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Agenda Item 3: Status of implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol)

Report on the status of implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol)

Note:

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Note by the Secretariat

1. In its Decision IG.23/1, the 20th Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017): (a) adopted the revised reporting format for the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols; (b) urged Contracting Parties to use the revised reporting format when submitting their national implementation reports; and (c) requested the Secretariat to submit to each meeting of the Contracting Parties, on the basis of an analysis of the information contained in the national reports, a report on the general advances made in the region, including at the legal and institutional levels, in implementing the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols along with proposals for further measures, as necessary.
2. In response to this request, and in the spirit of the paragraph 2 (ii) of Article 18 of the Barcelona Convention, the Coordinating Unit and the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) invited the Focal Points for SPA/BD to provide a report, for the period running from January 2022 to December 2023, on the application of the Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) through the **The Barcelona Convention Reporting System (BCRS)**¹.
3. The SPA/BD Protocol entered into force on 19 December 1999. As of 29 October 2020, 21 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention were also Parties to the SPA/BD Protocol, while 4 remained Parties to the 1982 SPA Protocol.
4. The status of progress in implementation and the associated main overall findings should be understood within the limitations which arise from the fact that not all Contracting Parties have submitted their national implementation reports for the 2022-2023 biennium and the difference in the amount of information submitted. The percentage used in presenting statistical responses is that out of the total reporting Contracting Parties. For the purpose of this report: “few” for less than 15%, “some” for between 15% and 40%, “many” for 40% or over, “most” for 70% or over and “nearly all” is used for 90% or over.
5. The present report is based on information submitted by eleven Contracting Parties for the 2022-2023 biennium, as of March 2025. It provides an overall analysis and summarizes the key findings.
6. A quantitative overview of the implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) during the biennium 2022-2023 is provided in the information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.3.

¹ <https://idc.info-rac.org/bcrs>

I. Introduction

1. **Part I: Legal and Regulatory Measures.** This section evaluates whether Contracting Parties have established the necessary legal frameworks for the protection and conservation of Specially Protected Areas (SPAs), including those designated as Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs), and for safeguarding endangered or threatened flora and fauna as listed in Annexes II and III of the Protocol.
2. **Part II: Specially Protected Areas (SPAs).** This section collects information regarding the designated SPAs and the protective measures implemented for their management. It specifically examines the development and adoption of management plans for each SPA, incorporating the elements mandated under Article 7 of the Protocol.
3. **Part III: Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs).** This section gathers data on the SPAMIs that have been designated and details the measures taken for their management. It focuses on the formulation and execution of management plans that include regulations on dumping and the release of wastes, as well as monitoring programs, species reintroduction initiatives, and the regulation of activities in adjacent zones.
4. **Part IV: Endangered and Threatened Species.** This section compiles information on the measures adopted by Contracting Parties to protect endangered or threatened species as specified in the Annexes to the Protocol.
5. **Part V: Monitoring.** This section collects data on the implementation of quality status monitoring and the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), which are critical for evaluating the effectiveness of conservation measures.
6. **Part VI: Enforcement Measures.** This section gathers information on the enforcement actions taken to ensure compliance with the Protocol, thereby verifying that the legal frameworks and management measures are effectively implemented.
7. **Part VII: Implementation of Regional Action Plans (RAPs).** This section documents the measures established for the execution of biodiversity Regional Action Plans adopted by the Contracting Parties, providing an overview of regional initiatives and their implementation status.

II. Progress in Implementation

A. Legal and Regulatory Measures

8. Reporting Contracting Parties have reported on the legal and regulatory measures put in place to implement the SPA/BD Protocol, as shown in detail below,
9. *Designation of the terrestrial areas (including wetlands) under its jurisdiction which are in the area to which the SPA/BD Protocol applies (Article 2.1).* Most reporting Contracting Parties (8 out of 11) have designated terrestrial areas, including wetlands, within the scope of the SPA/BD Protocol. These areas are generally designated under various national or regional protection categories, often as part of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) or integrated coastal management schemes. However, some Parties (3 out of 11) have not yet completed this designation.
10. *Protection, preservation and management in a sustainable and environmentally sound way of areas of particular natural or cultural value, notably by the establishment of SPAs (Article 3.1(a)).* Most reporting Contracting Parties (9 out of 11) reported the existence of measures ensuring the sustainable protection, preservation, and management of areas of particular value. These measures include the establishment of new protected areas, enforcement of regulations, and specific management plans. This trend demonstrates increased commitment to spatial conservation measures across the Mediterranean.

