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Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025

**Agenda item 6: Conservation of sites of particular ecological interest**

**6.1. Report by the Chair of the *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) on the group's works during the biennial period 2024-2025**

**Report by the Chair of the *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) on the group's works during the biennial period 2024-2025**

**Note:**

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### **Note by the Secretariat**

1. In accordance with the Terms of reference of the *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) available in Annex I of the present report, the Chair and/or Vice-Chair of AGEM should attend the meeting of the Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) to report about the AGEM work during the covered period.
2. The present report by the Chair and Vice-Chair of AGEM was prepared in this context, to inform the Seventeenth Meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points (Istanbul, Türkiye, 20-22 May 2025) about the AGEM activities and outputs, and to agree on the proposed forthcoming steps.
3. The activities were carried out as part of the AGEM Programme of Work for 2025, the SPA/RAC Programme of Work for 2024-2025 and the mandate emanating from relevant COP Decisions, including the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean (the Post2020 Regional Strategy) adopted by the Barcelona Convention in December 2021 (Decision IG.25/12), available in the Reference documents list.
4. This report includes a narrative part on the Fourth meeting of AGEM (Teleconference, 21 March 2025) (c.f. UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.17) and the Fifth meeting of AGEM (c.f. Teleconference, 15 April 2025) (UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.18).
5. The highest priority of AGEM in 2025 is to support the SPA/RAC Secretariat in its commitments for 2025 in line with the provisions of the Post2020 Regional Strategy, AGEM has also defined its key priorities for the biennium 2026-2027. AGEM Programme of Work for 2025 and key priorities for the 2026-2027 biennium are available in Annex II of the present report.
6. One of AGEM's main deliverables, the OECM Guidance report, prepared by SPA/RAC with the support of a consultant and in close consultation with AGEM, is presented as working document, referenced UNEP/MED WG.608/13.

**Report by the Chair of the *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) on the group's works during the biennial period 2024-2025**

## **I. Introduction**

1. During their COP 21 (Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019), the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention decided to set up a multidisciplinary *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) to support the Secretariat and the Contracting Parties to progress with the 2020 and post-2020 marine protected areas (MPAs) agenda in the Mediterranean and to work on related issues such as preparing guidelines, setting up definitions and measurable indicators, and tailoring global concepts and approaches to the Mediterranean context (Decision IG.24/6).
2. The AGEM group of experts was initially established on a pilot basis in 2018-2019, where it convened two annual in-person meetings in 2018 and 2019 in Tunis, Tunisia. After its formal establishment by COP 21, its composition was renewed in 2020 and it has been functioning for the period 2020-2021, contributing significantly to the development of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean (MCPA and OECM Strategy). Its work was appreciated by the SPA/BD Focal Points, who recommended during their fifteenth meeting in June 2021 that its mandate be extended beyond two years, given the ambitious expectations of Parties and the Secretariat from this group. The AGEM mandate was therefore extended until December 2023. During this period, three AGEM meetings were held by teleconference: First AGEM meeting, teleconference, 8 December 2020; Second AGEM meeting, teleconference, 3-4 May 2021; and Third AGEM meeting, teleconference, 1 March 2023.
3. The sixteenth meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points (Malta, 22-24 May 2023) requested from the Secretariat to review the AGEM terms of reference (ToRs) so that they match the provisions and timetable of the Post2020 Regional Strategy and its future Evaluation and Monitoring Framework, before the end of 2024 and to submit them electronically for review and approval.
4. The AGEM's Terms of Reference were hence reviewed and submitted to the SPA/BD Focal Points for feedback and approval in late 2024. In January 2025, the revised Terms of Reference were formally approved by the SPA/BD Focal Points and are presented in Annex I to this report.
5. AGEM is composed of:
  - a) 16 independent experts in eight areas of expertise: MPA management, MPA planning, Marine biology/ecology, Law and regulation, Socio-economics, Fisheries, Nature-based tourism, and Financing; and
  - b) representatives of the scientific bodies of the following 5 partner organizations: the Scientific Committee of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS); the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM); the Marine working group of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA-Marine) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); the Scientific Committee of the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN); and the marine conservation team of the Mediterranean Programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF Mediterranean).
6. In view of the setting-up of AGEM, the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) has compiled a list of 52 qualified experts and their CVs, based on (i) candidates proposed by the SPA/BD Focal Points, (ii) outgoing members (the 2020-2023 period) who wished to renew their application, and (iii) candidates proposed by SPA/RAC; and requested its Focal Points to select the 16 most suitable experts to be AGEM members.

7. The Group's composition was thus renewed following a vote by the SPA/BD Focal Points on 52 candidate members as independent experts. The representatives of the partner organizations' scientific bodies were designated by the relevant organizations.

