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Agenda item 3: State of Play of national IMAP Implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species

Progress report on the national implementation of Decision IG.22/7 on the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP), related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species

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Note by the Secretariat

Since the 15th Ordinary Meeting (COP 15, Almeria, Spain, 15-18 January 2008) of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention), the Ecosystem Approach has been considered the guiding principle, with the ultimate objective of achieving the Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast.

As a next key step in the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap, COP 17 (Paris, France, 8-10 February 2012) adopted 11 Ecological Objectives (EOs). This was not done in an isolated manner. For each Ecological Objective a set of Operational Objectives and indicators were also adopted by COP 17 (Decision IG.20/4). The purpose was to further break down and complement the ecological objectives to support their achievement, guide monitoring and assessment and as such the progress towards Good Environmental Status (GES).

Although COP 17 (Decision IG.20/4) adopted indicators for all the operational objectives, it was decided to focus, during the initial phase of Ecosystem Approach Roadmap implementation, on those ecological objectives for which data availability and methodological advancements would allow their effective monitoring. Therefore, COP 18 (Istanbul, Turkey, 3-6 December 2013), on the basis of article 18 of the Barcelona Convention and relevant provisions from its related Protocols, adopted an integrated list of Mediterranean Good Environmental Status (GES) and related targets.

At their COP 19 (Athens, Greece, 9-12 February 2016), the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme and related Assessment Criteria (IMAP).

IMAP foresees in its initial phase (2016-2019) of implementation, the following:

- existing national monitoring and assessment programmes of Contracting Parties to be updated and integrated, in line with the IMAP structure, principles and common indicators;
- Good environmental status (GES) definitions to be updated and the assessment criteria to be further refined;
- scale of reporting units to be defined, taking into account both ecological considerations and management purposes, following a nested approach;
- an updated and integrated data and information system for UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)-Barcelona Convention with clearly set roles for data handling and assessment for the various components and with a user-friendly reporting platform for Contracting Parties to be developed.

During the initial phase of IMAP (2016-2019), the Secretariat and respective MAP Components assisted the Contracting Parties, with the support of various projects particularly the EU-funded EcAp-MEDII and GEF Adriatic projects, in the national implementation of monitoring programmes related to biodiversity and non-indigenous cluster following the IMAP requirements.

In line with the IMAP timeline, the Secretariat has organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries (Madrid, Spain, 28 February – 1 March 2017) to discuss the common indicator guidance factsheets and assessment factsheets. The latter provided information on the status of the environment and information needed to evaluate the severity of environmental problems and distance from EcAp targets, ecological objectives and Good Environmental Status (GES) description.

Indeed, an important achievement of IMAP implementation is the preparation, in close consultation with, and with inputs from, the Contracting Parties, of the 2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report¹ (2017 MED QSR). Following the Initial Integrated Assessment undertaken in 2011, the 2017 MED QSR is the first report assessing the status of the marine and coastal environment of the Mediterranean Sea in an integrated manner using the IMAP Common Indicators and data reported from the Contracting Parties and other reliable sources.

Decision IG.23/6 on the 2017 MED QSR (COP 20, Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017) has also underlined the gaps of the 2017 MED QSR and recommended the following, as general directions towards a successful 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR):

- (i) harmonization and standardization of monitoring and assessment methods;
- (ii) improvement of availability and ensuring of long time series of quality assured data to monitor the trends in the status of the marine environment;
- (iii) improvement of availability of the synchronized datasets for marine environment state assessment, including use of data stored in other databases where some of the Mediterranean countries regularly contribute; and
- (iv) improvement of data accessibility with the view to improving knowledge on the Mediterranean marine environment and ensuring that Info-MAP System is operational and continuously upgraded, to accommodate data submissions for all the IMAP Common Indicators.

With a view to implementing this Decision, and specifically addressing the above-mentioned issues, as well as to further fostering regional cooperation on IMAP implementation, the Secretariat is organizing this first CORMON meeting on biodiversity and fisheries for the biennium 2018-2019.