11. *Protection, preservation and management of endangered or threatened plant and animal species (Article 3.1(b)).* Most reporting Contracting Parties (9 out of 11) have also reported the existence of legal frameworks or specific programs aimed at the protection of endangered or threatened species. These include national Red Lists, species-specific legislation, or alignment with international obligations under the SPA/BD Protocol and other instruments such as CITES or EU Directives.
12. *Compilation of an inventory of the components of marine and coastal biodiversity (Article 3.3).* Many reporting Contracting Parties (6 out of 11) have conducted inventories of marine and coastal biodiversity. These efforts are often linked to EU obligations under the Habitats Directive, or national biodiversity strategies. However, some Parties (3) are still in the process of developing such inventories, and 2 reported no such action yet, indicating that further capacity-building may be needed to support full implementation.
13. *Formulation of a national strategy and an action plan to protect the components of marine and coastal biodiversity (Article 3.4).* Nearly all reporting Contracting Parties (10 out of 11) have developed national strategies and/or action plans addressing the conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity. These typically take the form of national biodiversity strategies, ICZM strategies, or marine-specific action plans. This reflects a strong regional commitment to structured and integrated policy frameworks.
14. *Monitoring the components of marine and coastal biodiversity and those processes and categories of activities which have or are likely to have a significant adverse impact on them (Article 3.5).* Nearly all reporting Contracting Parties (10 out of 11) reported implementing monitoring systems to track biodiversity trends and human pressures. References were made to Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) structures, specific MPA monitoring programmes, and EU-mandated assessments under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). This demonstrates notable progress in evidence-based conservation.
15. *Taking into consideration, in the planning process leading to decisions on projects and activities that could significantly affect protected areas and species and their habitats, of possible direct or indirect, immediate or long-term, impact, including the cumulative impact of projects and activities on habitats (Article 17).* All reporting Contracting Parties (11 out of 11) confirmed that such considerations are included in their planning and decision-making processes. Most of them rely on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) systems to account for direct and indirect impacts on biodiversity. This reflects a comprehensive integration of ecosystem considerations into national development planning.
16. In the context of legal and regulatory measures, most Contracting Parties continue to face constraints related to financial resources and technical expertise, particularly when it comes to the development and enforcement of updated legal frameworks.
17. Several Parties indicated challenges in aligning national legislation with the Protocol's obligations, especially regarding the designation and effective management of protected areas. Administrative delays and insufficient institutional coordination were also mentioned, affecting the timely adoption of management plans and regulatory instruments. These issues highlight the need for enhanced technical assistance, legal support, and capacity-building efforts to support the full implementation of the Protocol's legal requirements.

B. Specially Protected Areas (SPAs)

1. Measures to protect SPAs

18. *Setting up of protected areas within the Protocol's geographical coverage (Article 3.1(a)).* Nearly all reporting Contracting Parties (10 out of 11) stated that they have established SPAs within their jurisdiction during the 2022–2023 reporting period. This reflects the continued commitment of Parties to expanding area-based conservation measures under the Protocol.
19. *Prohibition of the dumping and any discharge likely to directly or indirectly harm the integrity of SPAs (Article 6.b).* Nearly all Parties (10 out of 11) confirmed having legal or administrative measures in place to prohibit the dumping or discharge of substances likely to impair the integrity of SPAs. These provisions often derive from broader environmental legislation, such as maritime and wastewater regulations, which also apply to SPAs.
20. *Regulation of the passage of ships and all stopping or anchoring in the SPAs' extension zone (Article 6.c).* Many reporting Parties (6 out of 11) have adopted legal frameworks regulating the passage and anchoring of ships within SPAs or their buffer zones. However, 4 Parties responded negatively, and 1 reported the measure as under development, indicating room for improvement in managing maritime pressures.
21. *Regulation of the introduction of any species not indigenous to the SPA or of genetically modified species (Article 6.d).* Many Parties (6 out of 11) reported having implemented relevant regulations. However, 3 Parties reported the measure as under development, while 1 considered it not applicable, which suggests that additional technical or policy support may be required to address biological invasions effectively.
22. *Regulation or prohibition of all exploration activities or activities that involve modifying the soil or subsoil of the land part, of the seabed or of its subsoil in the SPAs (Article 6.e).* Nearly all Contracting Parties (10 out of 11) have legal frameworks regulating or prohibiting exploration activities within SPAs. These frameworks often address both terrestrial and marine domains, ensuring the integrity of the ecological characteristics of the sites.
23. *Regulation of scientific research in the SPAs (Article 6.f).* Nearly all Parties (10 out of 11) confirmed that scientific research in SPAs is subject to regulation, usually through permit systems overseen by national authorities. This helps ensure that research does not negatively impact protected values.
24. *Prohibition and regulation of all activities involving taking of species (i. e. fishing, hunting, taking of animals and harvesting of plants and their destruction as well as trade in animals, parts of animals, plants and parts of plants) which originate in SPAs (Article 6.g).* Nearly all Contracting Parties (10 out of 11) have put in place regulations or prohibitions concerning the removal of species from SPAs, whether for fishing, hunting, or trade. These measures are generally integrated within broader biodiversity protection laws.
25. *Regulation and, if necessary, prohibition of any other activity likely to have an adverse impact on the SPAs. These include activities that may harm or disturb the species or that might endanger the state of conservation of the ecosystems or species or might impair the natural or cultural characteristics of the SPA (Article 6.h).* Nearly all Parties (10 out of 11) reported measures in place to regulate or prohibit any other activities likely to impact the conservation status of ecosystems and species in SPAs. These include activities not already covered under other provisions.
26. *Traditional subsistence and cultural activities of local populations taken into account when formulating protective measures for SPAs (Article 18).* Most reporting Parties (8 out of 10, with one 'not applicable') stated that they take into account traditional and cultural practices of local

populations when developing protection measures for SPAs. This includes integrating community-based approaches or guidelines for sustainable use.

2. List of SPAs within the protocol's geographical coverage

27. Most reporting Contracting Parties (8 out of 11) provided information on a total of 78 Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) designated within their national jurisdictions. These areas vary in legal status and type, including Special Environmental Protection Areas (SEPAs), Nature Parks, Natural Monuments, and Special Reserves.

28. It is important to note that none of the SPAs were created during the current reporting biennium; some were declared in previous years but continue to be reported as part of national protected area systems under the SPA/BD Protocol.

29. Among the declared SPAs:

- 6 SPAs currently have their management plans under development.
- Many of the reported SPAs are already governed by legally binding protection measures.

30. Few of the management plans were adopted during the current biennium, particularly in Montenegro and Italy, highlighting active progress in conservation planning.

31. This suggests that while the overall number of SPAs has slightly increased compared to the previous reporting cycle, there remains a need for improved consistency in reporting and follow-up on management planning, particularly to ensure full alignment with the objectives of the SPA/BD Protocol.

