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Regional Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges

Rome, Italy, 10-12 July 2018

Report of the Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges

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Introduction

1. In accordance with the UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan Programme of Work 2018-2019 adopted by COP 20, Tirana, Albania, 17-21 December 2017 and in line with the objectives of the EU funded EcAp-MED II Project, the Secretariat organized a Regional Meeting on IMAP Implementation Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges (the Meeting). The Meeting was held in the Headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome, Italy.
2. The main objectives of the Meeting were to:
 1. Review the state of play of the IMAP implementation;
 2. Exchange best practices on national implementation of IMAP and address identified challenges;
 3. Discuss and provide guidance on the development of the IMAP compatible information and data sharing system;
 4. Initiate a discussion on several cross-cutting issues of regional importance for IMAP implementation and provide guidance on next steps.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting

3. The Meeting was opened by Mr Gaetano Leone, Coordinator of UN Environment MAP-Barcelona Convention.
4. The Coordinator welcomed the participants pointing out that this Regional Meeting aimed at enhancing the efficient implementation of IMAP and offers the opportunity for all Mediterranean countries to take stock of progress at the national level. By exchanging knowledge and good practices, we would better understand the status and trends of environmental changes to take appropriate actions to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Mediterranean. He also pointed out that this will highlight the tremendous efforts made by the countries, including difficulties and challenges in designing and implementing national monitoring programmes based on IMAP that is now expected to become a crucial tool to empower governments and communities to take evidence-based and informed decisions.
5. The Meeting was attended by representatives from the following Contracting Parties: Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, the European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, , Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, State of Libya, Tunisia and Turkey.
6. The UN Environment/MAP Secretariat was represented by the MAP Coordinating Unit including the MED POL Programme and the UN Environment/MAP Regional Activity Centers, namely SPA/RAC, PAP/RAC, INFO/RAC and Plan Bleu. The UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre was also present, as well as the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, University of Siena and Plastics Europe. The full list of participants is attached as Annex I to the present report.

Agenda items 2: Organizational Matters

UNEP MED WG.450/1/Rev.1; UNEP/MED WG.450/2 and UNEP/MED WG.450/Inf.1/Rev.1

a) Rules of Procedure for the Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges

5. The rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols applied mutatis mutandis to the present Meeting (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI).

b) Election of officers

7. In accordance with the Rules of procedures for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties, the Meeting elected one (1) President, three (3) Vice-Presidents and one (1) Rapporteur from among the participants, as follows:

Chair: Ms Heba Sharawy, Egypt
Vice-Chair: Ms. Ivana Stojanovic, Montenegro
Vice-Chair: Mrs Paula Valcarce Arenas, Spain
Vice Chair: M. Mohamed Sghaier Ben Jeddou, Tunisia
Rapporteur: Mr Luke Tabone, Malta

c) Adoption of the Provisional Agenda

8. The proposed Provisional agenda appearing in document UNEP/MED WG.450/rev.1, was adopted without changes.

d) Organization of Work

9. The discussions were held in plenary sessions in line with the provisional agenda. Simultaneous interpretation in English and French was provided during the Meeting.

Agenda item 3: State of Play of IMAP Implementation and Way Forward
UNEP/MED WG.450/3

10. The Secretariat provided an overview of the work undertaken to foster IMAP implementation. It brought to the attention of the participants its analysis on options and methodologies on several horizontal, cross-cutting issues to be addressed in the initial phase of IMAP (2016-2019), including integrated GES assessment approaches on scale of assessment, assessment criteria and thresholds, etc. (Part II of Document UNEP/MED WG.450/3).

11. The Secretariat's analysis was followed by discussions on state of national implementation and on the proposed cross cutting issues, recommendations on priority actions to be undertaken in the near future to ensure a timely implementation of IMAP. The Meeting final conclusions related to this agenda item are presented in Annex III of this report.

12. Specific attention was paid to the importance of upcoming CORMONs work, which should prioritize and address the most important cross-cutting issues in an efficient manner. France offered its support regarding the preparatory work for the upcoming CORMON on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species.

13. The Meeting highlighted the importance of more exchange of specific best practices and further capacity building for national implementation of IMAP, considering specific national implementation needs. The need to establish a data bank of different project results, to allow the utilization of their outcomes by Contracting Parties and avoid overlapping was pointed out.