The present meeting is dedicated to discussing the harmonization and standardization of monitoring and assessment methods, as well as the improvement of availability of the synchronized datasets for the marine environment state assessment. Recommendations are expected to contribute to the preparation of working documents and proposals for in-depth discussions and review by the 14th Meeting of SPA/BD thematic Focal Points (Portorož, Slovenia, 18-21 June 2019).

The present Progress Report aims at reviewing the state of play of national implementation of IMAP, focusing on best practices and challenges faced with regard to different aspects of its implementation at national level.

¹ At their COP 20 (Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017), the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, in endorsed the key findings of the 2017 MED QSR (Decision IG.23/6).

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List of Abbreviations / Acronyms

ACCOBAMS	Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area
CI	Common Indicator
COP	Conference of the Parties
CORMON	Correspondence Group on Monitoring
EcAp	Ecosystem Approach
EO	Ecological Objective
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GES	Good Environmental Status
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
GIS	Geographic Information System
IMAP	Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MED QSR	Mediterranean Quality Status Report
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
MTF	Mediterranean Trust Fund
NIS	Non-Indigenous Species
PAP/RAC	Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre
SPA	Specially Protected Area
SAP BIO	Strategic Action Programme for the conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean region
SPA/BD	Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean
SPA/RAC	Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre
SSFA	Small-Scale Funding Agreement
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment)

1. Introduction

1. The 19th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 19) agreed on the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria which set, in its Decision IG.22/7, a specific list of 27 common indicators (CIs) and Good Environmental Status (GES) targets and principles of an integrated Mediterranean Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

2. Among these 27 common indicators, 12 are related to the biodiversity cluster. These include 5 common indicators related to Biodiversity (EO1), 1 related to non-indigenous species (EO2) and 6 related to fisheries (EO3).

3. During the initial phase of IMAP implementation (2016-2019), a clear roadmap will be developed by the Secretariat in collaboration with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and other relevant partners on the monitoring programme and assessment for marine food webs (EO4) and seafloor integrity (EO6).

4. The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) is supporting the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to align the current monitoring activities, developed under furthering the implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) and the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Biodiversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAP BIO), with the new requirements of the IMAP including, in particular, the revision of data, meta-data and assessment templates for the selected agreed common indicators for biodiversity and non-indigenous species (NIS).

5. An important achievement of IMAP implementation during this initial phase (2016-2019) is the preparation, in close consultation with, and with inputs from, the Contracting Parties, of the 2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2017 MED QSR). Following the Initial Integrated Assessment undertaken in 2011, the 2017 MED QSR is the first report assessing the status of the marine and coastal environment of the Mediterranean Sea in an integrated manner, using the IMAP Common Indicators and data reported from the Contracting Parties and other reliable sources.

6. Despite the challenges met, given the limited availability of data and the fact that the IMAP is still at an early stage of its implementation, the 2017 MED QSR allowed for important conclusions and highlighted gaps that need to be overcome for successive assessments.

7. Indeed, Decision IG.23/6 on the 2017 MED QSR (COP 20, Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017) underlined the gaps of the 2017 MED QSR, requested the Secretariat to overcome them, and recommended general directions towards a successful 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR), among which the enhancing the Contracting Parties capacity.

8. To specifically address the gaps and follow the general directions in the development of the 2023 MED QSR, SPA/RAC is reviewing the state of play of national implementation of IMAP regarding biodiversity and non-indigenous species (NIS), focusing on best practices and challenges faced with regard to different aspects of its implementation at national level.

9. The present Progress Report on the implementation of Decision IG.22/7 on IMAP and Decision IG.23/6 on the 2017 MED QSR, provides information on IMAP national implementation related to biodiversity and NIS and highlights the progress towards a successful 2023 MED QSR.

2. Overview of national implementation of IMAP related to biodiversity and NIS

10. Work is ongoing by all the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to progress on national implementation of IMAP, with the support of the Secretariat, and building on the existing relevant monitoring programmes previously established under the SPA/BD Protocol, and on lessons learnt from other regional and/or global processes.

11. In this respect, the instrumental role of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD²) can be noted regarding the national monitoring programmes established by the Contracting Parties, which are also EU Member States. The country monitoring programmes established in line with the MSFD provide a solid basis for the implementation of IMAP requirements considering national specificities.