3. Management of SPAs

32. *Adoption of planning, management, supervision and monitoring measures for SPAs (Article 7.1).* Most Contracting Parties (6 out of 11) reported having adopted measures related to the planning, management, supervision, and monitoring of SPAs. Four Parties indicated that such measures are under development, and one reported not having such measures in place. This demonstrates continued but uneven progress across the region.

33. *Elaboration and implementation of a management plan for each SPA (Article 7.2 (a)).* Most reporting Parties (8 out of 11) stated that they have elaborated and implemented management plans for their SPAs. Two Parties reported the measure as under development, while one responded negatively. In some reports, management plans are described as being regularly updated or aligned with EU directives or national strategies

34. *Programmes for the observation and scientific monitoring of changes in the Protocol Areas' ecosystems and on the impact of human activities (Article 7.2 (b)).* Most Parties (8 out of 11) confirmed that they promote local authority involvement, while 3 are still developing such measures. Some Parties highlighted co-management approaches or the integration of municipalities into governance structure.

35. *Measures for the involvement of local communities in the process of managing the protected areas (Article 7.2(c)).* Most reporting Contracting Parties indicated that assistance measures for residents are in place, and 3 declared they are under development. Assistance is sometimes linked to sustainable development projects, awareness programmes, or benefit-sharing initiatives.

36. *Provision of assistance to local inhabitants to compensate for the possible adverse impact which the protection measures introduced in the SPA might have on their income (Article 7.2 (c)).*

Some Contracting Parties (4 out of 11) reported having such compensatory measures in place, while an equal number (4) stated that the measure is under development. Two Parties responded negatively, and one considered the question not applicable. Some reports described specific compensation mechanisms, including financial indemnities, legal provisions addressing restrictions on land use or property rights, and sector-specific regulations that enable compensation or provide support in cases where the designation of SPAs may affect traditional income sources.

37. *Funding mechanisms for managing and promoting the protected areas or income-generating activities that are compatible with the protection measures (Article 7.2(d)).* Many reporting Parties (7 out of 11) confirmed having financial mechanisms for SPA management or promotion. Two Parties reported the measure as under development, one responded negatively, and one deemed it not applicable.

38. *Appropriate training for the technical managers and other qualified staff of the protected areas (Article 7.2 (f)).* Many Contracting Parties (6 out of 10; one missing response) reported having training measures in place for SPA staff. Three Parties reported the measure as under development, and one answered negatively. These results reflect ongoing efforts to build technical and managerial capacity, though further reinforcement is needed in some countries.

39. Difficulties most frequently reported in the management of SPAs include administrative and institutional challenges, limited technical capacity, and insufficient financial resources. Some Parties also reported gaps in regulatory frameworks and highlighted the support received from SPA/RAC and regional projects for training, planning tools, and technical assistance.

Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs)

40. *Setting up of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) (Article 3.1.a).* Many reporting Contracting Parties (5 out of 11) stated that they have established SPAMIs. Two Parties reported that the process is under development, and four responded negatively. No new SPAMI was designated during the 2022–2023 reporting period.

41. *Elaboration and implementation of a management plan for each SPAMI (Article 7.2.a).* Many reporting Contracting Parties (6 out of 11) reported having elaborated and implemented a management plan for their designated SPAMIs. One Party reported that the process is under development, while three responded negatively and one stated that the measure was not applicable.

42. Difficulties most frequently reported for the creation and management of SPAMIs include limited financial resources and administrative management challenges.

Endangered and threatened species

43. *Drawing up of a list of endangered or threatened species of fauna and flora and identification of their distribution in the zones subject to Party's jurisdiction (Article 11.2).* Most reporting Contracting Parties (8 out of 11) stated having drawn up such lists and/or taken steps to identify the distribution of species. Some Parties referenced the use of national Red Lists or regional inventories, often aligned with international conventions or EU directives.

44. *Management of species of flora and fauna listed in Annexes II and III to the Protocol, to ensure their favorable state of conservation (Article 11.2 and Article 12.1).* Many Contracting Parties (7 out of 11) reported having implemented management measures for these species. National frameworks include species-specific action plans or legal provisions under nature protection laws.

45. *Controlling and, where appropriate, prohibiting the taking, possession or killing, the commercial trade, the transport and the exhibition for commercial purposes of protected species of*

fauna, particularly those listed in Annex II to the Protocol (Article 11.3.a and Article 12.2). Nearly all reporting Parties (9 out of 10) confirmed the existence of such control and prohibition measures, usually through national legislation governing wildlife protection or trade.

46. *Controlling and where appropriate prohibiting the disturbance of protected wild fauna, particularly during the period of breeding, incubation, hibernation and migration (Article 11.3.b).* Nearly all reporting Parties (10 out of 11) reported adopting such measures. In some cases, additional restrictions apply during sensitive periods through specific regulations or enforcement frameworks

47. *Establishment of bilateral or multilateral cooperation (including agreements) to protect and restore the population of migrant species in the area where the Protocol is applied (Article 11.4).* Many Contracting Parties (6 out of 11) reported cooperation initiatives through bilateral or multilateral agreements. Several referred to participation in instruments such as ACCOBAMS, CMS or AEWA.

48. *Regulating and where appropriate prohibiting all forms of destruction and disturbance of protected species of flora, particularly those listed in Annex II to the Protocol (Article 11.5 and Article 12.2).* Nearly all reporting Parties (10 out of 11) confirmed that such measures are in place, typically integrated within broader nature protection laws and implemented through regulatory frameworks.

49. *Formulation and adoption of measures and plans concerning the ex-situ reproduction, particularly in captivity, of protected fauna, and the growing of protected flora (Article 11.6).* Many reporting Parties (7 out of 11) reported having established such measures. These may involve collaboration with botanic gardens, zoos, aquaria or research institutions.

