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**Agenda Item 4: Progress report on the activities carried out by SPA/RAC under the UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy for the interim period: April 2023–April 2025**

**Progress report on the implementation of SPA/RAC activities under the UNEP/MAP MTS for the interim period: April 2023–April 2025**

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Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC)  
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat  
B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis Cedex - Tunisia  
E-mail: [car-asp@spa-rac.org](mailto:car-asp@spa-rac.org)

## Table of content

<b>I.</b>	<b>MTS Programme 2: “Towards Healthy Mediterranean Ecosystems and Enhanced Biodiversity” .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Outcome 2.1. Ecosystem resilience improved through restoration of those with best regeneration potential</i>	<i>1</i>
	<i>Outcome 2.2. Comprehensive, coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed MPAs and OECMs in place, expanded, effective and sustainable .....</i>	<i>1</i>
	<i>Outcome 2.3. Mediterranean endangered and threatened species and key habitats in favourable status of conservation.....</i>	<i>2</i>
	<i>Outcome 2.4. Non -indigenous species introductions minimized and introduction pathways under control</i>	<i>4</i>
<b>II.</b>	<b>MTS Programme 3 “Towards a Climate Resilient Mediterranean” .....</b>	<b>5</b>
	<i>Outcome 3.1. Legal, policy and institutional framework strengthened at the regional and national level to efficiently address climate change related challenges (flooding, erosion, land degradation, pollution, disasters etc.).....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>Outcome 3.2. Nature-based, technical solutions promoting prevention or reduction of the impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems and increase resilience to climatic variability and change .....</i>	<i>5</i>
<b>III.</b>	<b>MTS Programme 5 “Governance” .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	<i>Outcome 5.1. Effective Implementation and Enforcement by the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols, MAP Policies, including Ecosystem Approach related COP decisions, the MSSD and Programmes of Measures achieved at regional and national levels .....</i>	<i>6</i>
	<i>Outcome 5.2. Systemic strengthening and effective functioning and delivery of MAP decision-making and advisory bodies ensured, and efficiency enhanced with new digital Approaches .....</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>Outcome 5.3. Policy coherence and complementarity ensured among relevant work at global, regional and national levels and among MAP-Barcelona Convention system’s policy and regulatory instruments.....</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>Outcome 5.4. Enhanced partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement, including with the private sector and science policy interface .....</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>Outcome 5.5. Coordinated approaches implemented to strengthen public institution capacities for the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>MTS Programme 6 “Together for a Shared Vision of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast” .....</b>	<b>8</b>
	<i>Outcome 6.2. Science-based IMAP, foresight and other assessments and assessment tools for strengthened science-policy interface and decision making (in-house expertise, consultancy, publication, toolbox, national technical support, pilots(s)) .....</i>	<i>8</i>
	<i>Outcome 6.3. IMAP implementation and Environment and Development Observation provide updated and quality assured data in support of decision-making by Contracting Parties and assessment of GES.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>V.</b>	<b>MTS Programme 7 “Towards a Stronger Advocacy, Awareness, Education and Communication of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast” .....</b>	<b>10</b>
	<i>Outcome 7.1. Stakeholders and policymakers properly informed about the state of the Mediterranean Sea and coast and aware of the environmental priority issues .....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Outcome 7.2. Citizen and general public awareness and outreach raised through citizen science and digital campaigns .....</i>	<i>10</i>
	<i>Outcome 7.3. Towards a digital transformation: use of digital technologies to improve networking and MAP visibility .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<b>ANNEX I</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

**Progress report on the implementation of SPA/RAC activities under the UNEP/MAP MTS for the interim period: April 2023–April 2025**

**I.MTS Programme 2: “Towards Healthy Mediterranean Ecosystems and Enhanced Biodiversity”**

**Outcome 2.1. Ecosystem resilience improved through restoration of those with best regeneration potential**

**Main activity 2.1.1. Promote the implementation of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in the Mediterranean: Identify innovative actions, capitalize and promote replication**

1. Efforts focused on restoring *Pinna nobilis* populations base on the adopted restoration programme (COP 23). Tunisia continued monitoring living specimens, while a MoU is being finalized for similar activities in Libya. Additionally, discussions are advancing with IUCN-Med to establish a Mediterranean-wide task force.
2. Draft guidelines for species recovery plans are prepared as provided for in Action 2 of the Post-2020 SAPBIO and are presented to the 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SPA/DB FPs as the information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.4.
3. The development of the criteria for the full inventory of ecosystems with the highest ecological relevance and/or regeneration potential as provided for by Action 12 on restoration of the Post-2020 SAPBIO to support the country to undertake such inventories is underway.
4. SPA/RAC, as member of the task force of the Mediterranean Posidonia Network (MPN), will support the organization of the second seminar (Hammamet, Tunisia 5 -9 May 2025) to further discuss the implementation of the provision of the Mediterranean Action Plan for conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea.
5. SPA/RAC participated to the Institutional Dialogue event of the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission (Málaga, Spain 28-29 November 2024), which aimed to discuss critical issues related to marine and coastal restoration in the Mediterranean, build capacity in navigating the policy-science interface, and foster collaboration within the Natural Heritage community of practice<sup>1</sup>

