



**United Nations
Environment Programme
Mediterranean Action Plan**

Distr.: Limited
07 March 2025
Original: English

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

Athens, 7-8 April 2025

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), Non-indigenous Species (EO2) and fisheries (EO3)

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

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Note by the Secretariat

The Contracting Parties (CPs) to the Barcelona Convention adopted the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) (Decision IG.22/7) during CoP 19 (Athens, 2016) as part of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) process. IMAP establishes monitoring and assessment requirements based on agreed Ecological Objectives (EOs) and their corresponding common indicators.

Since 2016, significant progress has been made in IMAP implementation, leading to the development of national IMAP-based monitoring programs and the publication of the 2017 and 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Reports (MED QSRs). Building on this experience and the findings of MED QSR 2023, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, through Decision IG.26/3 of CoP 23, mandated an update of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and IMAP. This update aims to enhance IMAP implementation, strengthen national monitoring and assessment capacities, ensure quality-assured data, and improve the reliability of assessments. Additionally, it includes updates to the Guidance Factsheets for Common Indicators.

This document outlines the proposed approach for updating the Common Indicator Factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-Indigenous Species (EO2).

The meeting is expected to take note of the proposed updates and provide guidance on revising the Common Indicator Factsheets for Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-Indigenous Species (EO2).

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

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

1. The 19th Meeting of the Contracting Parties (CoP 19), held in February 2016, adopted the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) for the Mediterranean Sea and Coast, along with the associated assessment criteria (Decision IG.22/7). IMAP establishes a framework for coordinated environmental monitoring, including regional definitions of Good Environmental Status (GES), common indicators and targets, as well as clear principles and a timeline for its implementation.

2. Through Decision IG.22/7, IMAP introduced, for the first time, an integrated approach to monitoring biodiversity and non-indigenous species, pollution and marine litter, coastal zones, and hydromorphology. Its primary objective is to facilitate the implementation of Article 12 of the Barcelona Convention and other relevant provisions related to monitoring across various Protocols, with the overarching goal of assessing progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status (GES). IMAP is structured around 11 Ecological Objectives (EOs) and 27 Common Indicators, as outlined in Decision IG.22/7.

3. The Common Indicators defined for Biodiversity (EO1) and Non-indigenous Species (EO2) are as follows:

- Common Indicator 1: Habitat distribution (EO1) – This indicator aims to assess the spatial distribution of marine habitats, also considering their extent as a key parameter.
- Common Indicator 2: Condition of habitat-defining species and communities (EO1) – This indicator evaluates the ecological condition of habitats by analyzing the biological communities associated with them.
- Common Indicator 3: Species distribution (EO1) – Applied to marine mammals, seabirds, and marine reptiles, this indicator tracks changes in the distribution range of these emblematic species.
- Common Indicator 4: Population abundance of selected species (EO1) – This indicator monitors population trends of marine mammals, seabirds, and marine reptiles, reflecting changes in their conservation status.
- Common Indicator 5: Population demographic characteristics (EO1) – Focused on biological parameters such as body size, age structure, sex ratio, fertility rates, and survival/mortality rates, this indicator provides insights into population dynamics and vulnerability.
- Common Indicator 6: Trends in abundance, temporal occurrence, and spatial distribution of non-indigenous species (NIS), particularly invasive species, in risk areas (EO2) – Directly linked to the main vectors and pathways of species introduction, this indicator helps improve management and prevention measures.

4. Guidance Factsheets have been developed for each Common Indicator to ensure harmonized and consistent monitoring. These factsheets define specific objectives and serve as essential references for Contracting Parties, supporting them in the revision and implementation of their national monitoring programs. The ultimate aim is to strengthen the application of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) in the Mediterranean and ensure the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES).