50. *Granting of exemptions to the prohibitions prescribed for the protection of the species listed in the Annexes to the Protocol for scientific, educational, or management purposes necessary to ensure the survival of the species (Article 12.6).* Most reporting Parties (7 out of 10) reported that exemptions can be granted under strict conditions and typically within the framework of permit systems coordinated by competent national authorities.

51. *Taking steps to deal with the deliberate or accidental introduction into the wild of non-indigenous or genetically modified species and prohibiting those that may have harmful impacts on ecosystems habitats or species (Article 13).* Most reporting Parties (8 out of 10) indicated that legal or administrative measures are in place to address introductions of non-indigenous or genetically modified species. Some Parties referenced national invasive species strategies or risk assessment protocols

52. The most frequently reported difficulties in the implementation of species protection measures were related to limited technical capacities and insufficient financial resources.

Monitoring

53. This section addresses the implementation of quality status monitoring and the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), focusing on biodiversity-related Ecological Objectives (EOs): EO1 (Biodiversity), EO2 (non-indigenous species), EO3 (Harvest of commercially exploited fish and shellfish), and EO6 (Sea-floor integrity).

54. Many Contracting Parties (6 out of 10) reported having implemented quality status monitoring and IMAP. The remaining Parties indicated that such frameworks are still under development.

55. For *EO1 – Biodiversity*, half of the Parties reported implementation. In some cases, national IMAP monitoring plans were developed with support from SPA/RAC or projects such as GEF Adriatic and SSFA cooperation.
56. For *EO2 – Non-indigenous species*, some Parties reported full implementation, while many are still developing appropriate monitoring tools. One Party reported the use of eDNA and innovative biofouling indicators.
57. Regarding *EO3 – Harvest of commercially exploited species*, many Parties have active monitoring systems. One Party detailed actions to ensure sustainable fishery management through marine strategies and regulatory tools.
58. For *EO6 – Sea-floor integrity*, implementation remains limited, with some Parties reporting monitoring systems in place. One national report highlighted the use of VMS data and spatial analyses to assess physical loss.
59. While some progress has been made across the region, monitoring for most EOs remains under development for several countries.
60. The main difficulties reported by Contracting Parties relate to limited financial resources, insufficient technical capacity, and, in some cases, gaps in regulatory frameworks. These issues were commonly cited in relation to developing national IMAPs or integrating monitoring indicators into broader environmental strategies.

Enforcement Measures

61. Only a few Contracting Parties reported having implemented enforcement measures related to the SPA/BD Protocol. The most commonly reported types of actions included inspections, identification of non-compliance cases, imposition of administrative fines, and, in some instances, criminal prosecution. Some reports also referred to regulatory reminders issued following infractions.
62. Among the Parties that provided data, the number of inspections varied significantly, from fewer than 50 to several thousand, depending on the enforcement article concerned. Fines ranged from modest penalties to more substantial amounts exceeding €300,000 in a few cases. In some reports, enforcement actions were based on general environmental legislation, while in others, specific protocols or marine protection frameworks were cited.
63. Most Parties either left this section blank or marked it as not applicable, indicating no inspections or enforcement actions were reported during the biennium. In some cases, this was justified by the absence of officially designated specially protected areas, which limits the applicability of the relevant enforcement provisions.
64. The main difficulties reported by Parties include limited administrative and financial capacity, as well as the lack of established SPAs in some jurisdictions, which constrains enforcement efforts.

Implementation of Regional Action Plans (RAPs)

65. For the nine Regional Action Plans under the SPA/BD Protocol, the most frequently reported difficulties during the 2022–2023 biennium were the lack of financial resources and limited technical guidance or expertise. These constraints affected the implementation of actions across several plans, particularly those related to species conservation, monitoring, and cross-sectoral coordination.

1. Regional Action Plan on Cartilaginous Fishes (Chondrichthyans)

66. A total of 10 Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of this Regional Action Plan. Implementation levels vary considerably across the different recommended actions.

67. *Formalize/reinforce synchronous submission of data to both scientific and management bodies, including annual submissions to the GFCM.* Some Parties (3 out of 10) reported implementing this action, while the rest indicated it is either under development or not yet undertaken.

68. *Establish strict legal protection for species listed in Annex II and GFCM Recommendations.* Half of the reporting Parties indicated that this measure has been established in national legal frameworks.

69. *Support the GFCM finning prohibition through national regulations and enforcement.* Most Parties (7 out of 10) reported full implementation of this measure, with only one Party indicating that it is not applicable.

70. *Complete and disseminate inventories of critical habitats (mating, spawning, nursery grounds).* Many Parties (4) have taken steps toward this, while an equal number reported the measure is still under development.

71. *Increase compliance with obligations to collect and submit catch and bycatch data.* This measure remains under implementation, with some Parties (3) indicating progress and many still developing their systems.

72. *Comply with obligations under GFCM recommendations on data collection for pelagic sharks.* The measure is partially implemented, with some Parties (4 out of 11) confirming compliance, while one indicated it is not applicable.

73. *Improve programmes for coastal fisheries data collection.* Half of the Parties (5 out of 10) confirmed implementation, with others reporting ongoing development.

74. *Monitor Critically Endangered, Endangered and endemic species.* This action has only been implemented by Some Parties (2 out of 9), while most indicated a lack of progress or absence of monitoring.

75. *Submit annual Shark Assessment Reports to the GFCM.* The action remains weakly implemented, with Some Parties (2 out of 10) having submitted such reports, and two indicating that the question is not applicable.

76. *Develop and adopt national Shark Plans and regulations for fisheries targeting or catching chondrichthyans.* Also reported by Some Parties (2 out of 10), with many indicating that efforts are underway.