**Outcome 2.2. Comprehensive, coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed MPAs and OECMs in place, expanded, effective and sustainable**

**Main activity 2.2.1. Support the Contracting Parties in protecting and conserving the Mediterranean Sea through well-connected, ecologically representative and effective systems of marine and coastal protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures**

6. Within the framework of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA project, the national strategy on MCPAs and OECMs for the Egyptian Mediterranean coast has been officially endorsed by August 2023, based on a consultation process involving related stakeholders at national and local levels and taking into account both conservation objectives and the requirement for MCPAs to be integrated within their economic and social environment.
7. Under the GEF Child Project 3.1 in Libya, SPA/RAC and the Ministry of Environment (MoE) collaborated in developing i) an assessment of the legal and institutional framework for the establishment of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs), and ii) a draft law on protected areas that has been endorsed by the national stakeholders and adapted and tailored by the legislative department of the MoE to the appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> <https://natural-heritage.interreg-euro-med.eu/>

format and channeled then through the official procedures of the government and submitted to the parliament for adoption.

8. On the other hand, under the same Project, SPA/RAC and the MoE of Libya have started implementing a process aiming at updating the National Strategy on MCPAs in line with the global and Mediterranean agendas and targets including the identification and reporting of OECMs.

9. Under the EU-funded SEMPA project, SPA/RAC is supporting the relevant national authorities of Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia in developing and/or updating and implementing the management plans of Rachgoun Island future MPA (Algeria), Ashtoum El Gamil Protected Area (Egypt), Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon), Bsis island future MPA (Libya), Cap des Trois Fourches future MPA (Morocco), Kneiss and Kerkennah Islands future MCPAs (Tunisia).

10. With the support of the EU-funded SEMPA project, SPA/RAC developed a tailored regional capacity building programme for improving MCPAs/SPAMIs (MCPA) management and sustainability, focusing on the two main following topics: i) management effectiveness, and ii) climate change adaptation. In this context, two training courses were organized, followed by post-training implementation activities:

11. A first training course on “enhancing effective management of Mediterranean MCPAs/SPAMIs using IMET tool “ was conducted in Tunis, Tunisia from 13 to 20 February 2025, bringing together 13 managers from Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, to strengthen their capacities in evaluating and improving conservation effectiveness.

12. The Ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) Terms of Reference were updated, and its composition was renewed, following the validation by the SPA/BD Focal Points. AGEM convened two meetings by teleconference in 2025. The draft Guidance on Other Effective area-based Conservation measures (OECM) and criteria application in the Mediterranean in the Mediterranean was developed in close collaboration with the AGEM and is presented in the working document UNEP/MED WG.608/13 to the 17th meeting of SPA/BD Focal Point.

### **Main activity 2.2.2. Ensure effective SPAMI management and evaluation**

13. The third phase of the SPAMI Twinning Programme (2022–2023), involving six SPAMIs from Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, has included on-the-job trainings, the design and implementation of specific action plans, and the engagement of civil society in SPAMI management through the implementation of five small-scale projects in Italy, Lebanon, and Tunisia. The SPAMI Collaborative Platform was maintained.

14. The Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) Evaluation System (SES) was updated following the amendment of the Format of the periodic review of SPAMIs by COP23. Video tutorials were produced to facilitate the use of the SES. Ordinary periodic and extraordinary reviews of 25 SPAMIs due in 2024-2025 biennium were conducted and are presented in the working document UNEP/MED WG.608/15 for consideration by the 17th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points.

15. Thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Environment of Italy (MASE), the fourth edition of SPAMI Twinning Programme (2024-2025) was launched, involving exchanges with Italian SPAMIs, training, and the design of collaborative action plans. Two civil society organisations (CSO) projects were implemented to support SPAMI governance. The four SPAMI Twinning programmes are being evaluated in order to assess their effectiveness and provide recommendations for future improvements.

### **Outcome 2.3. Mediterranean endangered and threatened species and key habitats in favourable status of conservation**

#### **Main activity 2.3.1. Implement regional and national actions to boost the implementation of the Action Plans on marine key habitats**

16. In accordance with the decision IG.26/5, the assessment and the update of the Action Plan for the conservation of the Coralligenous and Other Calcareous Bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea, has been concluded and is presented as the working document UNEP/MEDWG.608/8 during the 17<sup>th</sup> SPA/DB Focal Points meeting in view to be submitted to the MAP Focal Points meeting and COP 24 for consideration.
17. The development of calls for the update of the guidelines suited to the inventorying and monitoring of dark habitats and associated assemblages and preparation of the detailed guidelines for effective management measures of dark habitats are underway.
18. The modalities of collaboration between SPA/RAC and the Agencia Estatal Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) is under finalization concerning the T-MEDNet platform. This initiative aims to develop an observation network on climate change effects in marine coastal ecosystems by implementing standard monitoring protocols for seawater temperature and biological indicators on a large scale and over the long term.
19. A MoA was established with The Institute of marine biology in Montenegro to deploy dataloggers to record temperature and assess the impact of heatwaves on coralligenous assemblages in National IMAP sites. Discussions are ongoing to deploy dataloggers to record temperature and assess the impact of heatwaves in other sites (Tunisia and Libya).
20. Discussions are underway to join a consortium for the NEXT MED call to develop a project on climate change and ecosystems.
21. SPA/RAC contributed to the elaboration of the Mediterranean Blue Carbon Strategy prepared by The IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, which is presented as an information document (UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.5).