Agenda item 4: Proposed IMAP Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries
UNEP/MED WG.450/4, UNEP/MED WG.450/5, UNEP/MED WG.450/6

14. INFO/RAC introduced documents UNEP/MED WG.450/4, UNEP/MED WG.450/5 and UNEP/MED WG.450/6, consisting of proposed Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for 10 selected pollution and marine litter; biodiversity and NIS; and coast and hydrography related IMAP Common

Indicators. In addition, INFO/RAC made a live presentation of the IMAP compatible pilot Info-system

15. The Meeting provided useful recommendations towards the development of the IMAP Information System, highlighting the importance of SEIS principles and that the future system should be interoperable to the extent possible with existing information and reporting systems used by the Contracting Parties.

16. The Meeting also reviewed the proposed Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for all three clusters and requested the Secretariat to develop the first elements of a data sharing policy for a first review by the upcoming CORMONs. Concerns were expressed and several participants requested full alignment between the proposed Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries and the IMAP Decision recommendations as well as the Common Indicator Guidance Factsheets, while keeping some flexibility by stating clearly which were the mandatory and optional requirements. The Meeting final conclusions related to this agenda item are presented in Annex III of this report.

Agenda item 5: Promotion of IMAP Implementation at National Level
UNEP/MED WG.450/3

17. The Chair invited the representatives of the Contracting Parties to share their national monitoring experiences, highlighting in particular best practices, challenges and lessons learned. All Contracting Parties present at the Meeting took the floor and provided information on the implementation of IMAP.

18. The representatives of France, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, and Spain shared their IMAP national implementation best practices in the areas of pollution and marine litter.

19. The representatives of Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Lebanon, and State of Libya shared their IMAP national implementation best practices in the areas of biodiversity and non-indigenous species.

20. The representatives of Algeria and Italy shared their IMAP national implementation best practices in the areas of coast and hydrography.

21. The representatives of Croatia, Montenegro and Turkey shared their best practices in relation to integration between the different clusters, bridging the identified gaps of an integrated GES approach, as well as the processes to establish nationally relevant governance mechanism to follow-up IMAP implementation.

22. The Meeting welcomed the ongoing implementation efforts of all countries. It also welcomed the ongoing support of various projects and underlined the importance of continuous need for support, on specific capacity building and trainings.

23. The Meeting final conclusions related to this agenda item are presented in Annex III.

Agenda item 6: Supporting Resource Mobilization for IMAP Implementation
UNEP MED WG.450/7, UNEP/MED WG.450/Inf.3

24. The Secretariat presented a summary of the recommendations of the “Funding Strategy for the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean, with a special emphasis on the implementation needs of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme in the Southern Mediterranean “(UNEP/MED WG.450/Inf.3). The latter indicated that diverse sources of funding would be necessary to be mobilized in near future to enable full IMAP implementation.

25. Many participants welcomed the work done by the Secretariat and found it relevant for their efforts to further mobilize funding for IMAP implementation.

26. The representative of the European Union made a presentation on key available potential funding resources for ecosystem approach and more specifically on IMAP implementation, under the current and upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework funding instruments. On behalf of the GEF team of UN Environment, the Secretariat made a presentation on GEF7 funding opportunities.

27. Some Contracting Parties pointed out the lengthy procedures related to these funding instruments, others had specific questions about the related rules, available instruments, including clarification questions in relation to GEF7 co-financing rules, on which the Secretariat was asked to provide further information.

28. The Secretariat presented two concept notes addressing IMAP and ecosystem approach implementation. The Meeting welcomed the proposed drafts, pointing out the need for longer time to provide comments and requested the Secretariat to share these drafts with their respective MAP Focal Points.

29. The Meeting final conclusions related to this agenda item are presented in Annex III.

Agenda item 7: Any Other Business

30. Under this agenda item three presentations were made: a) the representative of the University of Siena gave a presentation on the state of play of the Plastic Blusters Project, b) the representative of the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, presented the most recent developments of IMAP relevant work of the MEDCIS project, c) the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre, provided information on the ODYSSEA project and its possible links with IMAP implementation.

Agenda item 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

31. The Meeting reviewed, commented and approved the draft Conclusions and Recommendations as amended, attached as Annex III to the present report.