77. Overall, many measures remain in a development phase, and the rate of full implementation remains limited for several actions.

78. The main difficulties reported by the Parties include the lack of financial and human resources and the limited national expertise on taxonomy and population assessment of cartilaginous fishes. These gaps have constrained effective monitoring and legal reform in several countries.

2. Regional Action Plan concerning Species Introduction and Invasive Species

79. Seven reporting Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan concerning Species Introduction and Invasive Species, as below.

80. *Set up a mechanism to promote and coordinate the actions listed in paragraph 22 of the Regional Action Plan.* Some reporting Contracting Parties (1 out of 7) answered this question positively. One reporting Contracting Party indicated work under development.

81. *Conduct a baseline study to feed the Marine Mediterranean Invasive Species (MAMIAS).* Only one reporting Contracting Party out of seven answered this question positively. A reporting Contracting Parties out of six indicated action taken in that regard.

82. *Development of programmes for data collection and monitoring.* Three reporting Contracting Parties out of six referred to the data collection and monitoring programmes developed under IMAP Project, as well as the MSFD. The main difficulties reported in this field are financial resources and technical capabilities.

83. *Launch the procedures for enacting or strengthening national legislation governing the control of alien species introduction.* Three reporting Contracting Parties out of seven underlined the general domestic legislation regulating the introduction of alien species, as well as the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species (IAS Regulation). Two reporting Contracting Parties noted work under development in this area. One reporting Contracting Party answered that this question is not applicable.

84. *Develop programmes to raise the awareness of the general public and target groups, including decision-makers, concerning the risks associated with species introduction.* Three reporting Contracting Parties out of seven responded affirmatively to this question, basing their answers on the training and awareness raising programmes conducted on the risks linked to the introduction of non-native species and on ways of addressing this problem. Two Parties noted that work is under development.

3. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species

85. Ten Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species.

86. *Protect legally all bird species listed in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol.* Nearly all Parties (9 out of 10) reported having legal frameworks in place to ensure the protection of bird species included in Annex II, primarily through national nature conservation or species protection legislation.

87. *Optimize synergies with international agreements and organizations dedicated to bird conservation.* Many Parties (5 out of 8) indicated having developed synergies or coordination mechanisms with relevant international frameworks or conventions.

88. *Organize specific training courses and workshops in coordination/synergy with international and/or national NGOs.* Many Parties (5 out of 10) reported the organization of training activities or workshops related to bird conservation, often in collaboration with national institutions or NGOs.

89. *Establishment or support of research and monitoring programmes to fill knowledge gaps on threatened species.* Many Parties (5 out of 8) indicated the existence or ongoing development of programmes aimed at improving knowledge on the status of threatened bird species, with support from research centres or environmental agencies.

90. *Establishment and implementation of National Action Plans for the conservation of endangered and threatened bird species in the Mediterranean.* Many Parties (4 out of 8) reported

work underway to develop or implement national action plans, while an equal number responded negatively.

91. *Identification of areas of importance for birds on land and at sea (including breeding, feeding, molting and wintering grounds).* Many Parties (4 out of 8) reported having undertaken mapping or identification of important areas, with the remainder indicating ongoing efforts.

92. *Legal establishment of Protected Areas with adequate management plans at breeding sites.* Many Parties (4 out of 8) reported having established such areas, particularly in known nesting or breeding sites of key bird species, while others indicated limited or no implementation.

93. The main difficulties reported by Contracting Parties concern the lack of dedicated financial resources and the insufficient national data or monitoring capacity for the identification and management of important bird areas. These limitations were mentioned as significant obstacles to the effective implementation of national action plans and site-based conservation.

4. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans

94. Eleven Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans.

95. *Ratify the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS) and implement its Resolutions and Recommendations of relevance for the Mediterranean Sea.* Most reporting Parties (9 out of 11) confirmed having ratified the ACCOBAMS Agreement and are implementing its relevant resolutions with only one reporting a negative response.

96. *Ensure that cetaceans are covered, at national level, by appropriate regulation measures providing for the elimination of deliberate killing and for the mitigation of the adverse impacts from their interactions with human activities.* Most Parties (9 out of 11) reported having in place national laws or regulatory frameworks addressing these threats.

97. *Ensure, through regulation or other appropriate approaches, that whale-watching activity is environmentally sound and sustainably conducted.* Many Parties (4 out of 10) declared having taken measures to regulate whale-watching activities. Many others reported either ongoing development or considered the measure not applicable in their national context.

98. *Undertake the comprehensive survey of abundance and distribution of cetaceans being planned by ACCOBAMS (ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative).* Most Parties (7 out of 10) indicated participation or national-level implementation of this initiative.

99. *Assess the cetacean bycatch and depredation in their fisheries and adopt mitigation measures.* Many Parties (5 out of 10) reported taking steps to assess and mitigate cetacean bycatch, while others indicated the measure is still under development or not applicable.

100. *Pursue the development and the implementation of a basin-wide strategy for underwater noise monitoring in the Mediterranean under the Ecological Objective 11 of the EcAp process.* Few Parties (1 out of 9) confirmed implementation of this action, while most others (7 out of 9) reported it as being under development.

101. *Development of acoustic mapping to build a comprehensive picture of the spatial and temporal distribution of anthropogenic noise sources, in particular for the noise hotspot areas identified in the Mediterranean by ACCOBAMS.* Few Parties (1 out of 9) reported progress on acoustic mapping, while many others are still developing efforts in this area. Many Parties (4 out of 9) indicated no action has been taken to date.