**Main activity 2.3.2. Effectively implement the updated regional Strategy and Action Plans for the conservation of threatened and endangered species and share related practices**

22. The updated drafts Action plans for the conservation of marine Turtles and cartilaginous fishes as well as the Mediterranean Monk seal Strategy are elaborated and presented respectively as the working documents UNEP/MED WG.608/5, UNEP/MED WG.608/6 and UNEP/MED WG.608/7 during the 17<sup>th</sup> SPA/DB Focal Points meeting in view to be submitted to the MAP Focal Points meeting and COP 24 for consideration.
23. Thanks to the French Voluntary Contribution, SPA/RAC has supported: the preparation of the National action Plan for the conservation of bird species in Egypt; the winter bird census in Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia; the field ringing campaign, using PVC rings on Less Crested Tern nesting in Libya; the Monitoring of marine turtles nesting and stranding in Tunisia and the setup of rescue center in Morocco.
24. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Mediterranean Bird Symposium was held in Tunisia, February 2024 by SPA/RAC in partnership with AAO/BirdLife, ISPRA, IUCN-Med and Tour du Valat. The Symposium declaration is given in annex I of the present report.
25. In close consultation with its national Focal points of Spain and Greece, SPA/RAC is supporting Tethys Research Institute to implement the 2025 research projects: “*Enhancing Knowledge on fin whale movement in the Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic waters using bio: logging*” and “the annual monitoring of monk seal population parameters in the Ionian Archipelago (Greece)”
26. With reference to the bilateral Cooperation Agreement signed between UNEP/MAP and the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security to implement the MAP Programme of Work (PoW 2024-2025) and to *Improve national monitoring, management and capacity-building for conservation of endangered elasmobranchs in the Adriatic areas*, SPA/RAC has elaborated an overview on the status of elasmobranch in

the Adriatic region: given in the document WG.608/Inf.14 and has organized, in cooperation with Sharklab ADRIA, the Sub-regional training on monitoring, identification and advanced research methodologies of the Cartilaginous Fishes (chondrichthyans) in the Adriatic Sea (Vlorë, Albania, 21-23 January 2025). The call for consultancy related to the third activity about the Implementation of communication initiatives for the conservation of cartilaginous fishes has been launched at the beginning of April 2025.

27. Within the framework of the implementation of the MED Monk Seal Project, SPA/RAC is supporting monitoring and awareness-raising activities in Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia which were preceded by capacity-building training sessions. More details are given in the document UNEP/MED WG. 608/Inf.15

28. SPA/RAC is supporting, within the second and third phase of the EU funded Marine Litter MED project, the elaboration and the implementation of the national monitoring programme of CI 24 in Egypt, Libya and Morocco. An update on the progress made related to Candidate Indicator 24 is presented in the information document UNEP/MED WG. 608/Inf.21

### **Main activity 2.3.3. Implement conservation measures and share best practices for Annex II species**

29. SPA/RAC has assisted the elaboration of the national Action Plans for the conservation of cartilaginous fishes in Egypt and Libya and the conduction of a rapid assessment of elasmobranchs in Libya in line with Decision IG.26/4. While the Socio-economic study is underway through collaboration with Plan Bleu. Moreover, a sub-regional training on cartilaginous fish identification was held in Tunisia in December 2024, allowing the elaboration of illustrated guide about these species in the Mediterranean and Tunisia.

30. SPA/RAC organized the Smart Marine Conservation Forum on database management and digital transformation for marine conservation, held from 4 to 6 March 2024 in Al Hoceima, Morocco, and online. The event was funded by MASE, with a additional support from the European Union through the EU-funded ILIAD project. It brought together 80 online participants and 68 in-person attendees - including experts, researchers, professionals, and senior representatives- from 26 countries and 49 organizations.

31. To sustain regional efforts for sea turtle conservation SPA/RAC contributed to the organization with NASTNet and WWF NA of The Forum for a Sustainable, Safe, and Significant Marine Environment for Sea Turtles in North Africa, (Monastir, Tunisia, December 2024) and to the publication “Turning the tide: A roadmap to sea turtle survival in the Mediterranean » coordinated by MEDASSET.

32. SPA/RAC and the ACCOBAMS secretariat provided joint support for the 36<sup>th</sup> European Cetacean Society Conference, to be held in May 2025

### **Main activity 2.3.4. Evaluate the approach of regional Action Plans for species and habitats**

33. The draft evaluation of the effectiveness of regional Action Plans under the SPA/BD Protocol in light of the Global Biodiversity Framework, Post-2020 SAPBIO, and EcAp/IMAP processes has been carried out in consultation with the SPA/RAC Focal points and is presented during the 17th SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting as working document UNEP/MED WG.608/9 in view to be submitted to the MAP Focal Points meeting and COP 24 for consideration.