12. The UNEP/MAP SPA/RAC Programmes of Work for 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 have provided support to almost all the non-EU Contracting Parties (namely: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Montenegro, Lebanon, Morocco, State of Libya and Tunisia) in updating their national monitoring programmes aligned with the IMAP of the Barcelona Convention. This was possible mainly through the EU-funded EcAp-MED II Project (2015-2019) and the GEF Adriatic Project (2017-2019).

13. Several Southern Mediterranean countries have already developed their national monitoring programme on biodiversity and NIS with the technical assistance of SPA/RAC under the EcAp-MED II Project. Elaborated drafts were extensively discussed and validated by the concerned stakeholders that met at dedicated national workshops: State of Libya (Tunis, 18-19 April 2017), Tunisia (Tunis, 20 April 2017), Morocco (Rabat, 4 July 2017), Egypt (Cairo, 10 October 2017), Lebanon (Beirut, 17 January 2018) and Algeria (Algiers, 13 May 2018).

14. During these workshops, national institutions and stakeholders (managers, policy makers, scientists, private actors, civil society) fully engaged in decision-making processes and involved in the marine conservation aspect were implicated to pursue the constructive, participatory and inclusive process of implementation of the national monitoring programme on biodiversity and NIS following the IMAP requirements. The key potential sites for the implementation of IMAP, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and high-pressure areas from human activities, and the list of species and habitats to be monitored during the second phase of IMAP implementation (2019-2021) were agreed. The adopted national IMAP-based monitoring and assessment programmes are available on the SPA/RAC website (http://www.rac-spa.org/fr/ecapmed_ii), and are currently being harmonized and edited³.

15. The GEF Adriatic Project is implemented in Albania and Montenegro with the aim to restore the ecological balance of the Adriatic Sea through the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and improve the sub-regional management capacity through Marine Spatial Planning (MSP). The project activities will also provide a follow-up of the UNEP/MAP IMAP-related activities including those developed within the EcAp-MED II Project, where detailed guidelines for monitoring of each individual indicator were already developed (i.e. indicator guidance factsheets), and will result in two national monitoring programmes aligned with the requirements of IMAP that could be, in view of the joint methodological approach used, considered as sub-regional/harmonized monitoring programmes (for Albania and Montenegro). While Bosnia & Herzegovina is not a beneficiary country under the GEF Adriatic Project, exchange of experience with Albania and Montenegro is planned and further assistance from UNEP/MAP will be generated to support the alignment of the national monitoring programme with the requirements of IMAP.

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32008L0056>

³ Regarding the national monitoring programme of biodiversity in Israel, two chapters related to marine mammals and seabirds have been approved. The remaining chapters on sea turtles, marine habitats and NIS are still in progress.

16. Capacity building, technical support and trainings developed by the Secretariat aimed to fill knowledge gaps in specific areas identified both at national level (specific country needs as identified in national workshops) and sub-regional level, depending on the topic and existing regional/sub-regional recommendations, conclusions, with a focus on the Southern Mediterranean.

17. Two major sub-regional training events (Tunisia, 16-22 July 2017; Greece, 22-28 September 2017) addressed the monitoring and assessment techniques of the agreed biodiversity and NIS-related IMAP Common Indicators, such as the marine habitats, marine mammals, seabirds, marine turtles and non-indigenous species. The trainings were tailored in a way that combines theoretical and practical (fieldwork) aspects, following the recommendations of the Long-term evaluation of SPA/RAC training programmes. Different profiles of stakeholders were involved in these capacity building activities, through the adoption of a participatory approach and a tailored communication strategy, in order to secure the buy-in from local communities, governments and stakeholders including resource-users.

18. These sub-regional trainings were followed by specific sessions on reporting obligations about the quality assured data, including mapping/cartography using the Geographic Information System (GIS). A reporting template was deeply discussed. It aims to provide a standard for submission and assessment of data related to the biodiversity component, generated from the pilot monitoring projects.