8. The AGEM composition is presented in the following table:

*Table 1: composition of AGEM for the 2024-2025 and 2026-2027 biennia*

<b>Discipline/Organisation</b>	<b>Member</b>
<b>MPA management</b>	1) Mr. Robert TURK
	2) Ms. Sue WELLS
<b>MPA planning</b>	3) Ms. Souha EL ASMI
	4) Mr. Chedly RAIS
<b>Marine Biology/Ecology</b>	5) Mr. Abdulmaula HAMZA
	6) Mr. Leonardo TUNESI
<b>Law and regulation</b>	7) Ms. Saba GUELLOUZ
	8) Ms. Ana STRBENAC
<b>Socio-economics</b>	9) Mr. Paolo GUIDETTI
	10) Mr. Almokhtar SAID
<b>Fisheries</b>	11) Ms. Leila BASTI
	12) Mr. Marios PAPAGEORGIOU
<b>Nature-based tourism</b>	13) Ms. Martina HERVAT
	14) Ms. Milana TEMPESTA
<b>MPA financing</b>	15) Mr. Giuseppe DI CARLO
	16) Ms. Marie ROMANI
<b>ACCOBAMS/SC</b>	17) Ms. Léa DAVID
<b>GFCM/SAC</b>	18) Mr. Mohamed Malouli IDRISSE
<b>MedPAN/SC</b>	19) Mr. Joaquim CLAUDET
	20) Ms. Susan GALLON
<b>IUCN/WCPA-marine</b>	21) Ms. Yaprak ARDA
	22) Ms. Carla DANELUTTI
<b>WWF Mediterranean</b>	23) Mr. Mauro RANDONE
	24) Ms. Saba BASKIR

9. The contribution of the AGEM members is on a voluntary basis and the group members contributed in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their countries or organizations.

## **II. Report on the AGEM activities during the covered period**

### **II.1. Fourth meeting of AGEM (teleconference, 21 March 2025)**

10. The first meeting of AGEM for the biennial period 2024-2025, i.e., the fourth meeting of AGEM, was organized by teleconference on 21 March 2025, in presence of 15 independent experts and the representatives of the 5 partner organizations (23 members in total). The report of the Fourth AGEM meeting is presented in the information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.17.

11. The meeting was aimed at: (i) introducing the AGEM members; (ii) electing a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group; and (iii) discussing and agreeing on the programme of work of AGEM for 2025 and the key priorities for the next biennium 2026-2027.

12. During this first meeting and based on the principles of geographical and gender representation, the AGEM elected the following Chair and Vice-Chair:

- Chair: Mr. Robert TURK (Slovenia), and
- Vice-Chair: Ms. Souha EL ASMI (Tunisia).

13. The SPA/RAC Secretariat presented the AGEM draft Programme of Work for 2025 and key priorities to be tackled and covered during the next biennium 2026-2027.

14. The meeting, after discussions, agreed on the Programme of Work of the AGEM for 2025 as well as on key priorities for 2026-2027 (Annex II to this report), that includes the main following key outputs and:

**1. Mediterranean Guidance on OECMs (Deliverable D1):** Support the development of a regional guidance document to apply OECM criteria and to establish processes for identifying OECMs in the Mediterranean, accompanied by a regional webinar to disseminate the guidance, to be submitted to the seventeenth SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting on 20-22 May 2025.

**2. Impact of MCPAs with Enhanced Protection Levels (Deliverable D2):** Document and communicate the ecological and socio-economic impacts of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels.

**3. Potential international/transboundary MPAs in open waters (Deliverable D3):** Support countries in identifying potential international/transboundary Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in open waters.

15. The AGEM topics for 2025 were selected to prioritize those related to deliverables mandated by COP 23 decisions through the SPA/RAC PoW for 2024-2025.

16. For each expected deliverable, a timeline and a responsible were defined. As for deliverables D1 and D3, SPA/RAC will develop the documents, through external support, and AGEM will closely monitor and support the process of their elaboration and finalization. Regarding deliverable D2, it is foreseen that a specific working group on enhanced protection levels (WG-EP) composed of volunteer members of AGEM will be set up to lead the elaboration of the report.

17. Based on the draft 2026-2027 SPA/RAC Programme of Work, the AGEM Terms of Reference, and in line with the Post2020 Regional Strategy, the following key topics have been identified as priority areas for AGEM to focus on during the 2026-2027 biennium, ensuring alignment with regional conservation objectives and ongoing initiatives:

- 1. The MCPA and OECM Strategy mid-term evaluation:** based on Decision IG.26/5 of the Barcelona Convention COP 23 (Portoroz, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023), the Post2020 Regional Strategy should be evaluated in 2026 (mid-term evaluation).
- 2. Report on the Status of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean:** Support the elaboration of the four-yearly status report of the Mediterranean network of MPAs, jointly led by SPA/RAC and MedPAN, with the view of evaluating the progress made by the Mediterranean countries towards achieving the 30x30 Target
- 3. OECMs identification, recognition and reporting:** to continue the efforts regarding OECM based on the OECM Guidance document submitted to the seventeenth meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points.
- 4. MCPA coverage and representativity:** to narrow the gap and enhance the MCPA coverage in the Mediterranean and support through technical and scientific guidance the assessment of the representativity of the Mediterranean MPA network

18. These deliverables, or at least most of them, are expected to be prepared by SPA/RAC with the support of external expertise, thanks to the MTF funds and if possible other sources of funding. AGEM will thus closely monitor their planning, development, and finalization.

## **II.2. Fifth meeting of AGEM (teleconference, 15 April 2025)**

19. The second AGEM meeting for the biennium 2024-2025, i.e. the Fifth AGEM meeting, was convened on 15 April 2025 by teleconference, in the presence of 12 independent experts and the representatives of the 3 partner organizations (15 members in total). The report of the Fifth AGEM meeting is presented in the information document UNEP/MED WG.608/Inf.18.