## **Outcome 2.4. Non -indigenous species introductions minimized and introduction pathways under control**

### **Main activity 2.4.1. Update and implement the Regional Action Plan on NIS and Ballast Water Strategy**

34. On 23–24 January 2025, SPA/RAC has organised two back-to-back workshops on Non-Indigenous Species (NIS) in Rome, Italy, with the support of the Italian Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (MASE) under the bilateral Cooperation Agreement signed between UNEP/MAP and the Italian Ministry of

Environment and Energy Security to implement the MAP Programme of Work (PoW 2024-2025), the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Forests (MASAF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The first workshop focused on managing the spread of NIS across the Mediterranean. The second workshop specifically addressed two invasive blue crab species (*Callinectes sapidus* and *Portunus segnis*). Both workshops underscored the urgency of integrated approaches for sustainable NIS management and biodiversity conservation in the Mediterranean. The following documents were discussed and reviewed during these back-to-back workshops:

35. Guidelines Document on the Identification and Introduction of Appropriate Measures for the Reduction of New Introductions and for Eradication/Control of Non-Indigenous Species (NIS) in Priority Sites in Line with Post 2020 SAPBIO" are presented as information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.7,

36. Status of blue crabs in the Mediterranean and Best practices and management measures for mitigating the spread of blue crabs and addressing their impact on biodiversity and local economy are presented as information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.8,

37. SPA/RAC coordinated the Intersessional Working Group (IWG) on Non-Indigenous Species (CSO 5) (IWG-NIS) within the implementation of The Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention of, Preparedness, and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031) in collaboration with REMPEC.

38. SPA/RAC contributed to the elaboration of the Mid-Term Review of the Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022–2027) and is presented as information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.9 during the 17<sup>th</sup> SPA/DB Focal Points meeting.

## **II. MTS Programme 3 “Towards a Climate Resilient Mediterranean”**

**Outcome 3.1. Legal, policy and institutional framework strengthened at the regional and national level to efficiently address climate change related challenges (flooding, erosion, land degradation, pollution, disasters etc.)**

### **Main activity 3.1.1. Mainstream adaptation to climate change into local ICZM plans**

39. Technical support actions for developing national and local climate adaptation strategies integrated with ICZM are planned within the Fisheries and Ecosystem-Based Management for the Blue Economy of the Mediterranean (FishEBM Med project)<sup>2</sup> for July 2025–December 2026. These initiatives aim to enhance coastal resilience and align adaptation planning with integrated coastal zone strategies in Mediterranean countries participating in FishEBM.

**Outcome 3.2. Nature-based, technical solutions promoting prevention or reduction of the impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems and increase resilience to climatic variability and change**

### **Main activity 3.2.1. Mainstream nature-based solutions into regional policies implementation, including for adaptation and mitigation to climate change, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development/green economy**

40. SPA/RAC participated in drafting the “MEaDows4Coast” project proposal, promoting seagrass-based coastal resilience. It contributed to the FishEBM Med<sup>3</sup> project by planning an assessment of national/local climate change adaptation strategies in coastal areas, bringing together previous and ongoing work to address particular issues affecting the commercial fisheries sector in the Mediterranean area (Activity 3.2.6 of FishEBM project) and assessment on nature-based technical solutions promoting prevention or reduction of

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<sup>2</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.6

<sup>3</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.6



the impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems and increasing their resilience. Two regional workshops are scheduled back-to-back for July 2025 to present findings and assessments. Coordination with PAP/RAC and Plan Bleu is ongoing to align with the MedProgramme and Climagine method.

### **III. MTS Programme 5 “Governance”**

#### **Outcome 5.1. Effective Implementation and Enforcement by the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols, MAP Policies, including Ecosystem Approach related COP decisions, the MSSD and Programmes of Measures achieved at regional and national levels**

##### **Main activity 5.1.2. Advance the implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean and IMAP in coherence with regional and global developments**

41. SPA/RAC actively contributed to the advancement of EcAp and IMAP processes through participation in their Task Forces, which were established and held regular meetings. A concept note was prepared to support discussions on the EcAp revision<sup>4</sup>. Within the IMAP Task Force, SPA/RAC co-led the organization of thematic working groups<sup>5</sup> (e.g. benthic and pelagic habitats, marine food webs) and contributed to their monthly meetings. A proposal for updating IMAP elements<sup>6</sup> was submitted to the 11th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Videoconference, 2 October 2024)<sup>7</sup> and discussed during the CORMON Biodiversity and Fisheries meeting (Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025)<sup>8</sup>.

42. To ensure synergy and coherence with EU-MSFD, SPA/RAC is participating in TG Seabed meetings. Moreover, SPA/RAC contributed to the preparation of the Summary for Policy Makers of the 2023 MED QSR and the roadmap for the next Mediterranean quality status report (MedQSR), both of which were submitted and adopted during the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group (Videoconference, 2 October 2024).

##### **Main activity 5.1.5. Effective implementation and enforcement of Post-2020 SAPBIO**

43. SPA/RAC launched the mid-term assessment of the Post-2020 SAPBIO, focusing on startup activities. An international consultants’ team has been hired to assist the center to achieve the evaluations process, the elaboration of the simplified monitoring tables for national and regional actions and the framework for the future assessment of the collective implementation planned for expected results for 2027 and 2030. Coordination meetings and documents review were conducted in close consultation with the Post-2020 Advisory Committee. The draft version of these reports were presented and reviewed during the Eleventh meeting of the Post-2020 SAPBIO National Correspondents (Athens, Greece 9-10 April 2025)

44. The Main findings of the mid-term assessment focusing on the Post-2020 SAPBIO start-up activities and the Draft Monitoring Framework for the assessment of the collective implementation of the Post-2020 SPABIO are presented respectively as the working documents UNEP/MED WG.608/17 and UNEP/MED WG.608/19.

