indicators CI7 (Spawning Stock Biomass), CI8 (Total Landings), and CI9 (Fishing Mortality or Exploitation Rate). He also outlined the way forward for these indicators. These three indicators are regularly assessed and reported through the State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries (SoMFi) report, using GFCM’s established stock assessment forms and methodologies. The SoMFi report serves as the scientific basis for the EO3 chapter of the Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR), as demonstrated in previous cycles, including MED QSR 2017 (based on SoMFi 2016) and MED QSR 2023 (based on SoMFi 2022). The same approach will be maintained for future MED QSR updates. GFCM, in coordination with SPA/RAC, will update the EO3 factsheets for CI7–CI9 during the next biennium. The representative also provided clarifications regarding CI10 and CI11, which are currently considered non-mandatory and pending updates, as well as CI12 (Bycatch), which may be updated in the coming years, particularly in light of the GFCM’s standardized bycatch data collection protocol adopted in 2019.

63. Referring to the “List of GFCM priority species driving fisheries for which assessments are regularly (or planned to be) carried out”, presented as Appendix 1 to document UNEP/MED WG.606/9, and noting that this list is strongly fishery-centred and needs to be supplemented with indicators for lower trophic levels (e.g. plankton) and non-commercial species/habitats in order to provide a comprehensive ecosystem assessment, the representative of one Contracting Party made the following specific comments:

- The deep-water shrimps *Aristeus antennatus* and *Aristaeomorpha foliacea* are effective indicators of deep-water trawling pressure, although their indicator power may be localized due to less consistent data coverage throughout the Central and Eastern Mediterranean sub-regions.
- The dolphinfish *Coryphaena hippurus* offers moderate validity for species of regional importance for migratory/seasonal dynamics, while the red coral *Corallium rubrum* is highly valid, but specifically indicates coralligenous habitat health and targeted harvesting pressure.
- The European eel *Anguilla anguilla* is a poor indicator of the status of the Central Mediterranean marine ecosystem due to its complex multi-habitat life cycle and broad geographical pressures.

64. While supporting the previous comments, a representative of another Contracting Party emphasized that the GFCM’s list of priority species primarily focuses on commercial species and lacks essential conservation data. He suggested that the Barcelona Convention, as a conservation treaty, should consider factors beyond GFCM fisheries data, highlighting the importance of non-commercial fish. He stressed the need to explore ways to incorporate this perspective.

65. He also noted that sharks are not recognized as species of conservation concern in the Mediterranean, but only in the Black Sea by GFCM. He recalled that his country proposed the inclusion of five shark species in Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol, which would require GFCM to restrict fishing on these species. He expressed a desire to see the GFCM become more actively involved in the conservation of sharks in the Mediterranean, particularly the blue shark, which is one of the most heavily exploited shark species worldwide.

66. The representative emphasized that discards are a significant concern, as highlighted in the GFCM report, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean, where approximately 40% of catches are discarded, leading to a tremendous waste of marine species. He expressed the expectation that GFCM will not only report on this issue but also actively pursue strategies to mitigate and address this substantial waste through collaboration with its member Parties.

67. The representative of UNEP/MAP emphasized the importance of EO3 chapter in the development of the Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR). He noted that the outcomes of this meeting are crucial for enhancing this ecological objective with relevant content and information, particularly concerning the guidance factsheets and other related aspects. He also mentioned the close collaboration between the SPA/RAC team and GFCM on this initiative and expressed gratitude for the ongoing cooperation with GFCM.

68. The GFCM representative clarified that the list of species presented pertains specifically to those covered by stock assessments (commercially important), while the GFCM also conducts work on vulnerable species. He encouraged communication at the national level between the SPA/BD Focal Points and the GFCM and GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC) Focal Points. If any fishery related topic needs to be raised at the GFCM level, it can be addressed through the GFCM framework within the dedicated sub-regional committees or working groups before being brought to the SAC, which may provide advice for the Commission. He also referenced the Discards and Bycatch protocols developed by GFCM and highlighted that his organization considers any amendments to Annex II and Annex III of the Barcelona Convention’s SPA/BD Protocol, and that the indicated protocols include also the species of the IUCN Red List. Finally, he encouraged reference to the latest SoMFi report (2023) as the appropriate and authoritative source of information on the work of GFCM.

