

Annex XIV

Conclusions and recommendations of the Fifteenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points

**Fifteenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points
Videoconference, 23-25 June 2021**

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

- I. Following the kind invitation of the Maltese Government, the Fifteenth Meeting of the Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Focal Points was to be held in Malta. Because of the sanitary conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and according to the recommendation of the Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan, Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UNEP/MAP), all meetings scheduled up to July 2021 are to be conducted by teleconference.
- II. The Fifteenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (hereinafter referred to as “the meeting”) was hosted by Malta and held by videoconference on 23–25 June 2021.

Participation

- III. All the SPA/BD focal points were invited to attend the meeting or to designate representatives. The following Contracting Parties were represented at the meeting: Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey.
- IV. The Ad Hoc Group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) was represented by its Chair and Vice-Chair.
- V. The secretariats of the following United Nations bodies, conventions and agreements and intergovernmental organizations were represented as observers: the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Council of Europe - Bern Convention and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- VI. The following governmental organization was also represented as observer: the European Topic Centre of Spatial Analysis and Synthesis, University of Malaga (ETC/UMA).
- VII. The following nongovernmental organizations were also represented as observers: the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET), the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean, (MedPAN), the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).
- VIII. The UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit, the Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre (INFO/RAC), the Priority Action Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) and the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) were represented at the meeting.
- IX. The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) acted as the secretariat of the meeting.

Organizational matters

- X. 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.
- XI. The meeting unanimously elected the following officers:
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|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Chairperson: | Mr. Duncan BORG (Malta), |
| Vice-Chairpersons: | Ms. Melina MARCOU (Cyprus), |
| | Mr. Zamir DEDEJ (Albania), |
| Rapporteur : | Ms. Samia BOUFARES (Tunisia). |
- XII. The Meeting agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

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

1. The meeting expressed appreciation for the effort made by some Contracting Parties to report on implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol but stressed that it was difficult to have an overview on the status of its implementation from only a few reports.
2. The meeting called upon the Contracting Parties to submit implementation reports in a timely manner and in accordance with the reporting requirements of the Convention so that the status of and gaps in implementation of the Protocol could be better assessed.
3. The meeting noted that the online form was difficult to access and that it was difficult to provide the required data without access to data submitted previously. Receipt of only 12 reports from the 22 Contracting Parties indicated that there was a problem. The meeting stressed that countries have obligations to report to many conventions and asked for assistance to improve and streamline reporting.
4. The meeting suggested that a workshop be organized or a working group established to analyse the difficulties encountered by Contracting Parties with the online reporting system and to propose solutions to simplify reporting and improve the form and make it user friendly.

Agenda item 4 Progress report on activities carried out to implement the Biodiversity and Ecosystems core theme since the Fourteenth meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points

5. The Meeting welcomed with appreciation the progress report presented by the Secretariat on the many, varied activities undertaken since the 14th Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points and acknowledged the work of SPA/RAC in implementing the Programme of Work, despite the difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic during the period.
6. The meeting acknowledged the continuous commitment of the Secretariat and encouraged it to strengthen existing synergies with relevant regional partners to achieve regional objectives under the SPA/BD protocol, in particular for activities to conserve endangered species and key habitats, monitoring and surveillance of marine and coastal biodiversity, capacity-building and development of a coherent network of marine protected areas.

Agenda item 5 Conservation of species and habitats

5.1. Updating of the Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea

7. The meeting reviewed and endorsed the draft updated Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans and agreed on its submission, as amended, to the MAP focal points meeting and the Twenty-second Conference of the Parties (COP22) for adoption.

5.2. Updating of the Action Plan for the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemo-synthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark Habitats Action Plan)

8. The meeting recognized the importance of the updated action plan for conservation of dark habitats and the associated species and noted that financial and technical assistance would be necessary to implement the provisions of the plan in several countries. It stressed the importance of multisectoral cooperation in deep-sea conservation and called for strengthening of cooperation among SPA/RAC and its partners on conservation and sustainable use of the high seas and the deep-sea environment.

9. The meeting reviewed and approved the draft updated action plan for the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemo-synthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark Habitats Action Plan) and invited SPA/RAC to submit it, as amended, to the MAP focal points meeting and to COP22 for adoption.