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<sup>4</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.24

<sup>5</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.26

<sup>6</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.25

<sup>7</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.23

<sup>8</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.27

**Outcome 5.2. Systemic strengthening and effective functioning and delivery of MAP decision-making and advisory bodies ensured, and efficiency enhanced with new digital Approaches**

**Main activity 5.2.3. Deliver successfully the main institutional meetings of MAP (Bureau, Consultation FP Meeting, MAP Focal Point, EcAp Coordination Group and Thematic/Components Focal Points)**

45. SPA/RAC organized the 16th SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Malta, 2023) and proceeded with the preparation of 17th SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting (Istanbul, 2025).

**Outcome 5.3. Policy coherence and complementarity ensured among relevant work at global, regional and national levels and among MAP-Barcelona Convention system's policy and regulatory instruments**

**Main activity 5.3.2. Maximize synergies with Post 2020 Global agenda for the implementation of SAPBIO**

46. SPA/RAC has actively participated in various international events to advance the implementation of Post 2020 SAP BIO and the 30x30 CBD Target. In February 2023, it contributed to the 5th edition of the International Congress of Marine Protected Areas (IMPAC5) in Vancouver, showcasing its efforts in the Mediterranean. SPA/RAC co-organized side events with MedPAN at the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference and Monaco Bleu Initiative, highlighting its commitment to MPAs and sustainable financing. It also participated in the 9th Our Ocean Conference in Athens, contributing to workshops on the 30x30 target and monk seal conservation. SPA/RAC played a key role in the 4th Meeting of the Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) Global Dialogue (11-14 June 2024, Seoul, Republic of Korea) and supported the proposal for a CBD support center for Southern Europe. Additionally, SPA/RAC strengthened collaborations through new MoUs with IUCN Med, and the ACCOBAMS secretariat. The Center has joined the advisory board of the Mediterranean Program of the Oceanographic Institute of Monaco.

**Outcome 5.4. Enhanced partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement, including with the private sector and science policy interface**

**Main activity 5.4.1. Promote dialogue and enhanced engagement of global and regional organizations, including Conventions' Secretariats and Partners**

47. SPA/RAC organized and participated in a wide range of events and meetings. These included its contribution as a co-organizer of the GFCM FishForum 2024, held in Antalya, Türkiye, where it also conducted workshops. SPA/RAC represented UNEP/MAP at the 4th Meeting of the SOI Global Dialogue in 2024. In early 2025, SPA/RAC took part in the regional SOI capacity-building workshop for West and North Africa, held in Senegal, to share Mediterranean experiences on area-based conservation, and supported preparations for IMPAC6.

**Main activity 5.4.4. Promote the title of Partner to Regional Action Plan for the conservation of threatened species and marine key habitats "Regional Action Plans Partners"**

48. SPA/RAC began implementing the mechanism to grant the title of "Regional Action Plan Partner" as outlined in the relevant regional action plan and according to the adopted criteria and procedures for awarding the title (Decision IG26/5). Communication efforts were launched in 2024—2025 to promote these criteria at national level, particularly through letters sent to SPA/BD Focal Points and direct outreach to potential partners. The full list of partners was finalized in March 2025 and is presented at the 17th SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting as the working document (UNEP/MED WG.608/10)

**Outcome 5.5. Coordinated approaches implemented to strengthen public institution capacities for the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols**

**Main activity 5.5.2. Development of project proposals to support Parties' institutions on initial implementation of Post-2020 SAPBIO**

49. SPA/RAC coordinated several initiatives to mobilize resources for implementing the Post-2020 SAPBIO and MCPA-OECM Strategy. Following a donor conference in Paris in 2023, a comprehensive Resource Mobilization Strategy and project concepts were developed and presented to donors. Throughout 2024, these efforts continued with the submission of proposals and engagement with various funding programmes, including Interreg and Horizon Europe. Notable proposals include MEaDows4Coast and Fish4serve, addressing issues such as habitat restoration and bycatch. The strategy and concepts are set to be updated in 2025 based on the SAPBIO Mid-Term Assessment, ensuring alignment with evolving priorities and reinforcing SPA/RAC's support to Contracting Parties.

**IV. MTS Programme 6 “Together for a Shared Vision of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast”**

**Outcome 6.2. Science-based IMAP, foresight and other assessments and assessment tools for strengthened science-policy interface and decision making (in-house expertise, consultancy, publication, toolbox, national technical support, pilots(s))**

**Main activity 6.2.1. Strengthen the implementation of national IMAP-based monitoring programmes for all clusters and deliver quality assured data**

50. SPA/RAC has worked closely with national institutions to support the implementation of national IMAP monitoring programmes in six countries (Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia) through the EU-funded IMAP-MPA and EcAp-MED III projects, which ended in 2023 and 2024 respectively. These efforts enabled integrated monitoring in pilot sites, harmonized methods, capacity building, and contributions to the 2023 MED QSR elaboration. Two new EU-funded initiatives — SEMPA and EcAp-Med Plus — were launched in 2023 and 2024, respectively, to provide continued support until 2027 in advancing Good Environmental Status.