20. The objective of the meeting was to discuss and agree on the OECM Guidance document, entitled “Guidance on OECM identification and criteria application in the Mediterranean”.

21. The OECM Guidance was prepared by SPA/RAC with the support of a consultant. A first draft report was shared with the AGEM members prior to the meeting to gather comments, additional useful information and orientations on the guidance. Various feedback from the AGEM members was collected and integrated into an advanced draft. This draft was then presented to the AGEM members during their 5th meeting.

22. The document was appreciated by the members, and a few other comments were highlighted such as the focus on marine and coastal OECMs, the use of the term “local communities” instead of “indigenous people” as it suits better the Mediterranean context, to further reference Mediterranean experience in identifying OECMs and other concrete experience from countries that successfully reported OECMs.

23. AGEM indicated that SPA/RAC should play a pivotal role in advancing the OECM issue in the Mediterranean. Also, it was highlighted that SPA/RAC, in close collaboration with its key partner organisations in the region, have to launch concrete actions, prioritizing the support of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Contracting Parties to advance on achieving the CBD Target 3.

24. The OECM Guidance, as reviewed by the AGEM, was shared with the SPA/BD Focal Points for comments and review, before its formal submission as a working document to their 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of 20-22 May 2025 (UNEP/MED WG.608/13).

## **III. Expected activities until the end of 2025**

25. The group has mainly to support the implementation of the OECM Guidance, through:

- Pilot testing the guidance with a volunteer country,
- Organize a webinar to introduce the OECM Guidance to the Mediterranean community.

26. The Sixth meeting of AGEM is expected to be held in November 2025. The exact dates will be set according to the members’ availability and in conjuncture with the global and regional meetings agenda. If conditions allow, a face-to-face meeting could be envisaged, and if not, a remote meeting via videoconferencing facilities will be carried on. The objective of the Sixth meeting is to discuss the following documents in the view of their finalization:

- Impact of MCPAs with Enhanced Protection Levels; and
- Identification of potential international/transboundary MPAs in open waters.

#### **IV. Forthcoming steps**

27. In order to allow the AGEM group of experts to provide further support and advice for the Secretariat and Contracting Parties in the forthcoming period, it is proposed to:

- Activate the implementation of the AGEM programme of work for 2025, under the facilitation of the Secretariat and with a close contribution from the Contracting Parties and relevant partner organizations.
- Convene the Sixth AGEM meeting during the second half of 2025.
- Elaborate and implement the AGEM Programme of Work for 2026-2027, based on the identified key priorities and in line with the SPA/RAC PoW for 2026-2027, starting from early 2026 until end of December 2027.

**Annex I: *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM)**  
**Terms of reference (January 2025)**

# ***Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM)**

## ***Terms of reference***

### **I. The *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM): Rationale and objectives**

1. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are recognized as an efficient tool for the conservation of the marine environment as well as for the management of living resources. Their role in delivering ecosystem services and ensuring sustainability of a wide range of human activities (tourism, fisheries, recreation, education, etc.) is also increasingly recognized. The benefits generated are visible especially when MPAs are managed effectively and have sufficient resources to address local management issues.

2. In the Mediterranean, MPAs exhibit a remarkable diversity in both nature and typology, often closely tied to the legislative frameworks and national and international regulations. Most MPAs were established as standalone sites rather than as part of a cohesive network, which limits their ability to adequately protect the different components of the Mediterranean marine biodiversity. This has resulted in significant gaps in the protection of various critical ecosystems and species.

3. According to the most recent inventory of Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas conducted in 2020 by SPA/RAC and MedPAN, 8.3% of the Mediterranean Sea (209,303 km<sup>2</sup>) is designated as MPAs. This includes national MPAs, European marine Natura 2000 sites, and the Pelagos Sanctuary (established through an international agreement). Among the 1,087 designated MPAs, 39 are listed on the List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI List), representing 5.5% of the Mediterranean Sea (138,464 km<sup>2</sup>). Notably, these MPAs are unevenly distributed across regions, with 97.3% located in European Union (EU) waters.

4. Additionally, to date, no marine Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) have been reported for the Mediterranean. For most of these sites, there is limited information on the implementation of management measures. Even when such measures are in place, their effectiveness in achieving conservation targets remains uncertain.

5. It is clear that while the Mediterranean network of MPAs plays a significant role in safeguarding biodiversity hotspots and in protecting numerous natural sites from the adverse effects of human activities, it requires stronger development and implementation efforts. Additionally, most Mediterranean States are committed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to establish comprehensive, well-managed, effective, and equitably governed systems of ecologically representative and well-connected MPAs and OECMs. This commitment aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) Target 3, which aims to conserve and manage at least 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030 through well-connected and equitably governed systems of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

6. Achieving this target necessitates increasing the total surface area covered by MPAs by extending the boundaries of existing ones, creating new coastal and off-shore MPAs, and establishing additional MPAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). It also involves integrating other areas of usage restrictions that could enhance biodiversity conservation, such as fisheries reserves.

Furthermore, improving the management and governance systems of MPAs is essential for their effectiveness and achieving the target mentioned above.