69. Before closing this agenda item, a representative of the SPA/RAC Secretariat informed the meeting about the ongoing Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded FishEBM MED project (Fisheries and Ecosystem Based Management for the Blue Economy of the Mediterranean) implemented by FAO/GFCM, UNEP/MAP and SPA/RAC, in Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco, Tunisia, Türkiye. Project Output 3.2, entitled “Monitoring of good environmental status of Mediterranean ecosystems and biodiversity ensured, with established link to pollution impacts and sustainable use of marine ecosystem services”, consists of a set of activities that could be of great help and input to the development of EO3. These activities are:

- (i) Identify, under the IMAP, relations among the different indicators covering pollution and marine litter, biodiversity, non-indigenous species, coastal ecosystems and fisheries and define the contribution to the Good Environmental Status (GES) of Mediterranean marine waters and marine ecosystem by commercial fisheries.
- (ii) Compared analysis of the GFCM and the IMAP reporting frameworks to find out available data and required developments on the contribution to the GES of Mediterranean marine waters and marine ecosystem by data on commercial fisheries and incidentally caught vulnerable species according to the IMAP framework.
- (iii) Gap analysis study within the beneficiary countries on available capacities for integrating data on commercial fisheries and incidentally caught vulnerable species in the GES of marine waters and marine ecosystems, in line with IMAP requirements.
- (iv) Guidelines document for the integration in national monitoring plans of the contribution to the GES of Mediterranean marine waters and marine ecosystems by commercial fisheries data and their relations with biodiversity, pollution, and ecosystem services indicators.
- (v) Technical assistance actions to interested partner countries to improve capacities for integrating data on the contribution by commercial fisheries and incidentally caught vulnerable species, and their relations with biodiversity, pollution and ecosystem services, in the GES of Mediterranean marine waters and marine ecosystem according to the national IMAP framework in line with Post-2020 SAPBIO Action 26.

70. The deliverables of the first four activities will be available by the end of June 2025, and they will be presented at the next biennium CORMONs and GFCM meetings, as appropriate. Contacts with interested beneficiary countries are underway to define the technical assistance needed to improve their capacities to integrate data on the contribution by commercial fisheries and incidentally caught vulnerable species in the framework of the national implementation of IMAP.

71. The meeting welcomed the relevant collaboration between the Barcelona Convention and GFCM and encouraged its continuation and strengthening.

72. The meeting took note of the information provided on the way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to fisheries (EO3).

C. Way forward to update of the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards (CI 1, 2) related to Benthic Habitats, CI 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles and Sea Birds, cCI 24 related to Marine litter) (agenda sub-item 5.3)

73. Under this agenda item, the representatives of INFO/RAC, referring to document UNEP/MED WG.606/10 “Way forward to update of the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards (CI 1, 2 related to Benthic Habitats, CI 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles and Seabirds, CI 24 related to Marine Litter)”, presented the structure of the IMAP Info System, including the newly developed features, as well as the completion of the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for all IMAP common indicators and the inclusion of new modules.

74. In response to a question from the representative of a partner organization about the possibility of mirroring data from other sources and databases, the INFO/RAC representatives replied that the IMAP Info System is the official platform for data submission in the framework of the Barcelona

Convention's IMAP reporting, except for EO3, which is reported through the GFCM Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF). However, the Knowledge Management Platform (KMP) of the Barcelona Convention facilitates interoperability with other systems, allowing data from different contexts to be displayed.

75. Concerning the issue of data interoperability, the representative of the GFCM Secretariat noted that the GFCM Contracting Parties (i.e. data providers) prefer to keep reporting data to the DCRF and other GFCM databases, which are analyzed in the GFCM SoMFi report. This allows them to influence the level of data aggregation at the regional, sub-regional, or national level. The SoMFi then contributes to the IMAP MED QSR. Since this process is governed by the GFCM Parties, the GFCM Secretariat representative encouraged representatives of the Barcelona Convention Secretariat to attend GFCM governing body meetings in order to facilitate direct communication with the GFCM Parties on possible developments of this operational approach, including the possibility of exchanging raw data.

76. The representative of ACCOBAMS informed participants about a Memorandum of Understanding signed a few months ago with INFO/RAC, which facilitates data exchange primarily through the Knowledge Management Platform (KMP).

77. The representative of one Contracting Party highlighted feedback from national experts responsible for data reporting in different contexts, including relevant regional seas conventions and the EU MSFD. They noted differences in the required data versions, including timing, scale and concerned biodiversity components. They therefore recommend the establishment of harmonized processes, particularly concerning data submission deadlines, to reduce the reporting burden associated with multiple requirements.