51. Apart from these projects, SPA/RAC has assisted the following contracting Parties to implement their national IMAP for Biodiversity within the framework of its POW during the reporting period. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, seabird monitoring has been implemented, while in Türkiye and Montenegro, monitoring of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows has been conducted. Data standards (Ds) and data dictionaries (DD) have been completed in the IMAP Info System by both countries<sup>9</sup>.

**Main activity 6.2.2. Upgrade the assessment component of IMAP including possible integrated assessment for all IMAP clusters. Focus on assessment criteria and thresholds (CI 1, 2, 6, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, CCI 25)**

52. Within its Programme of Work for 2024–2025, SPA/RAC has developed a proposal for monitoring and assessment elements related to the two IMAP Common Indicators for benthic habitats (CI1 and CI2), and their application to three habitat types: *Posidonia oceanica*, coralligenous assemblages, and maërl beds. The proposal<sup>10</sup> was developed with the support of the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on benthic habitats and was submitted to the last CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025) for review and consideration<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> For more detail see document UNEP/MED WG.608/16

<sup>10</sup> For more detail see document UNEP/MED WG.608/16. Appendix D

<sup>11</sup> For more detail see information documents UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.22 and Inf.27

### **Main activity 6.2.3. Further develop IMAP Common Indicators**

53. With the support of the ABIOMMED EU-funded project and MASE funds, the first proposal for the further development of Ecological Objective 6 (EO6) on sea-floor integrity was drafted and presented to the Biodiversity Online Working Group (OWG) on benthic habitats<sup>12</sup>. As a first step towards advancing Ecological Objective 4 (EO4)<sup>13</sup> on marine food webs, SPA/RAC launched a desk review (2022–2023)<sup>14</sup> to inventory data sources, best practices, and methodologies for monitoring and assessing marine food webs in the Mediterranean. Based on this work, a proposal for common indicators for EO4 was developed by the OWG on Marine Food Webs. In parallel, indicators based on phytoplankton and zooplankton, relevant to IMAP biodiversity indicators, were prepared with the OWG on pelagic habitats<sup>15</sup>. Within the ABIOMMED project, SPA/RAC has undertaken a review of the elements associated with the assessment of Good Environmental Status (GES), including climate change, in the Mediterranean region<sup>16</sup>. All progress related to EO4 (marine food webs), EO6 (sea-floor integrity), and indicators for pelagic habitats were reviewed by the last CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025).

### **Main activity 6.2.4. Review and update of the common indicators factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1) and fisheries (EO3)**

54. A proposed approach for updating the Common Indicator Factsheets related to Biodiversity (EO1), Non-Indigenous Species (EO2), and Fisheries (EO3), as well as updating the Data Dictionaries and Data Standards for CI 1 and 2 (Benthic Habitats), CI 3, 4, and 5 (Marine Mammals, Marine Turtles, and Seabirds), and CI 24 (Marine Litter), was developed respectively by SPA/RAC, GFCM, and INFO/RAC, and presented at the last Biodiversity and fisheries CORMON Meeting (Athens, Greece, 7-8 April 2025).

### **Outcome 6.3. IMAP implementation and Environment and Development Observation provide updated and quality assured data in support of decision-making by Contracting Parties and assessment of GES**

#### **Main activity 6.3.11. Expand and improve the monitoring and forecasting capacities in the marine environment through integrating networks of observing and forecasting systems (Oceanographic observatories) across the Mediterranean Sea**

55. The EU-funded ILIAD project has initiated several activities aimed at capacity building and policy support. A joint workshop with FAO at FishForum 2024 was organised. A dedicated task force drafted a comprehensive **ILIAD Guidebook/Toolkit**, offering step-by-step instructions for leveraging digital-twin outputs in policymaking and marine management. Additionally, ILIAD contributed to various events, including the 6th GEO Dialogue and the EU Week of Cities and Regions. A policy workshop on fisheries was organized with AUA, GFCM, and DG Mare. A targeted **policy workshop on sustainable fisheries**—organized in partnership with the Agricultural University of Athens (AUA), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and DG MARE—brought together managers, scientists and industry representatives to co-design indicators based on ILIAD outputs. Meanwhile, the project advanced a **pilot monitoring plan and early-warning system** for the Port of Valencia, integrating real-time oceanographic sensors with predictive modeling to support port authorities in pollution and safety management. (more details about the project are given in the information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.11).

#### **6.3.12. Maintain Biodiversity databases as appropriate, regularly update databases content and elaborate an operational strategy for marine biodiversity data management, in line with the UNEP/MAP Data Management Policy**

<sup>12</sup> For more detail see document UNEP/MED WG.608/16. Appendix B

<sup>13</sup> For more detail see document UNEP/MED WG.608/16. Appendix A

<sup>14</sup> For more detail see information documents UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.19

<sup>15</sup> For more detail see document UNEP/MED WG.608/16. Appendix C

<sup>16</sup> For more detail see information documents UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.20

56. SPAMI evaluation system was updated and used by the Technical Advisory Commissions, supported by a series of online tutorials and country-level help desks to ensure consistent application.