7. In other words, the major challenge for national authorities responsible for MPA planning and management, as well as for the relevant international organizations, in the coming years, will be to enhance the Mediterranean network of MPAs and OECMs in terms of coverage, representativeness, connectivity, and management effectiveness. Additionally, MPAs need to be better integrate into their social and economic contexts, by promoting their recognition in the context of country-led maritime spatial planning and the delivering of ecosystem services such as fisheries, tourism, and resilience to climate change.

8. Addressing these challenges requires that MPA governance be based on the best available knowledge, leveraging expertise and experience from a diverse range of disciplines. This can be accomplished by establishing an *ad hoc* Group of experts that, based on the regular assessment of the status of Mediterranean MPAs, provides guidance to SPA/RAC so as to effectively support countries and international organizations on strengthening the Mediterranean MPA network, ensuring a proper and timely achievement of the GBF, the Post-2020 SAPBIO, and the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs targets. Additionally, it would help meet the Good Environmental Status for the Mediterranean Sea as outlined by the Barcelona Convention Ecosystem Approach process, along with other regional objectives.

9. The initiative to establish an “*ad hoc* Group of experts” stems from the need for a multidisciplinary think tank that can offer guidance and timely recommendations on the planning and management of MPAs. This “*Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean” (AGEM) was initially created on a pilot-basis in 2018-2019 and was officially adopted by Decision IG.24/6<sup>1</sup> during the 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 21; Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019).

10. According to the COP 21 Decision, the AGEM is a multidisciplinary *ad hoc* Group of experts for marine protected areas in the Mediterranean set up to support the SPA/RAC Secretariat and the Contracting Parties to progress with the 2020 and post-2020 marine protected areas agenda in the Mediterranean and to work on related issues such as preparing guidelines, setting up definitions and measurable indicators, and tailoring global concepts and approaches to the Mediterranean context.

11. One of the primary contributions of the AGEM will be to monitor progress in implementing the “Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean” (“the MCPA and OECM Strategy”) adopted by COP 22 to the Barcelona Convention (Decision IG.25/12<sup>2</sup>) and its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework adopted by COP 23 (Decision IG.26/5<sup>3</sup>), including the Strategy’s two main objectives:

- **By 2030, at least 30 per cent of the Mediterranean Sea is protected and conserved through well connected, ecologically representative and effective systems of marine and coastal protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ensuring adequate geographical balance, with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity.**
- **By 2030, the number and coverage of marine and coastal protected areas with enhanced protection levels is increased, contributing to the recovery of marine ecosystems.**

<sup>1</sup> Decision IG.24/6: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/31704/19ig24\\_22\\_2406\\_eng.pdf](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/31704/19ig24_22_2406_eng.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Decision IG.25/12: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/37134/21ig25\\_27\\_2512\\_eng.pdf](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/37134/21ig25_27_2512_eng.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Decision 26/5: [https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/44718/23ig26\\_22\\_2605\\_eng.pdf](https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/44718/23ig26_22_2605_eng.pdf)

12. It will also act as a think tank to identify the best approaches for achieving the five Strategic Pillars and their related Strategic outcomes of the MCPA and OECM Strategy (as adopted by COP 22) and its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (as adopted by COP 23):

- **Strategic Pillar 1: MCPA and OECM Governance**  
 ➔ **Strategic Outcome 1:** Governance arrangements for MCPAs and OECMs are inclusive and effective in delivering conservation and livelihood outcomes
- **Strategic Pillar 2: MCPA Network Expansion**  
 ➔ **Strategic Outcome 2:** MCPA coverage increased through the expansion of soundly-designed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of MCPAs
- **Strategic Pillar 3: Strategic Pillar 3: Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures**  
 ➔ **Strategic Outcome 3:** Marine and coastal OECMs in the Mediterranean are identified, recognized and reported towards post-2020 global and regional targets
- **Strategic Pillar 4: MCPA Management Effectiveness**  
 ➔ **Strategic Outcome 4:** MCPAs are effectively managed and their conservation outcomes successfully delivered
- **Strategic Pillar 5: Government and Stakeholder Action and Support**  
 ➔ **Strategic Outcome 5:** Actions and support for MCPAs and OECMs are mobilized

13. The ad hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) is set to play an instrumental role in supporting SPA/RAC and the Contracting Parties in meeting the ambitious 30x30 conservation target by 2030. This Group's expertise will be vital in identifying priority actions to expand, effectively manage, and connect Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs), as well as Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) across the Mediterranean. AGEM's guidance not only steers SPA/RAC in critical decision-making but also fosters coherence in conservation efforts at regional and national levels. Its strategic insights will help bridge scientific expertise and policy needs, ensuring a more integrated, adaptive approach to conservation that aligns with international objectives under the CBD post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. In the coming years, AGEM will continue to support the development of a resilient, well-connected network of protected areas and OECMs, reinforcing the Mediterranean's role as a model of sustainable marine management and biodiversity conservation.

## II. The Mediterranean *ad hoc* Group of experts for MPAs (AGEM): Terms of reference

### A) Mission and objectives

14. The primary mission of the *ad hoc* Group of experts is to provide scientific and technical guidance to improve the Mediterranean network of MCPAs and OECMs in terms of coverage, representativity, connectivity and management effectiveness. More concretely, the AGEM ultimate goal is to support the SPA/RAC in the implementation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean (MCPA and OECM Strategy), adopted by the Barcelona Convention COP 22 (Antalya, Türkiye, 7-10 December 2021). To this end, the Group will serve as a think tank addressing a wide range of topics of relevance to MPA planning, establishment and management, and OECM identification and reporting in line with the Barcelona Convention MCPA and OECM Strategy.