Agenda item 9: Closure of the Meeting

32. After the expression of usual courtesies, the Chair declared the Meeting closed at 18:10. on Thursday, 12 July 2018.

Annex I
List of Participants

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Annex II
Agenda of the Meeting

Agenda of the Meeting

- Agenda item 1:** Opening of the Meeting
- Agenda item 2:** Organizational Matters
- a) Rules of Procedure for the Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges*
 - b) Election of Officers*
 - c) Adoption of the Provisional Agenda*
 - d) Organization of Work*
- Agenda item 3:** State of Play of IMAP Implementation and Way Forward
- Agenda item 4:** Proposed IMAP Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries
- Agenda item 5:** Promotion of IMAP Implementation at National Level
- Agenda item 6:** Supporting Resource Mobilization for IMAP Implementation
- Agenda item 7:** Any Other Business
- Agenda item 8:** Conclusions and Recommendations
- Agenda item 9:** Closure of the Meeting

Annex III
Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Regional Meeting on IMAP Implementation: Best Practices, Gaps and Common Challenges (the Meeting), held in Rome, Italy, 10-12 July 2018.

Following the review and discussions of all agenda items, the Meeting agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

Agenda item 3: State of Play of IMAP Implementation and Way Forward

1. The Meeting welcomed the work undertaken by the Secretariat and MAP components to support the implementation of IMAP at regional, sub regional and national levels through different projects such as ECAP MED II, Marine Litter MED, etc. as indicated in document UNEP/MED WG. 450/3 Part I; The Meeting encouraged the Secretariat to establish the necessary tools, i.e. data bank of project results, to strengthen the utilization of their outcomes by Contracting Parties and avoid overlapping.
2. The Meeting acknowledged the high level of commitment of and the progress made by all Contracting Parties in the initial phase of IMAP implementation (2016-2019) and pointed out the need for further work to successfully implement the national IMAP based national monitoring programmes to deliver the required data to assess GES and contribute to 2023 MED QSR preparation;
3. The Meeting highlighted the need for adequate resource mobilization, capacity building and technical assistance at national level as well as through regional and sub-regional collaboration.
4. The Meeting pointed out the efforts made by the Contracting Parties that are the Members of the European Union to implement IMAP in synergy with the work under the EU Marine Strategy Directive and encouraged Contracting Parties to continue sharing best practices and lessons learnt and timely share relevant monitoring data in line with IMAP.
5. Thanking the Secretariat for bringing to their attention several cross-cutting issues related to IMAP implementation (Part II of document UNEP/MED WG. 450/3), the Meeting requested that the following issues are presented for review and more in-depth discussion in the upcoming CORMONs:
 - a) Better interlinkages between Activities/Pressure/Impacts and clarification of definition of impacts noting that such a definition should primarily focus on biodiversity. In this respect, the Meeting requested the Secretariat to update, based on feedback and inputs received during the Meeting, Tables 1, 2, 3 of document UNEP/MED WG.450/3 for further review by the CORMONs;
 - b) Clarifications of definitions of integration and aggregation rules. In this respect the Meeting requested the Secretariat to make the necessary changes in document UNEP/MED WG. 450/3 opting for giving the priority at this stage of IMAP implementation to the work on geographical aggregation and assessment scaling rather than integration.
6. The Meeting took note of the information provided in document UNEP/MED WG. 450/3 on potential different methodologies and options to develop thresholds as well as on recommendations made on the most suitable options per IMAP indicators. Noting the importance of application of thresholds for assessing GES, the Meeting pointed out the added value of continuing the application of trends as an important tool to assess GES and recommended the application of both trends and new/updated thresholds as appropriate tools for GES assessment.
7. Finally, the Meeting appreciated the information provided in UNEP/MED WG.450/3 on the application of different tools related to GES assessment and underlined the need for more capacity

building on national level, exchange of best practices at regional level for their better understanding and possible use by the Contracting Parties.

Agenda item 4: Proposed IMAP Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries

8. The Meeting acknowledged the importance of developing an information system for IMAP based on SEIS principles, which should be interoperable to the extent possible with existing information and reporting systems used by the Contracting Parties. In this regard, the Meeting encouraged continued work to be undertaken by INFO RAC to ensure "interoperability" (should extend to other formats) for the development of the IMAP compatible pilot Info-system and its main elements with the support of the EcAp-MEDII Project.