57. Several coordination meetings have been held with MedPAN to discuss and agree on the approach, tasks, and timeline for updating the MAPAMED database. Data collection has been proceeded with relevant stakeholders and from various official databases to gather information related to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), facilitating the update of the database, which was last updated in December 2019. The data have been submitted to the SPA/BD Focal Points for review and validation.

**V. MTS Programme 7 “Towards a Stronger Advocacy, Awareness, Education and Communication of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast”**

**Outcome 7.1. Stakeholders and policymakers properly informed about the state of the Mediterranean Sea and coast and aware of the environmental priority issues**

**Main activity 7.1.7. Celebrate UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention System Anniversaries**

58. For its 40th anniversary, SPA/RAC developed a visual identity specific to the celebration including a logo and a new slogan. The celebration includes the organisation of a ceremony during the 17<sup>th</sup> SPA/BD Focal point meeting and the publication of stories about the history and main achievements of SPA/RAC.

**Outcome 7.2. Citizen and general public awareness and outreach raised through citizen science and digital campaigns**

**Main activity 7.2.1. Enhance public awareness and outreach on UN and MAP Days observance and their topics**

59. Following a call for proposals, five NGOs from Albania, Italy, Lebanon, Slovenia, and Tunisia implemented awareness-raising mini projects in SPAMIs, contributing to the celebration of SPAMI Day 2023, held both virtually and in SPAMIs. SPAMI Day 2024 took place in Tunis, with events focusing on management effectiveness, civil society roles, and financing mechanisms. Looking ahead, the SPAMI Day 2025 will echo the 40th anniversary of SPA/RAC with a hybrid event to be held in June in Lebanon.

**Main activity 7.2.2. Enhance public awareness and outreach on key MAP topics for general and specific targets (MAP Partners, Civil Society, Private sector, Youth etc.)**

60. SPA/RAC’s communication efforts included promoting key regional events, such as the Mediterranean Symposium on marine birds and the Smart Marine Conservation Forum, through dedicated websites, media coverage, and online sessions. SPA/RAC maintained active engagement with the public through its website and social media platforms. Under the IMAP-MPA, Med Monk Seal, FishEBM Med, GEF-CP 3.1 and SEMPA projects, various awareness materials were developed - including videos, posters, and social media content - addressing topics such as empowering local CSOs for sustainable development, project achievements, MPA management effectiveness, the Mediterranean monk seal and NIS. Additional materials, such as agendas with key messages and infographics were also produced. Furthermore, a scientific and technological camp for children was held in Kerkennah in 2023 to raise awareness about marine conservation.

**Outcome 7.3. Towards a digital transformation: use of digital technologies to improve networking and MAP visibility****Main activity 7.3.1. Towards a digital transformation**

61. A communication strategy<sup>17</sup> and plan have been developed to improve SPA/RAC communication including its digital presence. Improvements on the SPAMI Collaborative platform, including the setting up of the forum functionality, that will be used as a tool to facilitate information exchange among SPAMI managers, have been developed thanks to MASE support.

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<sup>17</sup> For more detail see information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.13

## **ANNEX I**

### **3rd Mediterranean Symposium on Ecology and Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species « Djerba Declaration »**



Supported by the French Voluntary Contribution, the third edition Mediterranean Symposium on Ecology and Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species has been organized by SPA/RAC in partnership with AAO/BirdLife in Tunisia, ISPRA, IUCN-Med and Tour du Valat from 13 to 15 February 2024 in Djerba, Tunisia, more than sixty participants took part to this gathering.

The participants agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations.

The following improvements are acknowledged since the Second Symposium hold in 2015 in Hammamet, Tunisia:

- All Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have elaborated the legal protection of all coastal and marine birds species listed in Annex II (List of endangered and threatened species) of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/DB Protocol), even though the related application varies and few species are benefiting from National Action Plans devoted to their conservation.
- A number of Contracting Parties are protecting part of the breeding and/or feeding habitats of these species through the designation of protected areas that can be included within the network of Specially Protected Areas of the Mediterranean or are on the way to do so, even if effective implementation of dedicated management plans are often missing for these protected areas.
- Increasingly, conservation efforts are extended from coastal areas (colonies, wetlands) to the offshore environment, where some of the most threatened species also face severe threats such as bycatch, pollution, overfishing, effects of climate change, and the expected development of wind farms.
- A Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR) has been delivered by the MAP , it includes 11 indicator species belonging to 6 functional ecological groups of marine birds, together with the identification and assessment of the main pressures impacting the population dynamics of these species.
- The deep involvement of national and international NGOs and research institutions has led to major improvements in the knowledge on distribution, abundance and trends of breeding populations as well as non-breeding distribution and movements at sea as well as on their threats, even if much more is needed.
- The single species Action Plan for Audouin's Gull has been progressing. Many of the proposed conservation actions were implemented in several countries.
- The increasing participation of the society through actions of "Citizen Science" are much appreciated, further improvements should be developed.

This being deeply acknowledged, the participants would like to put forward the following recommendations.