78. The meeting appreciated the efforts of INFO/RAC in upgrading the IMAP Info System with new functionalities facilitating the user navigation and the reporting process, enhancing the access to the information.

79. The meeting agreed on the need to initiate a fine-tuning process of all available information standards for the biodiversity cluster, with the aim of evaluating the feasibility of possible changes. Contracting Parties are encouraged to carry out an internal assessment based on feedback collected from national IMAP users taking into account data availability and alignment with national monitoring plans.

80. The meeting also took note that a dedicated form, developed by INFO/RAC to facilitate the fine-tuning process, will be shared to support the structured submission of proposals that will be collected in 2025 and during the next biennium (2026-2027).

81. The meeting recommended the establishment of an Ad-hoc Online Working Group dedicated to the fine-tuning process of all available information standards related to the biodiversity cluster. The group will provide guidance to INFO/RAC and SPA/RAC into the evaluation process of proposed changes.

82. The meeting took note of the current status of reporting activities carried out by each Contracting Party to date and agreed to speed up the upload of the missing monitoring data into the IMAP Info System, as requested by past IMAP calls.

83. Eventually, the meeting took note that, according to the UNEP/MAP Data Policy, all monitoring data reported into the IMAP Info System must be published by the Contracting Parties, unless well-motivated constraints are in place. The publication function will be transferred to the Contracting Parties. Delays in publishing data, not justified according to the specific cases outlined in

the UNEP/MAP Data Policy, will result in a series of kind reminders and, ultimately, the publication of the data by UNEP/MAP.

VIII. Main elements and outline for the revision of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and IMAP (agenda item 6)

84. Under this agenda item, the UNEP/MAP representative presented document UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.6 “Revised Ecosystem Approach roadmap: Main elements, process and timeline” and document UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.7 “Revised Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme: Main elements and outline”. He provided an overview about the overall process for upgrading and revising the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and IMAP implementation in the Mediterranean region.

85. The meeting took note of the elements presented for the revision of the Ecosystem Approach Policy in the Mediterranean and its IMAP.

86. The meeting endorsed the proposed terms of reference and flow of interaction for the CORMONs and welcomed their inclusion in the proposed draft decision on EcAp.

IX. Information on the EcAp related projects (SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS, GEF FishEBM MED, Marine Litter MED II & PLUS) (agenda item 7)

87. Referring to information documents UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.8 entitled “Information note on the project ‘Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and MCPAs for nature’ (SEMPA project - IMAP component)”, UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.9 entitled “Information note on the project ‘Supporting the Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties in implementing Ecosystem Approach to achieve GES’ (EcAp MED PLUS project)” and UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.11 entitled “Information note on the projects Marine Litter MED II & PLUS”, the representatives of the UNEP/MAP Secretariat informed the meeting about the SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS and Marine Litter MED PLUS EU-funded projects.

88. Referring to information document UNEP/MED WG.606/Inf.10 “Information note on the project ‘Fisheries and Ecosystem-Based Management for the Blue Economy of the Mediterranean’ (GEF-FishEBM MED project)”, a representative of the SPA/RAC Secretariat informed the meeting about the GEF-funded FishEBM MED project.

89. The representative of WWF expressed their appreciation to SPA/RAC for their ongoing coordination during the first IMAP cycle, highlighting the significance of the 2017 and 2023 MED QSRs as milestones for understanding the Mediterranean’s environmental status. She noted that many biodiversity indicators still rely on qualitative assessments, with a lack of quantitative data on vulnerable species and habitats, particularly in North Africa. This issue necessitates enhanced collaboration, capacity-building and on-the-ground investment. WWF emphasized the success of regional partnership initiatives like NastNet, the North African sea turtle monitoring network, as a model for structured data collection. This success should be replicated to build other collaborative networks for other species groups and priority habitats.

90. She mentioned that WWF North Africa is actively involved in projects focusing on marine turtles, megafauna and seagrass meadows, which are aligned with the IMAP indicators through field-based monitoring and data collection. Looking ahead, WWF North Africa is ready to work with national institutions and the Secretariat to implement activities that meet EcAp/IMAP objectives and priorities, and to accompany countries throughout the process: from the initial design of monitoring activities to the elaboration of a comprehensive and quantitative next QSR. In this regard, WWF is ready to share technical expertise and support biodiversity monitoring in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Algeria, and to extend this support to Egypt, as well as to assist in the establishment of monitoring protocols, training of local observers and institutions, digitization of standardized and open data within the SEMPA and EcAp MED PLUS projects.