## B) Tasks

15. The *ad hoc* Group of experts will work to deliver scientific and technical advice regarding the achievement of the “the MCPA and OECM Strategy” of the Barcelona Convention. It should also keep close watch on the Mediterranean network of MPAs with the view of providing assessments and ensuring the timely identification of gaps and hindrances that might impede the proper development of the network. It should deliver sound outputs, clearly drafted, and timely issued, based on the state of the art in terms of knowledge. The main tasks it would undertake are:

- Support the implementation of activities proposed by the “MCPA and OECM Strategy”.
- Guiding the process of the mid-term and final evaluations of the MCPA and OECM Strategy (due in 2026 and 2030, respectively) through its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
- Support the SPA/RAC in the elaboration of key documents requested in the framework of the SPA/RAC Programme of Work.
- Provide recommendations and guidance on how to narrow the gap between the North and South and West to East to achieve the 30x30 Target.
- Regularly review the state of Mediterranean MPAs by supporting the elaboration of the four-yearly status report of the Mediterranean network of MPAs, jointly led by SPA/RAC and MedPAN, with the view of evaluating the progress made by the Mediterranean countries towards achieving the 30x30 Target.
- Assess the representativity of the Mediterranean MPA network, in particular through a gap analysis to identify the ecosystems and other components of marine biodiversity that are under-represented and make recommendations to overcome the identified gaps.
- Assess the financial needs and gaps for MPAs and propose innovative funding approaches, including through proper marketing of the services and benefits generated by MPAs.
- Identify potential MPA sites including within the Mediterranean Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs).
- Identify potential OECMs in the Mediterranean and assist the Parties in their reporting.
- Provide scientific advice in response to SPA/RAC requests from its Focal Points and other MPA stakeholders.
- Develop harmonized technical tools including guidelines, standards and indicators as relevant.

The *ad hoc* group of experts should liaise with SPA/BD Focal Points through the SPA/RAC in carrying out the listed tasks, particularly when identifying potential MPA sites or OECMs, so that Contracting Parties are directly involved in such processes.

## C) Membership/Composition

16. To be effective the *ad hoc* Group of experts should include a wide range of expertise and ensure a fair, geographically and gender balanced representation of the Mediterranean sub-regions. It will be made of 21 members, including 16 specialists of the following disciplines (2 members/discipline):

- MPA management
- MPA planning
- Marine Biology/Ecology
- Law and regulation
- Socio-economics (other than fisheries and tourism)
- Fisheries
- Nature-based tourism
- MPA Financing

17. The 16 disciplinary specialist members of the *ad hoc* Group of experts will be designated for a period of four (04) years by the SPA/BD Focal Points. To this end, SPA/RAC will propose a list of at least 32 qualified experts and their CVs (4 experts for each of the 8 disciplines referred to in paragraph 16). The SPA/BD Focal Points may also propose experts and their CVs.

18. Furthermore, each of the 5 following organisations will be invited to designate one representative to be member of the *ad hoc* Group of experts, from scientific bodies or staff:

- The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) of GFCM;
- The Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS;
- IUCN/WCPA marine;
- The Scientific Committee of MedPAN;
- WWF.

19. The chair may decide to invite representatives of other organizations or additional experts to speak on specific topics, either on their own initiative or at the request of a Group member.

20. Contribution to the *ad hoc* Group of experts should be on a voluntary basis and the group members will contribute in their personal capacity, and not as representatives of their countries or organizations. They will not receive compensation for their contributions or input to the Group's work.

#### **D) Working languages**

21. The working languages of the *ad hoc* Group of experts will be English and French.

#### **E) Functioning modalities**

22. At each of its first meetings after the appointment of members, the *ad hoc* Group of experts shall elect from among its members a chair and a vice-chair. SPA/RAC will designate one of its officers to provide backstopping services to the AGEM. The backstopping officer will act as the Secretariat of the AGEM and ensure liaison between the *ad hoc* Group of experts and SPA/RAC.

23. Should financial support be available, the *ad hoc* Group of experts will meet physically at least once every year and will exchange electronically on a frequent and regular basis using appropriate means. The work of the *ad hoc* Group of Experts will be mainly through remote meetings and webinars with the support of SPA/RAC.

#### **F) Reporting and record-keeping**

24. The conclusions and recommendations of each meeting of the AGEM will be adopted by the attending members and will be made available on the website of SPA/RAC. Furthermore, the Chair and/or Vice-Chair of AGEM will attend the meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points to report about the AGEM works and to present each of the outputs it issued during the covered period.

**Annex II: Programme of work of AGEM for 2025 and key priorities for the biennium 2026-2027**

# ***Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM)**

## **Programme of Work for 2025 and key priorities for 2026-2027 biennium**

### **1. Recalling the AGEM mission and objectives**

The primary mission of the *Ad hoc* Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) is to provide scientific and technical guidance to improve the Mediterranean network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in terms of coverage, representativity, connectivity and management effectiveness.

