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Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) Biodiversity and Fisheries  
Marseille, France, 12-13 February 2019

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



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## **Report of the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries**

### **Introduction**

1. In accordance to the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work and Budget for 2018-2019 (Decision IG.23/14) adopted by the 20<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and its Protocols, the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries, in Marseille, France, on 12 and 13 February 2019, at the Hôtel Mercure Centre Vieux Port (1, rue Neuve Saint Martin, 13001 Marseille).

### **Participation**

2. The following Contracting Parties were represented at the meeting: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, European Union (EU), France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey.

3. The following intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations were represented at the meeting by observers: the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN).

4. The Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre (INFO/RAC) was represented at the meeting.

5. SPA/RAC acted as the Secretariat for the meeting.

6. The full list of participants is attached as Annex I to the present report.

### **Agenda item 1. Opening of the meeting**

7. The meeting was opened on Tuesday 12 February 2019, at 9.30 a.m. by the representatives of SPA/RAC and the host country.

8. Mr. Khalil ATTIA, Director of SPA/RAC, welcomed the participants and thanked the Government of France for hosting the meeting. While highlighting the relevance of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) process in the framework of the Barcelona Convention, he summarized the main steps achieved since 2008 in implementing the EcAp roadmap. He also recalled the main objectives of the meeting, that are, harmonizing the monitoring protocols for biodiversity and non-indigenous species related common indicators, and ensuring a coherent reporting of quality-assured data towards the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR).

9. Mr. Jean VERMOT, representative of the Ministry of Ecological and Solidary Transition, and SPA/RAC Focal Point, of France, after welcoming the participants to the city of Marseille, started by thanking the Barcelona Convention Secretariat and SPA/RAC for the quality of their work and the way they are taking over the assignments entrusted by the conferences of the Parties. He expressed his country's interest and support to the Barcelona Convention's mission in several respects: the importance of the marine environment and biodiversity, and the services they provide for human wellbeing and survival, as well as the importance of the Mediterranean region. He said that the marine conservation is a common responsibility among all Mediterranean riparian States and that, to this end, they should all endeavour in fulfilling their obligations towards a better knowledge and conservation of marine biodiversity.

## **Agenda item 2. Organizational matters**

### ***a) Rules of procedure***

10. The meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI) would apply *mutatis mutandis* to their deliberations.

### ***b) Election of officers***

11. The meeting unanimously elected the following officers:

Chairperson:	Mr. Jean VERMOT (France)
Vice-chairpersons:	Ms. Sabah TAHARI (Morocco)
	Ms. Martina MARIĆ (Croatia)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Simon NEMTZOV (Israel).

### ***c) Adoption of the agenda***

12. The meeting adopted its agenda on the basis of the Provisional Agenda and Provisional Annotated Agenda, including the proposed timetable, circulated in documents UNEP/MED WG.458/1 and UNEP/MED WG.458/2, respectively.

13. The agenda appears in Annex II to the present report.

### ***d) Organization of work***

14. The discussions were held in plenary sessions in line with the agenda. Simultaneous interpretation in English and French was provided during the meeting.

**Agenda item 3. State of play of national IMAP implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species**

15. The Secretariat introduced document UNEP/MED WG.458/3 entitled “Progress report on the national implementation of Decision IG.22/7 on the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP), related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species”. The document provided an overview of the state of play of IMAP national implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species, focusing on the activities delivered, support provided, best practices exchanged and challenges faced during the initial phase (2016-2019) of its implementation, and highlighted the progress towards a successful 2023 MED QSR.

16. The Secretariat invited the representatives of the Contracting Parties to present briefly the progress made regarding the national implementation of IMAP, highlighting the advances, challenges, gaps and needs, and providing information on data availability to contribute to the elaboration of the 2023 MED QSR.

17. The Contracting Parties representatives briefly presented the status of implementation of relevant monitoring programmes at national level with regard to biodiversity and non-indigenous species. These programmes are stemming from the Barcelona Convention and/or EU policies. While most of the countries are in the phase of development or updating of their national monitoring programmes on biodiversity, many of the mentioned monitoring activities where possible thanks to project funds. The challenges relate mainly to the lack of financial and human resources, and sometimes to the need for a better coordination and synergy, at national or regional level, or to the lack of expertise.

18. In the ensuing discussion, the meeting encouraged the Secretariat to re-establish the online expert group on biodiversity and non-indigenous species, in order to timely and efficiently address key technical issues and also to involve nationally designated experts in the process of elaboration of the 2023 MED QSR.

19. The meeting final conclusions and recommendations related to this agenda item are presented in Annex III to this report.

**Agenda item 4. Guidance on monitoring concerning the biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators**

20. The Secretariat introduced document UNEP/MED WG.458/4 “Monitoring protocols of the Ecosystem Approach Common Indicators 3, 4, 5 and 6”. The document provided guidelines on how to monitor cetaceans, monk seal, seabirds, marine turtles and non-indigenous species, developed in order to better assist countries in the implementation of their national IMAP as well as to harmonize and standardize monitoring and assessment methods related to the agreed common indicators of biodiversity and non-indigenous species (Ecological Objectives EO1 and EO2, respectively).