91. The meeting welcomed the assistance provided through the EcAp related projects, i.e. SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS, FishEBM MED, Marine Litter MED PLUS.

X. Any other business (agenda item 8)

92. No additional element was presented under this agenda item.

XI. Conclusions and recommendations (agenda item 9)

93. The meeting reviewed, commented on, and approved the draft conclusions and recommendations as amended and attached to the present report as **Annex III**.

XII. Closure of the meeting (agenda item 10)

94. In his concluding remarks, the Director of SPA/RAC expressed gratitude to participants for their active engagement and valuable contributions over the two-day meeting, thanked the Chair, Vice-Chairs, and Rapporteur for their leadership in facilitating the dense agenda, and conveyed confidence that the meeting's outcomes would significantly advance IMAP objectives and SPA/RAC's mission, furthering regional cooperation on environmental protection.

95. After expressing the usual courtesies, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 13.00 on Tuesday, 8 April 2025.

Annex I**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS****REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES /
REPRÉSENTANTS DES PARTIES CONTRACTANTES**

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| CROATIA / CROATIE | Ms. Jelena UROS Head of Service for biodiversity mainstreaming Nature Protection Directorate Zagreb, Croatia |
| CYPRUS / CHYPRE | Mr. Nikolas MICHAILIDIS Officer Department of Fisheries and Marine Research Nicosia, Cyprus |
| FRANCE / FRANCE | Mr. Laurent GUERIN Point focal CORMON Biodiversité Office Français pour la Biodiversité (OFB) |
| GREECE / GRÈCE | Ms. Aimilia DROUGAS Biologist, Geologist-Oceanographer, PhD / National Focal Point Ministry of Environment and Energy General Secretariat of Natural Environment and Water General Directorate of Environmental Policy Directorate of Natural Environment and Biodiversity Management Department of Protected Areas Athens, Greece |
| ISRAEL / ISRAËL | Mr. Simon NEMTZOV Wildlife Ecologist and Head of International Relations Israel Nature and Parks Authority |
| ITALY / ITALIE | Mr. Leonardo TUNESI Research Director Emeritus Department of Marine biodiversity, habitat and species Protection ISPRA - High Institute for Environmental Protection and Research Rome, Italy |
| LEBANON / LIBAN | Ms. Lara SAMAHA Head of Department Department of Ecosystems Ministry of Environment Beirut, Lebanon |

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| LIBYA / <i>LIBYE</i> | Mr. Abdulmaula HAMZA B.Sc., M.Sc. M.Res. & PhD Biological Sciences, Assistant Professor Ministry of Environment Tripoli, Libya |
| MALTA / <i>MALTE</i> | Mr. Brian CHRISTIE Environment Protection Officer Environment and Resources Authority Marsa, Malta |
| MONTENEGRO / <i>MONTÉNÉGRO</i> | Ms. Ivana MITROVIC Department for nature protection, monitoring, analysis and reporting Agency for Nature and Environment Protection of Montenegro |
| SPAIN / <i>ESPAGNE</i> | Mr. Rafael CENTENERA ULECIA Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge Madrid, Spain |
| TÜRKİYE / <i>TÜRKİYE</i> | Ms. Nese YAPICI SPA/RAC National Focal Point of Türkiye Head of Section of Species and Habitat Protection General Directorate for Protection of Natural Assets Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Ankara, Türkiye |

**REPRESENTATIVES OF UNITED NATIONS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES /
REPRÉSENTANTS DES INSTITUTIONS SPÉCIALISÉES DES NATIONS UNIES**

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|---|---|
| GFCM - General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean / Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) <i>CGPM - Commission générale des pêches pour la Méditerranée / Organisation des Nations unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture (FAO)</i> | Mr. Anis ZARROUK Fishery Ecosystems Officer General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, FAO Rome, Italy |
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**REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS /
REPRÉSENTANTS D'AUTRES ORGANISATIONS INTERGOUVERNEMENTALES**