More concretely, the AGEM ultimate goal is to support the SPA/RAC in the implementation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean (MCPA and OECM Strategy), adopted by the Barcelona Convention COP 22 (Antalya, Türkiye, 7-10 December 2021).

To this end, the Group will serve as a think tank addressing a wide range of topics of relevance to MPA planning, establishment and management, and OECM identification and reporting in line with the Barcelona Convention MCPA and OECM Strategy.

### **2. Main tasks of the AGEM until 2030**

The AGEM will work to deliver scientific and technical advice regarding the achievement of the post-2020 MCPA and OECM Strategy of the Barcelona Convention. It should also keep a close watch on the Mediterranean network of MPAs with the view of providing assessments and ensuring the timely identification of gaps and hindrances that might impede the proper development of the network. It should deliver sound outputs, clearly drafted, and timely issued, based on the state of the art in terms of knowledge.

Based on the AGEM Terms of Reference reviewed and approved by the SPA/BD Focal Points via email in January 2025, the main tasks it would undertake are:

- Support the implementation of activities proposed by the “MCPA and OECM Strategy”.
- Guiding the process of the mid-term and final evaluations of the MCPA and OECM Strategy (due in 2026 and 2030, respectively) through its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
- Support the SPA/RAC in the elaboration of key documents requested in the framework of the SPA/RAC Programme of Work.
- Provide recommendations and guidance on how to narrow the gap between the North and South and West to East to achieve the 30x30 Target.
- Regularly review the state of Mediterranean MPAs by supporting the elaboration of the four-yearly status report of the Mediterranean network of MPAs, jointly led by SPA/RAC and MedPAN, with the view of evaluating the progress made by the Mediterranean countries towards achieving the 30x30 Target.
- Support through technical and scientific guidance the assessment of the representativity of the Mediterranean MPA network, in particular through a gap analysis to identify the ecosystems and other components of marine biodiversity that are under-represented and make recommendations to overcome the identified gaps.
- Assist in the assessment of the financial needs and gaps for MPAs and in proposing innovative funding approaches, including through proper marketing of the services and benefits generated by MPAs.
- Guide the identification of potential MPA/SPAMI sites including within the Mediterranean Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs).
- Participate in the identification of potential OECMs in the Mediterranean and assist the Parties in their reporting.
- Provide scientific advice in response to SPA/RAC requests from its Focal Points and other MPA stakeholders.
- Develop harmonized technical tools including guidelines, standards and indicators as relevant.

The *ad hoc* group of experts should liaise with the SPA/BD Focal Points through the SPA/RAC in carrying out the listed tasks, particularly when identifying potential MPA sites or OECMs, so that the Contracting Parties are directly involved in such processes.

### 3. AGEM periodic Programmes of Work

Each two years (in line with the periodicity of the biennial Programmes of Work of the Barcelona Convention), AGEM will develop a targeted Programme of Work (PoW) aligned with its overarching objectives and the evolving needs of the MPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean.

These periodic PoWs will outline key priorities, thematic focus areas, and specific actions to support scientific guidance, policy recommendations, and capacity-building efforts. By adapting to emerging challenges and opportunities, AGEM aims to provide strategic expertise and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders to enhance marine conservation and governance in the region.

For the current biennium (2024-2025) and for the newly established AGEM in February 2025, the work programme will cover the remainder of 2025.

In early 2026, AGEM will work on developing its Programme of Work for 2026-2027, outlining specific activities and the timeline for each identified key priority, to ensure their effective and timely implementation.

### 4. Priority topics for AGEM in 2025

In 2025, the AGEM will focus on enhancing and strengthening the strategic framework for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean. Emphasis will be placed on improving the identification and reporting of OECMs, and assessing the conservation impacts of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels. Additionally, AGEM will foster regional collaboration for coordinated research and transboundary conservation efforts, to support the effective implementation of the MCPA and OECM Strategy.

The following proposed deliverables to be guided by the AGEM are subscribed in the SPA/RAC PoW for 2024-2025 adopted by the Barcelona Convention COP23, and aim to strengthen regional cooperation, improve conservation outcomes, and support sustainable governance of Mediterranean marine biodiversity. The first and third deliverables will be carried out by SPA/RAC consultants, and AGEM will ensure guiding the process of their elaboration and their review. The second deliverable would be elaborated internally with the support of a specific AGEM Working Group on Enhanced Protection Levels.

In 2025, the AGEM is expected to guide and/or deliver the following key outputs:

- 1. Mediterranean Guidance on OECMs:** Supporting the development of a regional guidance document to apply OECM criteria and to establish processes for identifying OECM in the Mediterranean, accompanied by a regional webinar to disseminate the guidance, to be submitted to the seventeenth SPA/BD Focal Points Meeting on 20-22 May 2025.
- 2. Impact of MCPAs with Enhanced Protection Levels:** Documentation and communication of the ecological and socio-economic impacts of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels.
- 3. Identification of potential international/transboundary MPAs in open waters:** Support countries in identifying potential international/transboundary Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in open waters.