21. The Secretariat also presented information documents UNEP/MED WG.458/Inf.3 (“Defining the Most Representative Species for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24”) and UNEP/MED WG.458/Inf.4 (“Protocols for monitoring interactions between marine litter and marine turtles (ingestion and entangling) with a view to harmonizing methods of data collection for monitoring and assessment in the Mediterranean”), prepared to support the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach roadmap, particularly the interaction between marine litter common indicators and species, as well as document UNEP/MED WG.458/Inf.5 (“Assessment of the available data to propose GES targets for the IMAP Candidate Indicator 24”).

22. The Secretariat finally presented the main elements of document UNEP/MED WG.458/Inf.6 (“Supporting the UNEP/Map Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP): ODYSSEA alignment to current IMAP knowledge gaps identified from the Mediterranean 2017 Quality Status Report”) elaborated by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) on approaches to be used to fill the gaps identified in the 2017 MED QSR.

23. Participants provided suggestions, comments and recommendations on further work on the draft monitoring guidelines as well as on the other presented documents, in order to revise and finalize them for consideration by the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SPA/BD thematic Focal Points scheduled in June 2019.

24. The conclusions and recommendations made under this agenda item appear in Annex III to this report.

**Agenda item 5. Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators**

25. INFO/RAC representative introduced document UNEP/MED WG.458/5 (“Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species: Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for Selected IMAP Common Indicators”), providing proposed Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for the selected biodiversity and non-indigenous Common Indicators (CIs): CI1 and CI2 related to marine habitats, and CI6 related to non-indigenous species.

26. The meeting reviewed the IMAP Data Standards and Data Dictionaries and provided concrete proposals and recommendations towards the development of the IMAP Information System.

27. The meeting also provided comments that will serve to revise and timely finalize the presented document for consideration by the second CORMON meeting (tentatively scheduled in April-May 2019) and the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SPA/BD thematic Focal Points, scheduled in June 2019.

28. The meeting detailed conclusions and recommendations issued under this agenda item appear in Annex III to this report.

**Agenda item 6. Any other business**

29. The representative of the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat briefly presented the preliminary results of the first large-scale cetaceans survey carried out in the Mediterranean Sea, between June and August 2018, within the “ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative” (ASI) project. She explained that this project aimed at supporting the establishment of a long-term monitoring programme of cetaceans’ populations, and that it supported the Mediterranean countries in fulfilling their international and regional commitments, such as the implementation of IMAF and a number of European directives (MSFD and Habitats Directive). During this large-scale survey, visual sightings of cetaceans, other megafauna species (seabirds, cartilaginous fishes and sea turtles), as well as marine litter, have been collected by trained observers embarked in dedicated aircrafts and research vessels. The data collected is going to be analyzed in 2019-2020, notably during sub-regional workshops involving national experts and scientists from the Mediterranean riparian countries. Once the final consolidated report is available (Autumn 2020), it will be shared with UNEP/MAP Secretariat and Components. Regarding the data collected, it was pointed out that data can be made available to the Contracting Parties through requests to the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat, until an appropriate data management system is set in place. The ASI Contact Group Members and the ACCOBAMS Focal Points are going to be consulted on proposals related to data availability and data sharing rules.

**Agenda item 7. Conclusions and recommendations**

30. The participants were invited to review the draft conclusions and recommendations prepared by the Secretariat taking into account the views, opinions and remarks expressed during the meeting. The proposed conclusions and recommendations were amended and approved by the meeting.

31. The approved version of the conclusions and recommendations is included in Annex III to the present report.

**Agenda item 8. Closure of the meeting**

32. The meeting was closed at 2.00 p.m. on Wednesday, 13 February 2019.

**Annex I**  
**List of participants**

## List of participants

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**REPRÉSENTANTS D'ORGANISATIONS INTERGOUVERNEMENTALES**

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**REPRESENTATIVES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**  
**REPRESENTANTS D'ORGANISATIONS NON-GOUVERNEMENTALES**

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COMPONENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**  
*PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT - UNITÉ DE  
COORDINATION ET COMPOSANTES DU PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA MÉDITERRANÉE*

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**SECRETARIAT / SECRÉTARIAT**

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**Annex II**  
**Agenda of the meeting**

## **Agenda**

- Agenda item 1.** Opening of the meeting
- Agenda item 2.** Organizational matters  
*a) Rules of procedure*  
*b) Election of officers*  
*c) Adoption of the agenda*  
*d) Organization of work*
- Agenda item 3.** State of play of national IMAP implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species
- Agenda item 4.** Guidance on monitoring concerning the biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators
- Agenda item 5.** Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators
- Agenda item 6.** Any other business
- Agenda item 7.** Conclusions and recommendations
- Agenda item 8.** Closure of the meeting