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| ACCOBAMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area / <i>Accord sur la Conservation des Cétacés de la Mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la Zone Atlantique Adjacente</i> | Ms. Maÿlis SALIVAS Executive Secretary Monaco |
| IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature <i>UICN - Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature</i> | Ms. Mercedes MUÑOZ CAÑAS Manager Marine Biodiversity and Blue Economy line IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation Malaga, Spain |

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER ENTITIES /
ORGANISATIONS NON-GOUVERNEMENTALES ET AUTRES ENTITÉS**

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| ETC-UMA European Topic Centre for Spatial Analysis and Synthesis - University of Malaga / <i>Centre thématique européen pour l'analyse et la synthèse spatiales - Université de Malaga</i> | Ms. Dania ABDUL MALAK ETC-UMA Director Malaga, Spain |
| PIM Initiative - Mediterranean Small Islands Initiative <i>Initiative PIM - Initiative pour les Petites îles de Méditerranée</i> | Mr. Georgios KARRIS Member of the Advisory Committee |
| WWF World Wide Fund for Nature / <i>Fonds mondial pour la nature</i> | Ms. Simone NIEDERMÜLLER Regional Manager Ms. Valentina CEBALLOS Fisheries Officer WWF Mediterranean Rome, Italy |

**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME - SECRETARIAT TO THE
BARCELONA CONVENTION AND COMPONENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ACTION
PLAN / *PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT - SECRÉTARIAT
DE LA CONVENTION DE BARCELONE ET COMPOSANTES DU PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA
MÉDITERRANÉE***

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| <p>UNEP/MAP / PNUE/PAM United Nations Environment Programme / Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan - Barcelona Convention Secretariat / <i>Programme des Nations unies</i> <i>pour l'environnement / Unité de coordination</i> <i>pour le Plan d'action pour la Méditerranée -</i> <i>Secrétariat de la Convention de Barcelone</i></p> | <p>Mr. Christos IOAKEIMIDIS QSR Programme Management Officer</p> <p>Ms. Samar KILANI Programme Management Officer, EcAp MED PLUS</p> <p>UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit - Barcelona Convention Secretariat Athens, Greece</p> |
| <p>INFO/RAC - Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication / <i>Centre</i> <i>d'activités régionales pour l'Information et la</i> <i>communication</i></p> | <p>Ms. Francesca CATINI IMAP Info System Officer</p> <p>Mr. Alessandro LOTTI INFO/RAC Officer</p> <p>Rome, Italy</p> |

SECRETARIAT OF THE MEETING / *SECRÉTARIAT DE LA RÉUNION*

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| <p>SPA/RAC Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre / <i>Centre d'activités régionales pour les Aires spécialement protégées</i></p> <p>Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat B.P. 337, 1080 Tunis Cedex, Tunisia</p> <p>E-mail: car-asp@spa-rac.org</p> | <p>Mr. Mahmoud Elyes HAMZA SPA/RAC Director</p> <p>Mr. Yassine Ramzi SGHAIER Ecosystem Approach Officer</p> <p>Mr. Atef OUERGHI Programme Officer - Ecosystem Conservation</p> <p>Ms. Lobna BEN NAKHLA Programme Officer - Species Conservation</p> <p>Mr. Atef LIMAM Projects Officer - Marine Protected Areas</p> <p>Ms. Aida ABDENNADHER Associate Project Officer - EcAp MED PLUS Project</p> <p>Ms. Syrine MOSLAH Programme Assistant - Biodiversity Programme</p> <p>Ms. Naziha BEN MOUSSA Administrative & Procurement Officer</p> <p>Ms. Imtinen KEFI Financial Officer</p> <p><u>SPA/RAC consultants:</u></p> <p>Mr. David CONNOR Expert in marine environment and policy</p> <p>Mr. David AGNETTA Expert in effects of fishery on food web</p> <p>Ms. Popi PAGKOU Expert in marine biology and ecology</p> <p>Ms. Souha EL ASMI Expert in marine environment and policy (Report writing)</p> |
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Annex II

AGENDA

Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting

Agenda item 2: Organizational matters

Agenda item 3: Development of EcAp ecological objectives

3.1. EO6: Sea-floor integrity

3.2. EO4: Marine food webs

Agenda item 4: IMAP common indicators

4.1. Assessment methodologies: assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2

4.2. Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats

4.3. Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles

Agenda item 5: Proposal to revise the IMAP on Biodiversity, Non-Indigenous Species (NIS) and fisheries (EO3)