102. *Promote awareness of the anthropogenic noise impacts on cetaceans, targeting in particular decision makers, key players in the industry organisations and the stakeholders in the shipping sectors.* Many reporting Parties (4 out of 8) reported awareness-raising actions targeting stakeholders, with some others reporting efforts under development.

103. *Establish a list of marine areas under national jurisdiction identified as of special importance for cetaceans:* Some Parties (3 out of 8) indicated having established such lists or areas, while many others reported this activity is still under development.

104. The main difficulties reported by Contracting Parties relate to the lack of technical capacity for monitoring and noise assessment, and insufficient national data on cetacean populations. These challenges were often linked to broader gaps in funding and coordination needed to fully implement ACCOBAMS-related actions at national level.

5. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation

105. Nine reporting Contracting Parties provided information on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation, as follows.

106. *Take new vegetation species in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol into account.* Some Contracting Parties (3 out of 9) reported having taken into account the new species of Annex II in their domestic conservation measures. Many others either responded negatively or indicated that implementation was still under development.

107. *Create MPAs to conserve marine vegetation.* Many Contracting Parties (6 out of 10) reported the establishment of Marine Protected Areas or similar designations (e.g., Sites of Community Importance) to protect marine vegetation. Two other Parties reported ongoing work in this area.

108. *Set up a programme for making national inventories on macrophyta species, with staggered planning according to the regions priorities.* Some Parties (2 out of 8) reported having established such inventory programmes, while half responded negatively and a quarter indicated work in progress.

109. *Make theoretical probable distribution maps for the main plant assemblages.* Some Parties (2 out of 9) reported having developed such mapping initiatives, while most indicated that efforts are still under development.

110. *Implement targeted mapping and inventorying actions (Annex II species, priority sites).* Many reporting Parties (4 out of 8) stated they have implemented mapping and inventorying actions, and three others noted ongoing efforts in this domain.

111. *Establish a programme for setting up monitoring networks for the main marine plant assemblages at national and regional level.* Many Parties (5 out of 9) reported having established monitoring networks, and two others indicated that these are under development.

112. *Set up and/or extend their networks for follow-up of plants in the Mediterranean.* Only one out of nine Parties reported having set up or extended monitoring networks. Several indicated either ongoing efforts or limited progress.

113. *To develop short-, medium- and long-term action plans according to national and regional priorities.* Some reporting Contracting Parties (2 out of 8) responded positively to this question, while many reported no progress.

114. Main difficulties reported include the limited availability of financial resources, the lack of technical expertise for species identification and mapping, and challenges in inter-agency coordination to implement long-term vegetation monitoring strategies.

6. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Monk Seal

115. For the biennium 2022–2023, eleven Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of the Monk Seal, as follows:

116. *Has the Party given the monk seal protection status?* Many reporting Contracting Parties (7 out of 11) stated that the monk seal has been granted protection status through national legislation or biodiversity conservation frameworks.

117. *For fishing, does the Party explicitly ban the use of dynamite, the carrying of firearms on boats, and all fishing techniques that can endanger monk seals?* Many reporting Contracting Parties (7 out of 11) confirmed having adopted such bans in their fisheries legislation, while one Party indicated that this is under development.

118. *If the Party still has breeding monk seal populations, have measures been taken to isolate monk seals from any human activity?* Some reporting Contracting Parties (2 out of 9) stated that they have taken measures to isolate breeding monk seal populations from human activity. A majority of Parties considered this question not applicable to their national context.

119. *In the Party's territory, have SPAs been created to conserve monk seal populations or their potential habitats?* Many Contracting Parties (5 out of 10) reported the establishment of protected areas specifically targeting monk seal conservation or their potential habitats.

120. *Has the Party established a list of breeding caves and other habitats that are of importance for monk seal conservation?* A limited number of Parties (2 out of 10) reported having identified and inventoried such important habitats. An equal number reported ongoing efforts, while others indicated no action taken yet.

121. *Has the Party carried out programmes for data collection on the monk seal?* Many reporting Contracting Parties (4 out of 10) indicated that they have conducted data collection activities, including monitoring of sightings or collaboration with research institutions.

122. *Has the Party developed programmes for awareness raising, information and training concerning monk seal conservation?* Many reporting Parties (4 out of 9) indicated the implementation of awareness and training programmes targeting the general public, fishermen, and stakeholders, often in cooperation with NGOs.

123. *Does the Party have an action plan for the conservation of monk seals and its potential habitats?* Some reporting Contracting Parties (2 out of 10) reported having developed a dedicated national action plan, while others rely on general species conservation measures.

124. The main challenges reported by Contracting Parties in implementing monk seal conservation actions relate to limited technical and financial capacities, as well as the absence of updated data on monk seal presence and habitats in national waters.

7. Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles

125. Eleven Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the Conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles, as detailed below:

126. *Protection of turtles – general species protection.* Nearly all reporting Parties (9 out of 10) stated that legal measures are in place to ensure general protection of marine turtle species, through nature protection acts or specific regulations covering threatened species.

127. *Enforce legislation to eliminate deliberate killing.* Most Contracting Parties (9 out of 11) reported having enforcement mechanisms to eliminate deliberate killing. In one country, work in this area remains under development.