**Annex III**  
**Conclusions and recommendations**

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Following the review and discussions of all agenda items, the CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (“the Meeting”), held in Marseille, France, on 12 and 13 February 2019, agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

### **Agenda item 3: State of play of national IMAP implementation related to biodiversity and non-indigenous species**

1. The Meeting welcomed the work undertaken by SPA/RAC to support the implementation of IMAP (biodiversity and non-indigenous species cluster) at regional, sub-regional and national levels through different projects (e.g. EcAp MED II, GEF Adriatic, MedKeyHabitats II, MedMPA Network). The Meeting encouraged SPA/RAC to continue its support for the implementation of the second phase of IMAP (2019-2021).
2. The Meeting acknowledged the high level of commitment and the progress made by all Contracting Parties in the initial phase of IMAP implementation (2016-2019) and pointed out the need for further collaboration between the Parties to assess GES and contribute to the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR) preparation.
3. The Meeting highlighted the need for adequate resource mobilization, capacity building and technical assistance at national level, including through regional and sub-regional collaboration.
4. The Meeting pointed out the efforts made by the Contracting Parties that are Members of the European Union to implement IMAP in synergy with the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), Habitats Directive, Birds Directive and Water Framework Directive (WFD) and encouraged the Contracting Parties to continue sharing best practices and lessons learnt and timely share relevant monitoring data, in line with IMAP, to the potential data platforms.
5. The Meeting encouraged the Secretariat to re-establish the informal Online Expert Group on Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species (“Biodiversity Working Group”), that will address key outstanding technical monitoring and assessment specifics in line with paragraph 23 of document UNEP/MED WG.458/3, paragraph 27 of document UNEP/MED WG.430/6, and in accordance with the decision taken at the 4<sup>th</sup> EcAp Coordination Group meeting (October 2014; UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.401/8). To this end, the Secretariat will develop a concept note on the establishment and functioning of this Biodiversity Working Group, to be submitted to the forthcoming CORMON meeting (tentatively scheduled for late April 2019) for proper consideration and guidance for its further elaboration.

### **Agenda item 4: Guidance on monitoring concerning the biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators**

6. The Meeting commended the quality of the “Monitoring Protocols of the Ecosystem Approach Common Indicators 3, 4, 5 and 6”, and agreed to provide the Secretariat with written comments and suggestions by 27 February 2019, at the latest.
7. The Meeting underlined the need to further make explicit the links between the monitoring protocols and the agreed IMAP Common Indicators as well as their respective Guidance Factsheets and data standards.

8. The Meeting highlighted the need to start developing and implementing, as soon as possible, a list of actions, to be prepared by the Secretariat in close consultation with the EcAp Coordination Group, for developing the EO4 and EO6 in synergy with the EU MSFD.

9. The Meeting highlighted the need to consider synergies with relevant Regional and International organizations and treaties in order to avoid overlapping of efforts and duplication of reporting.

10. The Meeting encouraged regional wide efforts, such as the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI), which could provide valuable data towards a successful 2023 MED QSR.

**Agenda item 5: Data standards and data dictionaries for selected biodiversity and non-indigenous species common indicators**

11. The Meeting acknowledged the importance of developing an information system for IMAP based on SEIS principles, which should be interoperable to the extent possible with existing information and reporting systems used by the Contracting Parties with the aim to develop data standards for the purpose of IMAP assessment. In this regard, the Meeting encouraged continued work to be undertaken by INFO/RAC to ensure interoperability for the development of the IMAP compatible pilot Info-system and its main elements.

12. The Meeting underlined that monitoring protocols should guide data standards development that is carried out in parallel with discussions on the agreed common methodologies. Information systems are a major tool to collect and transfer data. Given that the development of indicators, monitoring methods and data standards are progressing in parallel, close and continuous dialogue and collaboration are needed among the bodies responsible for these developments to ensure their proper alignment and coherence.

13. The Meeting recommended to make available automatic completion tool for the phylum and class for the species.

14. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to refer to the protocol or methodology used for collecting the data, as part of the metadata to be reported on. In particular, a brief description into the information standard and references could be added to specific documents to be attached to the metadata template.

15. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to ask the Contracting Parties, through their SPA/BD Focal Points in coordination with INFO/RAC Focal Points, to designate qualified experts that could actively contribute in defining biodiversity and non-indigenous species data standards for the IMAP Pilot Info-System.

16. Concerning Metadata Standards and Data Dictionaries, the Meeting agreed to provide the Secretariat with their specific initial comments and proposals, in writing, by 27 February 2019, at the latest.

17. The Meeting noted that an IMAP Data Policy was under development and acknowledged its importance in relation to the planned data submissions as part of the IMAP process.

18. The Meeting highlighted that a workplan agenda for the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR would facilitate further work of the CORMON as well as experts' involvement.