5.1. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to biodiversity (EO1) and non-indigenous species (EO2)

5.2. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to fisheries (EO3)

5.3. Way forward to update of the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards (CI 1, 2 related to Benthic Habitats, CI 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles and Sea Birds, cCI 24 related to Marine Litter)

Agenda item 6: Main elements and outline for the revision of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and IMAP

Agenda item 7: Information on the EcAp related projects (SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS, GEF FishEBM MED, Marine Litter MED II & PLUS)

Agenda item 8: Any other business

Agenda item 9: Conclusions and recommendations

Agenda item 10: Closure of the meeting

Annex III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

1. The Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) of the United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan - Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UNEP/MAP) organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries (hereinafter referred to as “the Meeting”) in Athens, Greece, on 7-8 April 2025.

Participation

2. All the Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) and/or members of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group and relevant partners for the implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), as appropriate, were invited to designate their representatives to the CORMON meeting.

3. The following Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention were represented at the meeting: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Montenegro, Spain, Türkiye.

4. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented as observers: Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean / Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (GFCM / FAO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

5. The following non-governmental organizations and other entities were also represented as observers: European Topic Centre for Spatial Analysis and Synthesis - University of Malaga (ETC-UMA), Mediterranean Small Islands Initiative (PIM Initiative), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

6. The United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan-Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) Secretariat was also represented, along with the following Mediterranean Action Plan Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication (INFO/RAC).

7. SPA/RAC acted as secretariat for the meeting.

Objectives of the meeting

8. The main objectives of the meeting are to review the following documents:

- Development of IMAP Ecological Objectives EO4 on marine food webs and EO6 on sea-floor integrity;
- Monitoring and assessment elements for the IMAP common indicators (CI1 and CI2) on benthic habitats;
- Progress update on CI24 and the development of common indicators CI1 and CI2 for pelagic habitats;
- Updates to factsheets, data dictionaries, and standards for indicators related to biodiversity (EO1), non-indigenous species (EO2), and fisheries (EO3).

Organizational matters

9. The Meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its related Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI), as amended by the Contracting Parties (UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.1/5 and UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5), would apply *mutatis mutandis* to their deliberations at the meeting.

10. The Meeting unanimously elected the following officers:

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|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Chairperson: | Mr. Abdulmaula Hamza (Libya), |
| Vice-chairpersons: | Ms. Ivana Mitrovic (Montenegro), |
| | Ms. Lara Samaha (Lebanon), |
| Rapporteur: | Mr. Laurent Guérin (France). |

11. The Meeting agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

General considerations

12. The Meeting expressed its appreciation for the contribution of the Biodiversity Online Working Groups (OWGs) to the progress of the EcAp/IMAP process and recommended the continuation of their work for further progress.

13. The Meeting welcomed the willingness expressed by several regional partners to contribute to the implementation of the EcAp/IMAP process.

14. The Meeting encouraged the participation of representatives of the Barcelona Convention in the meetings of the governing bodies of relevant regional agreements in order to update them on the progress of the EcAp/IMAP process and to strengthen collaboration and support for the process.

Agenda Item 3: Development of EcAp Ecological Objectives

3.1. Development of the IMAP Ecological Objective 6 on sea-floor integrity under the Barcelona Convention

15. The Meeting commended the quality of the presented document and the thorough integration of comments from the 2024 Biodiversity and Fisheries CORMON meeting (videoconference, 5-6 June 2024).

16. The Meeting recommended that the specificities of the Mediterranean region be taken into account in the development of Ecological Objective 6, while ensuring coherence with other regional seas conventions and the European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

17. The Meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/3 entitled "Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 6 on sea-floor integrity under the Barcelona Convention" and agreed on its submission to the SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

3.2. Development of the IMAP Ecological Objective 4 on Marine food webs under the Barcelona Convention

18. The Meeting commended the valuable contribution of the Online Working Group for Marine Food Webs to the development of Ecological Objective 4.

19. The Meeting noted the difference in capacity between EU and non-EU Contracting Parties and requested the Secretariat to make further efforts to bridge this capacity-building gap.

20. The Meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/4 entitled “Development of the EcAp Ecological Objective 4 on Marine Food Webs under the Barcelona Convention” and agreed on the proposed common indicators on marine food webs and their submission to the SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

Agenda Item 4: IMAP common indicators

4.1. Assessment methodologies: assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2

21. The Meeting commended the work of the Secretariat in developing the assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2.