5. The structure of the Common Indicator Factsheets follows a standardized format, incorporating various categories of information relevant from both a policy and scientific perspective. Each factsheet includes the following elements:

- Indicator title
- Justification and policy context
- Objectives and targets
- Analysis and monitoring methods (spatial and temporal framework)

- Contacts and reference information
- Detailed definitions, methodologies, and bibliographic references
- Gaps, uncertainties, and data aggregation protocols (if applicable)
- Analytical approaches and expected outcomes

6. The Factsheets were presented and reviewed by the Meeting of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species (Madrid, Spain, 28 February–1 March 2017) and the Meeting of the SPA/RAC Focal Points (Alexandria, Egypt, 9–12 May 2017), Results of this revision are included in the document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.444/6/Rev.1 presented at the 6th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group, Athens (Greece), 11th September 2017.

7. In 2021, the Guidance Factsheet of Common Indicator 6 (CI6) was revised based on new findings and assessment processes. Updates from the Study on marine pollution trends in the Mediterranean and key reports, including the 2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report and REMPEC's work on "significant acute pollution" under the Bonn Agreement, informed the revision. The updated factsheet was reviewed by CORMON and endorsed by REMPEC, SPA/BD Focal Points Meetings, and the 8th Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group Meeting in September 2021.

8. Since 2016, IMAP implementation has significantly advanced, leading to national IMAP-based monitoring programs and the development of the 2017 and 2023 MED QSRs. Drawing from this experience and the findings of MED QSR 2023, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, through Decision IG.26/3 of COP 23, called for an update of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAP) and IMAP, with a focus on enhancing IMAP implementation, strengthening national monitoring and assessment capacities, ensuring quality-assured data, and improving assessment reliability. This revision also includes updates to the Guidance Factsheets of Common Indicators.

9. As outlined in the SPA/RAC work programme for 2026-2027, SPA/RAC will update the Guidance Factsheets of Common Indicators for EO1 and EO2. To achieve this, it is proposed to:

- incorporate climate change considerations into the updated Guidance Factsheets. As one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the Mediterranean Sea, climate change requires further clarification within the Guidance Factsheets and GES definitions. Its impacts should be integrated into existing indicators and methodologies, particularly in the establishment of baseline and threshold values.
- take into consideration the development of Monitoring and Assessment Scales, Assessment Criteria, Thresholds, and Baseline Values for IMAP Common Indicators 1, 2 related to habitats (Posidonia, Coralligenous, and Maerl), 3, 4, and 5 related to seabirds, marine mammals, and marine turtles, as well as for IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to non-indigenous species.
- update the Guidance Factsheets based on the latest scientific knowledge. Advancements in marine biodiversity research, ecological monitoring, and the impacts of climate change provide valuable insights that should be integrated to ensure more accurate assessments and effective conservation measures.

10. Furthermore, the revision will take into account newly developed guidelines, such as the IUCN guideline for the Mediterranean Monk Seal "A Comprehensive Set of Monitoring and Research Techniques for the Study and Conservation of *Monachus monachus* in the Mediterranean Sea" (UNEP/MED WG. 606/inf.3), the results of the ABIOMMED project: D1C1 criterion assessment for cetaceans in the ACCOBAMS area (UNEP/MED WG. 606/inf.4), and the guideline document produced by SPA/RAC on the identification and implementation of appropriate measures to reduce new introductions and to eradicate/control non-indigenous species (NIS) in priority sites, in line with the Post-2020 SAPBIO (UNEP/MED WG. 606/inf.5).

11. Additionally, the revision will incorporate emerging data collection approaches, such as artificial intelligence, environmental DNA (eDNA), and citizen science. These innovative methods enhance monitoring efforts, improve data accuracy, and facilitate large-scale assessments of marine biodiversity.

12. The involvement of regional partners in this update is crucial to ensure their active participation in the implementation of IMAP and data collection efforts. Strengthening collaboration with regional organizations, research institutions, and stakeholders will enhance the effectiveness of monitoring programs and promote a more coordinated approach to biodiversity conservation in the Mediterranean.

13. Following the adoption of the proposed new Common Indicators 1 and 2 for pelagic habitats, as well as those for Ecological Objectives 4 and 6, specific Guidance Factsheets will be developed. These documents will provide detailed methodological frameworks for monitoring and assessing these indicators, ensuring consistency and reliability in data collection and analysis across the Mediterranean region.