128. *Habitat protection and management (nesting, mating, feeding, wintering and key migration passages).* Many Parties (6 out of 11) confirmed implementing protection and management measures for turtle habitats. Some noted integration within national MPA systems or Natura 2000 sites. A few countries have yet to take action in this area.
129. *Setting up and implementing management plans.* Some Parties (4 out of 11) indicated that management plans have been adopted or are being implemented. An equal number reported no measures, and others mentioned this was not applicable.
130. *Restoration of damaged nesting habitats.* Some Parties (2 out of 9) reported action on the restoration of damaged nesting habitats. Over half of the reporting countries considered this point not applicable, mainly due to the absence of nesting sites.
131. *Fishing regulations (depth, season, gear) in key areas.* Many Contracting Parties (7 out of 11) reported having implemented fishing regulations in areas important for turtle conservation. Some countries noted regulatory gaps or limited enforcement capacities.
132. *Setting up and/or improving operation of Rescue Centers.* Many Parties (4 out of 10) confirmed having operational rescue centers or working to improve them. An equal number reported this is under development.
133. *Identification of new mating, feeding and wintering areas and key migration passages.* Half of the reporting Parties (5 out of 10) reported identifying new important areas or conducting mapping exercises. Several countries indicated ongoing efforts in this field.
134. *Elaboration and execution of cooperative research projects of regional importance aimed at assessing the interaction between turtles and fisheries.* Many Parties (5 out of 9) confirmed involvement in research projects, often in partnership with regional or international initiatives (e.g. LIFE projects).
135. *Tagging and genetic analysis (as appropriate).* Many Contracting Parties (5 out of 10) reported having carried out tagging or genetic analysis, often in the framework of research or conservation programmes.
136. *Modification of gear, methods and strategies.* Some Parties (2 out of 7) reported action taken to modify fishing gear or strategies to reduce turtle bycatch. Work remains under development in several countries, particularly regarding regulatory and technical aspects.
137. *Setting up and/or improving long-term monitoring programmes.* Some Parties (4 out of 11) indicated that long-term monitoring efforts are in place, while others noted ongoing development of such systems.
138. *Setting up stranding networks.* Some Parties (5 out of 11) reported having stranding networks operational, supported in some cases by rescue centers or local NGOs.
139. *Public awareness and information campaigns in particular for fishermen and local populations.* Most reporting Parties (9 out of 11) confirmed having conducted awareness campaigns targeting local communities and stakeholders interacting with marine turtles.
140. *Training courses.* Many Parties (4 out of 9) reported having provided training sessions for stakeholders, including fishers and rescue center staff. Others indicated limited or no action.
141. *Elaboration of National Action Plans and assessment of progress in implementation.* Many Contracting Parties (4 out of 9) reported having adopted or implemented National Action Plans for turtle conservation. A few noted ongoing efforts to develop such plans or monitor progress.

8. Dark Habitats Action Plan

142. A total of 11 Contracting Parties reported on the implementation of the Dark Habitats Action Plan for the 2022–2023 biennium. Among them, some Parties (4 out of 11) indicated that the Action Plan was not applicable to their national context.

143. *Making a summary of knowledge of dark populations and their distribution around the Mediterranean in the form of a geo-referenced information system.* Only one Party responded positively, many (3 out of 7) indicated ongoing work, and one responded negatively.

144. *Identify and assess proven pressures on each of the various types of habitats.* One Party responded positively, some (3 out of 8) reported work under development, and some (2 out of 8) responded negatively.

145. *Revise the reference list of types of marine habitat for the selection of sites for inclusion in national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest, in order to take account of dark assemblages.* Few Parties (1 out of 8) reported having taken this action, some (3 out of 8) reported ongoing work, and some (2 out of 8) responded negatively.

146. *Revise the list of endangered or threatened species in order to take account of dark assemblage species.* Some Parties (3 out of 8) noted work under development, and some others (2 out of 8) answered negatively. Only one Party out of eight reported implementation,

147. *Promote the identifying of areas of interest for the conservation of dark assemblages in the Mediterranean and carry out concerted actions in national and/or cross-border sites.* Some Parties (2 out of 8) responded positively, One other indicated ongoing work, and some (3 out of 8) responded negatively.

148. *Finalise the implementing of MPAs in already identified sites at national level and outside waters that lie within national jurisdiction.* Some Parties (2 out of 8) responded positively, and many (4 out of 8) reported that this action is under development.

149. *Propose the creation of new MPAs.* Many Parties (3 out of 7) noted ongoing work while some others (2 out of 7) reported implementation.

150. *Extend existing MPAs to integrate nearby sites that host dark assemblages.* Some Parties (2 out of 6) responded positively, One reported ongoing work, and one responded negatively.

151. *Introduce national legislation to reduce negative impacts.* Some Parties (2 out of 8) responded positively, some (3 out of 8) reported work under development, and one responded negatively.

152. *Integrate taking dark assemblages into account within impact studies procedures.* Many Parties (4 out of 7) responded positively, and one other reported ongoing work.

153. *Step up awareness and information about dark assemblages with the various actors.* Five Parties noted work under development while only one responded positively.

154. *Implement monitoring systems.* Some Parties (2 out of 9) reported implementation, some (2 out of 9) noted work under development, and many (3 out of 9) responded negatively.

9. Regional Action Plan for the conservation of Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions

155. A total of nine Contracting Parties provided responses regarding the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the conservation of Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions.

156. *Improve habitat modeling methods could provide new predictive models on Coralligenous distribution and guide cost-effective field surveys for data acquisition.* Only one Party out of seven reported efforts to improve habitat modeling methods through dedicated research projects such as TRETAMARA. Two indicated that work was under development, while two others reported no action in this field. Two additional Parties considered this point not applicable to their national context.

157. *Promote research programs on Coralligenous assemblages and maerl beds.* Two Parties out of seven reported having actively promoted research on coralligenous assemblages, either through national efforts or transboundary projects like Interreg SI-IT. Two others reported work under development. Meanwhile, two Parties stated that no such programmes were in place, and one Party considered the question not applicable.

158. *Develop and implement legislation initiatives for the conservation of Coralligenous assemblages.* Four out of nine Parties reported the existence or implementation of legal instruments aimed at the conservation of coralligenous assemblages. In one case, the response refers to several legal texts, including the Nature Protection Act and Ordinances on marine habitat types. Three Parties answered negatively, while one Party noted ongoing work in this area. France did not provide a response on this point.