9. The Meeting reviewed the proposed Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries and recommended the following next steps:

- a) to develop the first elements of a data sharing policy for a first review by the upcoming CORMONs;
- b) to progressively ensure full alignment between the proposed Common Indicators Data Standards and Data Dictionaries with IMAP requirements, as stated by the Common Indicator Guidance Factsheets in particular, while keeping some flexibility by stating clearly which are the mandatory and optional requirements;
- c) to draft a document that states clearly the options proposed by INFO/RAC regarding the IMAP Information System that will be discussed by CORMONs.

10. The Meeting set deadline of 15 September for additional comments and requested the Secretariat to update and submit to CORMONs the revised versions of the proposed Data Standards and Data Dictionaries of the selected IMAP Common Indicators for their finalization.

Agenda item 5: Promotion of IMAP Implementation at National Level

11. The Meeting acknowledged that all Contracting Parties reported obvious progress in implementing COP Decisions IG.22/7 and IG.23/6 through the preparation and implementation of their respective national IMAPs. The Meeting noted that the Contracting Parties have extended the scope of their national monitoring programmes covering the three clusters of IMAP, their geographical scope as well as the usage of new/optimal monitoring tools and practices, the use of integrated approaches to enhance cost effectiveness through synchronized monitoring of more than one indicator.

12. The Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to continue their work with the view to ensuring reporting by all Contracting Parties of monitoring data as requested in Decision IG.23/6.

13. Acknowledging achievements, lessons learned and challenges faced during the current initial phase of IMAP implementation at national level, the following directions have been identified and highlighted for further work to be addressed by CORMONs:

- a) Efforts for coordinated national IMAP implementation should be enhanced, notably through technical proposals;
- b) Tailored capacity-building activities should be established to fill the gaps clearly identified during IMAP national trainings, including on technical capacities, software, monitoring protocols, human resources needed, etc.;
- c) Further efforts are necessary by the Contracting Parties to generate more synchronized datasets for assessments (collection of quality assured data in a coherent manner and format and availability of long-time data series to monitor trends);
- d) IMAP compatible Pilot Info-system needs to be finalized to accommodate reporting of IMAP compatible data by the Contracting Parties, with clear distinction between mandatory and optional data;

- e) Monitoring protocols and assessment methods have to be harmonized and standardized, including region-wide harmonized criteria for reference conditions and threshold/boundary values per assessment area, as appropriate and feasible;
- f) Further development of the risk-based approaches, analytical testing and assessment methodologies, assessment criteria for integrated chemical and biological assessment methods and testing of new research-proved tools for monitoring the toxic effects, as well as improvement of knowledge on emerging chemicals, are needed;
- g) Testing of the Background Assessment Criteria (BACs) and Environmental Assessment Criteria (EACs) and thresholds application should be undertaken on a trial basis and at regional and sub-regional levels;
- h) Identification and evaluation of marine litter accumulation (stranding fluxes, loads and linkage with specific sources) and hotspots using GIS and mapping systems and modelling tools should be enhanced, including better understanding of transport dynamics and accumulation zones;
- i) Science-Policy Interface should be strengthened, structured and sustained, by supporting the national monitoring programmes, to ensure that ongoing scientific projects can address IMAP national implementation needs;
- j) Cooperation at sub-regional level for Common Indicators, as appropriate, to share best practices and addressing specific gaps within national monitoring programmes should be strengthened;
- k) A continual exchange of best practices should be encouraged and established among thematic experts possibly through on-line communication tools for all three IMAP clusters.

Agenda item 6: Supporting Resource Mobilization for IMAP Implementation

14. The Meeting welcomed the “Funding Strategy for the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean, with a special emphasis on the implementation needs of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme in the Southern Mediterranean “(UNEP/MED WG.450/Inf.3)” and acknowledged the relevance of the issues addressed.
15. The Meeting underlined the need for further funding resources, with a focus on national implementation and welcomed the presentations delivered on potentially available funding opportunities of the European Union and GEF (GEF7).
16. The Meeting took note of the two proposed concept notes presented in UNEP/MED WG.450/7 and provided positive feedback and comments, in particular on the outlined priority outputs to contribute to the implementation of IMAP.
17. The Meeting asked the Secretariat to submit UNEP/MED WG.450/7 to the MAP Focal Points for proper consideration and guidance for its further elaboration.
18. Acknowledging the importance of ensuring funding from GEF, the Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to enhance internal coordination with their respective GEF Focal Points to ensure adequate national dedicated resources from STAR allocations. In that respect, the Secretariat was asked to provide additional information on relevant modalities related to in-kind and cash contributions.