## 5. Proposed Programme of Work of the AGEM for 2025

Deliverable	Topic	Activity	Rational	Responsible	Timeline of Implementation	Comment
DELIVERABLE 1 (D1)	Mediterranean Guidance on OECMs	Supporting the development of a regional guidance document for identifying and reporting OECMs.	SPA/RAC PoW2024-2025: Activity 2.2.1.a)	AGEM	Early March to late March 2025: guidance document drafting by the consultant.	This action is integrated into the SPA/RAC PoW for 2025.
			<b>MCPA &amp; OECM Strategy Strategic Pillar 3: OECMs</b> <b>Action A.3.1.6 under Output 3.1</b> ( <i>Awareness in Contracting Parties and stakeholders on OECMs enhanced and guidance for the application of OECM criteria provided</i> )  <b>→ A.3.1.6</b> Develop sectoral and other guidance, such as tools and templates, for applying OECM criteria and establishing processes for identifying OECMs	SPA/RAC (with the support of a consultant)  Specific WG on OECM (WG-OECM), as needed  Invited OECM experts	Late March: share the draft document with AGEM for comments.  Early April 2025: discussion through specific AGEM online meeting.  Mid-April 2025: finalisation of the draft document taking into account the AGEM feedback.  18 April 2025: sharing the draft document with the FPs.  20-22 May 2025: discussion of the draft document at the FP meeting.  October - November 2025: Pilot-test the guidance document with an interested country in OECMs, with support of WG-OECM.  Mid-December 2025 (after COP 24, 2-5 December 2025): OECM webinar organization with contribution from AGEM.	A consultant is engaged to develop the Mediterranean guidance on OECM criteria application and their identification.  The AGEM is expected to guide the elaboration of this document to be submitted to the 17 <sup>th</sup> meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points on 20-22 May 2025, and in organizing a specific webinar to share the guidance in December 2025 (after the adoption of the guidance).  It is also proposed to pilot-test the guidance with an interested country before the webinar.

Deliverable	Topic	Activity	Rational	Responsible	Timeline of Implementation	Comment
DELIVERABLE 2 (D2)	Impact of MCPAs with Enhanced Protection Levels	Documentation and communication of ecological and socio-economic impacts of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels.	SPA/RAC PoW2024-2025: Activity 2.2.1.a)	AGEM	June - September 2025: elaboration of a first draft of the Impact of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels by the WG-EP.	It is proposed that the WG-EP lead the elaboration of the document.
			<b>MCPA &amp; OEEM Strategy Strategic Pillar 2: MCPA Network Expansion Action A.3.1.6 under Output 2.4</b> <i>(The number and coverage of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels is increased)</i>  <b>→ A.2.4.4</b> Provide tools for monitoring, documenting and communicating impacts of MCPAs with enhanced protection levels	Specific WG on MCPA with enhanced protection levels (WG-EP)  Invited relevant experts  Specific organisations could be invited to collaborate, such as The MedFund, BlueSeeds or MedSea Alliance	October - November 2025: first draft shared with AGEM for comments and feedback.  December 2025: finalization of the document.	This document could be shared with the AGEM for comments and then validated by email.  Specific organisations such as MedPAN can support the preparation of the document since they have elaborated some tools on MCPA with enhanced and strict protection.

Deliverable	Topic	Activity	Rational	Responsible	Timeline of Implementation	Comment
DELIVERABLE 4 (D3)	Identification of potential international/Transboundary MPAs in open waters	Study on facilitating collaboration among neighboring countries to coordinate joint research and identify potential MPAs in open waters.	SPA/RAC PoW2024-2025: Activity 2.2.2.e)	AGEM	June - August 2025: first draft prepared by SPA/RAC consultant.	The document is to be elaborated by SPA/RAC consultant (French Voluntary Contribution financial support).
			<b>MCPA &amp; OECM Strategy Strategic Pillar 2: MCPA Network Expansion</b> <b>Action A.2.1.3 under Output 2.1</b> ( <i>Areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are identified</i> )  → A.2.1.3 Collaborate with neighbouring countries to promote joint co-ordinated research in ABNJs and to identify potential MCPAs based on harmonized monitoring protocols	SPA/RAC (with the support of a consultant)  Invited experts on ABNJs/international laws and regulation.	September - October 2025: draft circulated to AGEM for feedback.  November 2025: specific online meeting to discuss about the draft.  December 2025: finalisation of the document.	The AGEM will accompany the expert with guidance.  Document should be discussed through specific online meeting.

## 6. Simplified timetable of the AGEM PoW for 2025

N°	Topic	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
-	Kick-off of the AGEM: introduction and PoW2025	<b>W2: First AGEM Meeting (PoW)</b>	<b>W3:</b> finalization and submission to FP								
D1	Mediterranean Guidance for OECMs	<b>W1-W4:</b> Draft of the document	<b>W1: Second AGEM Meeting (OECM)</b>  <b>W3:</b> Finalisation and submission to FP								<b>W2: OECM webinar</b>
D2	Impact of MCPAs with Enhanced Protection Levels				<b>W1:</b> Constitution of <b>WG-EP</b> and Start of work			<b>W4:</b> First draft of the doc	<b>W1:</b> Circulated to AGEM for feedback	<b>W1:</b> Integration of comments  <b>W3: Third AGEM Meeting (MPAs in open waters + Enhanced Protection)</b>	<b>W3:</b> Finalisation of the doc
D3	Identification of potential MPAs in open waters				<b>W3:</b> Expert recruited			<b>W 4:</b> First draft of the doc	<b>W1:</b> Circulated to AGEM for feedback	<b>W3: Third AGEM Meeting (MPAs in open waters + Enhanced Protection)</b>	<b>W3:</b> Finalisation of the doc

## 7. Key priorities for AGEM during the biennium 2026-2027

Based on the draft 2026-2027 SPA/RAC Programme of Work, the AGEM Terms of Reference, and in line with the MCPA and OECM Strategy, the following key topics have been identified as priority areas for AGEM to focus on during 2026-2027 biennium, ensuring alignment with regional conservation objectives and ongoing initiatives.