22. The Meeting recommended that net changes, i.e., losses and gains in habitat extent, should be monitored to reflect the potential success of habitat restoration efforts.

23. The Meeting recommended that more effort be put into mapping benthic habitats in order to improve data collection for the assessment of the common indicators CI1 and CI2.

24. The Meeting recommended that coordinated monitoring efforts be encouraged among Contracting Parties within the same subregional subdivisions, with SPA/RAC facilitation as appropriate.

25. The Meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/5 entitled “Assessment methodologies: assessment criteria and thresholds for biodiversity common indicators CI1 and CI2” and agreed on its submission to the SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

4.2. Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats

26. The Meeting acknowledged the quality of the work done on the development of indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats.

27. The Meeting discussed and reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/6 entitled “Update on the progress made in developing indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats” and agreed on the proposed indicators using phytoplankton and zooplankton for pelagic habitats and their submission to the SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

4.3. Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles

28. Many Contracting Parties acknowledged the efforts and assistance provided by the SPA/RAC in monitoring marine litter ingested by or entangling marine turtles.

29. The Meeting reviewed document UNEP/MED WG.606/7 entitled “Update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles” and agreed on its submission to the Marine Litter CORMON Meeting (May 2025), the SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) and the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting (Athens, Greece, 15 September 2025).

Agenda item 5: Proposal to revise IMAP on Biodiversity (EO1), Non-Indigenous Species (EO2), and Fisheries (EO3)

5.1. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-indigenous Species (EO2)

30. The Meeting welcomed the willingness of the partner organisations in updating the common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-indigenous Species (EO2).

31. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to edit and make available in a well-presented format the updated factsheets on common indicators.

5.2. Way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Fisheries (EO3)

32. The Meeting welcomed the relevant collaboration between the Barcelona Convention and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and encouraged its continuation and strengthening.

33. The Meeting took note of the information provided on the way forward to update common indicators factsheets related to Fisheries (EO3).

5.3. Way forward to update of the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards (CI 1, 2 related to Benthic Habitats, CI 3, 4 and 5 related to Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles and Sea Birds, cCI 24 related to Marine litter)

34. The Meeting appreciated the efforts of INFO/RAC in upgrading the IMAP Info System with new functionalities facilitating the user navigation and the reporting process, enhancing the access to the information.

35. The Meeting agreed on the need to initiate a fine-tuning process of all available information standards for the biodiversity cluster, with the aim of evaluating the feasibility of possible changes. Contracting Parties are encouraged to carry out an internal assessment based on feedback collected from national IMAP users taking into account data availability and alignment with national monitoring plans.

36. The Meeting also took note that a dedicated form, developed by INFO/RAC to facilitate the fine-tuning process, will be shared to support the structured submission of proposals that will be collected in 2025 and during the next biennium (2026-2027).

37. The Meeting recommended the establishment of an Ad-hoc Online Working Group dedicated to the fine-tuning process of all available information standards related to the biodiversity cluster. The group will provide guidance to INFO/RAC and SPA/RAC into the evaluation process of proposed changes.

38. The Meeting took note of the current status of reporting activities carried out by each Contracting Party to date and agreed to speed up the upload of the missing monitoring data into the IMAP Info System, as requested by past IMAP calls.

39. The Meeting took note that, according to the UNEP/Map Data Policy, all monitoring data reported into the IMAP Info System must be published by the Contracting Parties, unless well-motivated constraints are in place. The publication function will be transferred to the Contracting Parties. Delays in publishing data, not justified according to the specific cases outlined in the

UNEP/MAP Data Policy, will result in a series of kind reminders and, ultimately, the publication of the data by UNEP/MAP.

Agenda Item 6: Main elements and outline for the revision of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and IMAF

40. The Meeting took note of the elements presented for the revision of the Ecosystem Approach Policy in the Mediterranean and its IMAF.

41. The Meeting endorsed the proposed Terms of Reference and flow of interaction for the CORMONs and welcomed their inclusion in the proposed draft decision on EcAp.

Agenda Item 7: Information on the EcAp related projects (SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS, GEF FishEBM MED, Marine Litter MED II & PLUS)

42. The Meeting welcomed the assistance provided through the EcAp related projects (SEMPA, EcAp MED PLUS, GEF FishEBM MED, Marine Litter MED II & PLUS).