159. *Coordinate the design of an Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program for the assessment of the state of coralligenous/maerl assemblages in view to be included in the assessment of the state of the Mediterranean.* Only two Parties out of eight reported coordination efforts toward the design of such an integrated monitoring programme. One Party mentioned that work was under development, while four Parties indicated that no such efforts had been undertaken. One additional Party considered the question not applicable. France did not provide a response.

160. Actions taken by reporting Contracting Parties signal a positive signal progress in implementation. To further enhance implementation, it seems that focus should be put on the promotion of research programs on coralligenous assemblages and maerl beds and on designing an integrated monitoring and assessment program for the assessment of the state coralligenous/maerl assemblages.

III. Main findings

161. Most reporting Contracting Parties have designated Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) and provided legal or regulatory frameworks for their protection and management. A few Parties are still in the process of developing or updating their national systems for SPA designation and management, indicating a dynamic and evolving implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol.
162. Many Contracting Parties reported having developed Management Plans for their SPAs. Some Parties clarified that, although formal plans are not always in place for each SPA, protective and management measures have been adopted through other legal instruments or frameworks. Further efforts appear necessary to ensure the effective implementation and operationalization of these plans.
163. Most Contracting Parties have established regulations governing activities such as scientific research, species collection, fishing, maritime traffic, and waste disposal in SPAs and/or SPAMIs. These measures are often articulated within site-specific management plans or through national environmental legislation.
164. Appropriate training initiatives for SPA staff, managers, and technical personnel were reported by many Contracting Parties, often implemented through national programmes, international cooperation, or support from regional organizations like SPA/RAC.
165. Monitoring programmes and observation efforts for ecological changes in Protocol areas are in place in most reporting Parties, with a majority stating that human impacts are systematically taken into account. Many Parties have also emphasized efforts to engage local communities in the management and stewardship of SPAs.
166. Most reporting Parties referred to the use of diverse financing mechanisms, including national funding schemes, international cooperation, and income-generating activities compatible with conservation, to support the management and promotion of SPAs.
167. Implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) appears to require continued efforts, particularly regarding Ecological Objectives EO1 (Biodiversity), EO2 (Non-indigenous species) and EO6 (Seafloor integrity), where several Parties reported either partial or ongoing implementation.
168. As of 2022–2023, the number of SPAMIs remains unchanged at 39 sites. A few Contracting Parties reported efforts underway to nominate new SPAMIs or to strengthen the management of existing ones.
169. Regulatory measures for the protection of endangered or threatened species are reported to be in place in most Contracting Parties, with references to national species lists, protected areas, and restrictions on harmful activities.
170. Many Contracting Parties reported having developed or updated inventories of biodiversity, with a focus on marine species and habitats. These efforts are often aligned with the SPA/BD Protocol and relevant EU Directives (e.g., Habitats Directive).
171. Several Parties reported listing endangered or threatened species at national level and identifying their distribution. However, the update and harmonization of these lists remain in progress in some countries.
172. Measures on ex-situ conservation, such as the reproduction or reintroduction of protected species, have been reported in most Parties, particularly in relation to key species like the monk seal, marine turtles, or certain plant species.

173. The majority of Contracting Parties reported having taken steps to control or prevent the introduction of non-indigenous or genetically modified species, although full implementation of Article 13 remains a challenge in some areas.

174. Cartilaginous Fishes: The level of implementation of this Plan remains limited. Several Contracting Parties reported a lack of data synchronization, delays in submitting catch statistics, and the absence of national action plans. Further efforts are required to fulfill reporting obligations and implement national Shark Action Plans.

175. Invasive Species: Progress remains insufficient overall. While a few Parties have integrated invasive species control into national strategies, the mechanism to coordinate actions (paragraph 22 of the RAP) and updates to the MAMIAS database are still not fully operational in most countries.

176. Bird Species: Significant efforts have been noted, especially in terms of legal protection and monitoring. However, further action is needed on the establishment and implementation of National Action Plans for endangered and threatened bird species, as only a few Parties reported progress in this regard.

177. Cetaceans: Most Contracting Parties have ratified the ACCOBAMS Agreement and undertaken action for cetacean conservation, such as surveys and mitigation measures. However, acoustic mapping and the development of a Mediterranean-wide noise monitoring strategy remain underdeveloped and require further support.

178. Marine Vegetation: While some progress has been made, notably on the creation of MPAs for marine vegetation, national inventories, monitoring networks, and action plans remain under development in many Parties. The integration of new Annex II species in legal frameworks is also pending in several cases.

179. Monk Seal: Implementation varies depending on species presence. Parties with breeding populations reported having taken conservation measures, created SPAs, and conducted awareness programmes. However, many countries with no monk seal presence marked several questions as not applicable.

180. Marine Turtles: Most Parties reported legal protection and enforcement, but gaps remain in habitat protection, tagging and genetic studies, and the establishment of rescue centers or training programmes. Enhanced efforts are needed to ensure comprehensive implementation of the RAP.

181. Dark Habitats: Implementation is still limited, though a few Contracting Parties reported progress in awareness-raising and national legislation. Areas requiring further work include habitat mapping, revision of endangered species lists, and the integration of dark habitats into MPAs and impact assessments.

182. Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions: Many Parties reported legislative measures and scientific programmes underway. However, promotion of dedicated research and the coordination of an integrated monitoring framework remain in early stages in several countries.

IV. Main difficulties and constraints

183. The most frequently reported challenges in implementing the SPA/BD Protocol remain:

- Limited financial resources,
- lack of technical and human capacities,
- administrative constraints and
- coordination gaps across institutions