#### **Recommendation #1 – SPECIES ACTION PLANS**

1. In order to strengthen the conservation of coastal and marine seabird species, SPA/RAC is requested to:



62. promote the elaboration of non-binding Action Plans (APs) at the Mediterranean scale for coastal and marine bird species listed under Annex II,
  63. invite the Contracting Parties to elaborate and implement National Action Plans (NAPs) in line with the regional guidelines and the IMAP (Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast). Training sessions on the implementation of NAPs could be proposed by SPA/RAC and its partners to concerned people in areas without experience in the elaboration of such documents.
2. Priority should be given to the elaboration of a rescue AP for the Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, an endangered species in the Mediterranean, for which re-introduction procedures have been effectively developed that could be applied in most parts of the Mediterranean basin.
  3. Attention should be urgently given to the recently described new taxon *levantinus* of the Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* breeding along the Egyptian and Libyan coastline. Its population seemingly is very small and its breeding sites are under strong pressure from human activities. SPA/RAC is called to support surveys to gather more information on its distribution along the eastern Mediterranean coast and its genetic relationship with the Little Terns breeding elsewhere in the area. Depending on these relationships, *levantinus* may be a clear candidate to be added to the Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol.
  4. Species classified as threatened at global level by IUCN should also receive priority, and information should be gathered to allow a proper re-assessment of their status.
  5. It must be stressed that monitoring of long time series is of great informative value for the evaluation of population trends, as can be repeatable proxies (e.g. rafts of birds congregating at sea) when information on the number of breeding pairs is not available or realistically achievable. Population studies may also be valuable to assess trends for species that are difficult to count in their colonies, such as shearwaters and storm-petrels. Also, relatively widespread species are possibly more informative on pressures like disturbance, than ultra-rare species. This might suggest in future the opportunity to add species such as the Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* to the Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol.

## **Recommendation #2 – CONSERVATION OF SMALL ISLANDS AND LIMITATION OF INTRODUCED PREDATORS**

Small, often uninhabited, islands and islets are of the greatest importance as breeding places for many of the most endangered species listed in the Annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol. Many such islands remain unprotected and birds breeding there often are under pressure from disturbance by human activities (leisure, poaching) and predation by introduced species (mostly rats and cats).

Contracting Parties should be invited to improve the legal protection status and management of these important breeding sites. When introduced predators are present, the implementation of their eradication should be of the highest priority. In order to keep islands free from introduced predators (naturally predator free islands and islets, as well as those where introduced predators had been removed and that have an elevated risk of re-incursion), Contracting Parties should be invited to prepare and implement bio-security protocols for these important breeding sites.

## **Recommendation #3 – BY-CATCH ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION**

Seabirds are at risk of being caught by or entangled in various fishing gears. This cause of accidental mortality is more often diffuse although it can be locally/ temporally high, and may be easily overlooked. Its impact on population demography is acknowledged to be high to very high for some species, particularly shearwaters.

Thanks to the joint effort of fisheries and conservation organisations, research institutions, governmental bodies and local authorities, fishermen and local communities, the situations when significant by-catch of seabirds occurs are increasingly understood, and ways to mitigate this problem are being developed. However, several potential knowledge gaps remain, and action to implement mitigation measures whenever necessary is urgently needed;

Contracting Parties are requested to continue:

- Assessing incidental catches of coastal and marine birds,
- Identifying and testing mitigation techniques,
- Raising awareness on the topic and supporting policy advocacy.

A collaborative approach among all involved parties is essential.

For some fisheries, such as small-scale demersal longlines, a fraction of the captures involves the recovery of live birds: it is needed to invest in capacity building for fishermen to properly handle and release these birds in the best possible condition. (see good practice guide for the handling of seabirds caught incidentally in mediterranean pelagic longline fisheries)

#### **Recommendation #4 – PLASTIC POLLUTION**

The Mediterranean Sea unfortunately is identified as one of the most plastic polluted water on our planet. Plastic debris occurs under various forms which causes the death of many seabirds directly (entanglement) or impact their survival and/or productive capacity (e.g. internal wounds and repro-toxicity due to ingested micro-plastics).

Contracting Parties are strongly invited to maintain and develop their on-going efforts to reduce and prevent the introduction of plastic debris in the sea, whatever their origin (industrial waste, rubbish dumps, individual neglect, disused fishing gears, etc.).

#### **Recommendation #5 – SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION, CITIZEN SCIENCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES INVOLVEMENT**

Recent improvements in the knowledge and understanding of the seabirds movements at sea, particularly shearwaters, have strongly benefited from cooperation with NGOs and research institutions from different countries. Such cooperation, including North-South collaboration, should be promoted whenever possible. Improved cooperation should also help the coordination of research projects, and direct them towards the most meaningful conservation outcomes.

Recent improvements in understanding population status have also benefited from increased involvement of amateur naturalists and the concerned public through "Citizen Science" programs. These programs, which greatly contribute to the acceptance of conservation measures, should be encouraged

Being aware of the important role of local authorities throughout the Mediterranean in management of coastal and marine ecosystems and small islands, SPA/RAC is invited to extend technical guidance to local authorities about nature conservation, planning procedures and management plans of threatened ecosystems. Local authorities however often lack scientific and technical knowledge and advice on how to safeguard coastal and seabird habitats. Yet, they are eager to receive some vital information, and this, not only in English, but in their languages.

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The organization of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Mediterranean Symposium on Ecology and Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species has benefited from the technical assistance of IUCN Med, ISPRA (Italy) and Tour-du-Valat Biological Station (France), and financial support from the French Voluntary Contribution and the Global Environment Facility.