19. During summer 2018 and upon requests from countries, additional trainings to reinforce national capacities concerning the implementation of Biodiversity/NIS monitoring protocols were developed, in close collaboration with the concerned national authorities with the support of the EU-funded EcAp-MED II Project and MAVA-funded Projects (Turtles Project, MedKeyHabitats II Project). These trainings were implemented in: Tunisia (10-13 May 2018), Morocco (26-29 June 2018), Lebanon (3-7 July 2018), Egypt (20-23 July 2018), Turkey (20-27 July 2018) and Algeria (9-13 September 2018).

20. Within the MAVA-funded project (Conservation of marine turtles in the Mediterranean), Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Morocco, Spain, State of Libya, Tunisia and Turkey are developing their marine turtles nesting sites monitoring networks, through the implementation of harmonized monitoring protocols in line with the Ecosystem Approach guidelines, and by adopting a participatory and integrated approach that consider both local socio-economic and environmental contexts.

21. Furthermore, within the GEF Adriatic Project, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC are supporting Albania and Montenegro to set up a national team of expert. A capacity building activity was developed (Montenegro, 26-27 November 2018) in order to strengthen national capacities and develop the National Knowledge Gap Assessment, useful for the elaboration of the national IMAP.

22. Further trainings aiming at strengthening national capacities towards the 2023 MED QSR development were developed in close collaboration with regional partners. In this context, SPA/RAC has collaborated with ACCOBAMS in delivering a training on advanced data analysis and quality assured data reporting on common indicators 3, 4 and 5 related to marine mammals (particularly to cetaceans) (Lebanon, 1-5 October 2018). During the training, the IMAP monitoring protocols and assessment methods, sample processing, metadata, reporting templates, examples of existing national monitoring schemes and capacities compared to IMAP requirements, and the guidance factsheets have been presented and extensively discussed. An additional training event is also planned for early 2019 with the technical support of the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) Project (Tunisia, 25-28 February 2019).

23. The main recommendations and requests formulated by national experts during the above-mentioned training workshops are as follows:

- The constitution of sub-regional expert groups for better coordination of monitoring;
- Work on strengthening integration between the three clusters; (i) biodiversity and non-indigenous species, (ii) pollution and marine litter, and (iii) coast and hydrography;
- Further need for capacity building, especially in terms of technical support regarding the mapping techniques and reporting quality assured data of the indicators (e.g. modelling, GIS application);

24. On the basis of lessons learned from the EcAp-MED II Project, and upon consultation with the national experts during the validation workshops of the national IMAPs (State of Libya (18-19 May 2017); Tunisia (20 May 2017); Morocco (4 July 2017); Egypt (10 October 2017); Lebanon (17 January 2018); Algeria (13 May 2018)), the concerned countries recommended to dedicate the next phase to actively contribute to strengthen the cooperation at sub-regional/regional level and to enhance the integration between components.

25. In accordance with the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work for 2016-2017, SPA/RAC supported the Contracting Parties towards a successful implementation of their national monitoring programmes on biodiversity through pilot activities in the relevant selected monitoring sites (MPAs and high-pressure areas). The ongoing activities include the conclusion of specific Small-Scale Funding Agreements (SSFAs) with Egypt, Greece, Morocco, State of Libya and Tunisia, and financed through the Mediterranean Trust Fund (MTF), EcAp-MED II Project, MedKeyHabitat II Project, Deep-Sea Lebanon Project and MAVA Turtles Project with the main aim to: i) support ongoing implementation of the monitoring programme on biodiversity; ii) ensure gradual transition to new IMAP-based monitoring programmes of the marine environment, and iii) support implementation of some pilot projects related to endangered species monitoring, such as the Mediterranean monk seal.

26. Mapping of marine key habitats was already undertaken in some potential areas in Lebanon and Montenegro. Further mapping activities are ongoing in Algeria, Cyprus, Malta, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey to assess habitat sensitivity to fishing activities.

27. In conclusion, the initial phase of IMAP implementation (2016-2019) showcases a high level of progress by all Contracting Parties. Nonetheless, serious efforts need to be undertaken in the future implementation phases in order to achieve the Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Mediterranean.