### 7.1. The MCPA and OECM Strategy mid-term evaluation

#### *Rationale:*

- ➔ Decision IG.26/5 “Specially Protected Areas (SPAs), Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and Ecosystem Restoration” of the Barcelona Convention COP23 (5-8 December 2023, Slovenia).
- ➔ The MCPA and OECM Strategy: Chapter 3 (Strategy implementation), Section 3.3: Monitoring and implementation; and the Strategy’s Evaluation and Monitoring Framework.
- ➔ Draft 2026-2027 SPA/RAC Programme of Work: Activity 5.1.2.a) Mid-term (2026) evaluation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, through its Evaluation and Monitoring Framework, with conclusions and recommendations for the Strategy implementation by 2030 elaborated.

#### *Objective:*

- ➔ Guide and contribute to the Mid-term Evaluation of the Barcelona Convention Post-2020 Regional Strategy on MCPA and OECM in the Mediterranean through its Evaluation and Monitoring Framework:
  - Develop guiding principles for the MCPA and OECM Strategy evaluation;
  - Comment the Terms of Reference for the Strategy assessment consultation;
  - Review and contribute to the methodology and timeline for assessing the implementation of the MCPA and OECM Strategy;
  - Organize and participate in online meetings dedicated to the Strategy evaluation process;
  - Review and discuss the Strategy evaluation drafts during its development process;
  - Propose recommendations for the effective implementation of the MCPA and OECM Strategy for the remaining period until 2030.

#### *Note:*

- ➔ The Strategy assessment should be submitted to the 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points in mid-2027. The preparation of this deliverable should start in early 2026 and finish not later than March 2027.

### 7.2. MPA Status report

#### *Rationale:*

- ➔ SPA/RAC draft PoW 2026-2027: Activity 2.2.1.i) Status report on the Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean elaborated and disseminated

#### *Objective:*

- ➔ Support the elaboration of the four-yearly status report of the Mediterranean network of MPAs, jointly led by SPA/RAC and MedPAN, with the view of evaluating the progress made by the Mediterranean countries towards achieving the 30x30 Target, contributing to the regular review of the state of Mediterranean MPAs:
  - Contribute to/review specific sections of the report;
  - Review and discuss the MPA Status draft reports during its development process;
  - Propose recommendations to enhance MPA coverage and the effective management of MPAs in the Mediterranean.

#### *Note:*

- ➔ The MPA Status report is jointly developed by SPA/RAC and MedPAN and will be presented during the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Mediterranean MPA Forum to be organized during 2027.

### 7.3. OECMs identification, recognition and reporting

#### *Rationale:*

- ➔ The MCPA and OECM Strategy: Strategic Pillar 3 (OECMs), Output 3.1: Awareness in Contracting Parties and stakeholders on OECMs enhanced and guidance for the application of OECM criteria provided & Output 3.2: OECMs identified, recognized and reported to regional and global databases by Contracting Parties and regional organizations

#### *Objective:*

- ➔ Promote the OECM recognition and identification, based on the “Guidance for Mediterranean OECMs: Identification and criteria application” that will be developed in 2025 with the support of AGEM and adopted by the Barcelona Convention COP 24 in December 2025:
  - Continue advancing the reflection and efforts on OECMs. This process will be guided by the framework and guidance under-preparation by SPA/RAC, to be submitted to the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points, with a focus on practical application and knowledge sharing among Mediterranean stakeholders. SPA/RAC and partner organization in the Mediterranean to lead the work on OECM in close consultation with the Contracting Parties.

#### *Note:*

- ➔ The OECM guidance will be developed in 2025, and it is proposed to put the focus on OECMs in 2026 and continue the efforts in 2027.

### 7.4. MCPA coverage and representativity:

#### *Rationale:*

- ➔ The MCPA and OECM Strategy: Strategic Pillar 2 (MCPA Network expansion): Output 2.1: Areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are identified, Output 2.2: Distribution of MCPA systems across the Mediterranean Sea is balanced & Output 2.3: MCPA coverage in areas beyond national jurisdiction is increased

#### *Objective:*

- ➔ Narrow the gap and enhance the MCPA coverage in the Mediterranean and support through technical and scientific guidance the assessment of the representativity of the Mediterranean MPA network :
  - Identify the challenges and obstacles hindering the declaration of new MPAs;
  - Identify the marine biodiversity that are under-represented;
  - Identify funding gaps and exploring new funding mechanisms for MPAs.
  - Provide tailored guidance and specific recommendations on how to narrow the gap, in particular between the North and South and West to East, to achieve the 30x30 Target.

#### *Note:*

- ➔ This work could be based on the MCPA and OECM Strategy assessment and on the MPA Status report that will be developed in 2026.