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**Agenda item 7: Ecosystems conservation**

**7.4. Activities for the elaboration of national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest**

**Draft Programme of work for Reference Lists of Habitat Types in the Mediterranean**

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## **Draft Programme of work for Reference Lists of Habitat Types in the Mediterranean**

### Introduction:

The Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean and the Action plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (MAP Phase II), adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in 1995, contain provisions for the preparation of inventories of habitats at national as well as regional level.

Central to the success of the Barcelona Convention and its protocols is the level of information on habitats and species of Mediterranean interest which will be assembled during the coming years. In this regard, the quantitative and qualitative improvement of the level of information attained within the implementation of these instruments will have to be regarded as an indicator of their performance. In this context, and following a specific provision of MAP Phase II to prepare inventories according to common criteria, the Contracting Parties adopted at their 10th Ordinary Meeting (Tunis, 18-21 November 1997) criteria for the establishment of national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest.

The criteria require that "Information concerning each inventoried site will be compiled according to a standard format, which will have to be agreed by the Parties upon a proposal from the Centre. Such information will include, but will not necessarily be limited to, the fields detailed in Appendix I to these criteria." (Art. 7)

To this end, a Standard Data-Entry Form (SDF) was conceived as an operational inventory tool made available to the relevant national authorities. It is designed to cover the fields of information detailed in the Appendix to the Criteria, and the specific criteria for the assessment of the importance of the site for habitats and species (Art. 4, 5 and 6 of the Criteria).

The criteria provided also for the establishment of a reference list of marine and coastal natural habitat types, on the basis of a model classification. A model classification of marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region, as well as a reference list of habitat types were adopted in 1999. The list complements, the similar tools under the Berne Convention, the Bonn Convention, the Ramsar Convention, the EC Habitats and Birds directives and other relevant instruments.

Being neither complete nor systematic, the knowledge of the Mediterranean biodiversity cannot be considered satisfactory. Gaps in knowledge are, indeed, evident at individual/population (genetic diversity), species and community/habitat levels. A more complete and integrated inventory of Mediterranean habitats would be of great use, since it would identify the most critical sites for biodiversity. Such an inventory should be supported by the mapping of the habitat spatial distribution (based on the use of innovative information and mapping technology, but treated in a user-friendly manner, so that it is easily accessible to both policy-makers and management staff), as well as by compiling a list of species associated with each habitat. In addition, long-term monitoring programmes should be established in order to define the temporal variability of abundance, biomass, and other assemblage variables within sensitive habitats. This could be undertaken through the implementation of the integrated monitoring and assessment programme under the EcAp process.

During the last symposiums on the marine key habitats held in Portoroz from 27 to 31 October 2014, it became obvious to amend, discuss and propose new facies for integration within the Barcelona Convention's Habitats List.

It was recalled that despite the emergence of new indicators to compare the ecological status or the pressures on these habitats, evaluation is often based, for lack of sufficient resources, solely on expert opinion. In the same way, several participants highlighted the dramatic lack of mapping data on these habitats (vegetation and coralligenous) in particular for the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Suggestions for RAC/SPA actions on Reference Lists of Habitat Types in the Mediterranean**

It is recommended that RAC/SPA direct its action over the coming two-year period towards the following activities:

- Evaluation of national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest;
- Further assistance to countries for the use of the SDF and to strengthen their capacity to map, monitor and assess the marine habitats status within the framework of EcAp;
- Updating of the reference list of marine and coastal natural habitat types;
- Ensure further harmonisation of the reference list of marine and coastal natural habitat types with other similar tools, such as the ones related to Natura 2000 and EUNIS;
- Further developing MedGIS and working in close collaboration with the Focal Points for SPAs to feed data into it and GIS-Based mapping of marine key habitats (Posidonia Meadows and coralligenous) by 2017;
- Enhancing partnership with the actors in the region concerned by the collection and circulation of pertinent information for the conservation marine key habitats.