5.3. First elements to elaborate the List of Reference of Pelagic Habitat Types in the Mediterranean Sea

10. In considering the first elements proposed for the List of Reference of Pelagic Habitat Types in the Mediterranean Sea, the meeting (i) invited SPA/RAC to take into account, as appropriate, written comments received from the focal points on the subject in amending working document WG 502/7, and (ii) endorsed the proposal of the secretariat and agreed to its submission to the meeting of MAP focal points and to COP 22 with a recommendation to establish a multidisciplinary group of experts to elaborate the List for consideration by COP 23.

5.4. Ballast water management strategy for the Mediterranean Sea: 2022–2027

11. The meeting welcomed the draft Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022–2027) prepared by REMPEC in cooperation with SPA/RAC and reviewed by the Fourteenth Meeting of REMPEC focal points and agreed to its submission to the next meeting of MAP focal points and COP 22 for adoption.

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 2021

12. The meeting welcomed the report of the AGEM and acknowledged with appreciation the work of the secretariat and the AGEM during the period 2020–2021.

13. The meeting highlighted the role of the AGEM in providing scientific and technical advice to the Contracting Parties and to the secretariat with regard to advancing marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean region and recommended that the mandate of its members be extended to cover 2022–2023. The meeting also recommended that the terms of reference and the programme of the AGEM be aligned with the MPA and OECM agenda in the Mediterranean for the forthcoming period.

6.1.1 Criteria for inclusion of Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) in the Directory of Mediterranean SPAs

14. The meeting welcomed establishment of the Directory of Mediterranean SPAs and the proposed definition of a SPA and thanked SPA/RAC and AGEM for their valuable work on the matter.

15. The meeting proposed that the SPA Directory covers also the assessment of the effectiveness of conservation measures, in order to strengthen the listed SPAs, especially in terms of management and enforcement and to provide data for the MAPAMED database.

16. The meeting reviewed and endorsed the definition of SPAs and the draft criteria for inclusion of SPAs in the Directory of Mediterranean SPAs and invited SPA/RAC to submit them for the consideration of the next meeting of MAP focal points and COP22.

6.1.2 Guidance on identifying and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) for the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment

17. The meeting welcomed the proposed considerations on OECMs elaborated by the Secretariat and AGEM and invited them to assist the Contracting Parties in using the new concept.

6.2. Post-2020 Regional Strategy for marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean

18. The meeting welcomed and discussed the draft Post-2020 Regional Strategy for marine and coastal protected areas (MCPAs) and OECMs in the Mediterranean and provided comments and proposals to be considered for the revision of the document.

19. The meeting highlighted the importance of aligning the Post-2020 MCPA and OECM Regional Strategy with the Post-2020 SAPBIO targets and activities and particularly those related to protected areas.

20. The meeting endorsed the draft Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean and invited SPA/RAC to submit it to the next MAP focal points meeting and COP22 for adoption.

6.3. List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI List)

6.3.1. Ordinary Periodic Review of SPAMIs

21. The meeting commended the efforts made for the evaluation of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) during the biennium despite the challenging circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and approved the recommendations of the technical advisory

commissions that evaluated the 11 SPAMIs. Therefore, all the 11 evaluated SPAMIs remain in the ordinary evaluation process.

22. The meeting took note of the corrective measures identified and launched by Lebanon and Tunisia for their respective SPAMIs included in a period of a provisional nature by COP 21, and commended the efforts made by both countries and the support provided by SPA/RAC and donors.

23. The meeting took note of the SPAMIs to be reviewed in 2022 (Karaburun Sazan National Marine Park, Albania) and 2023 (Banc des Kabyles Marine Reserve, Algeria; Habibas Islands, Algeria; Calanques National Park, France and Portofino Marine Protected Area, Italy).

6.3.2. Inclusion of areas on the SPAMI List

24. The meeting took note of the information that no proposals had been received for inclusion of areas on the SPAMI List during the intersessional period.

6.3.3. Establishment of a SPAMI Day and a SPAMI Certificate

25. The meeting welcomed the concepts to set up the SPAMI Day and SPAMI Certificate and invited SPA/RAC to submit them to the next MAP focal points meeting and COP22 for adoption.

6.4. Draft guidance document for the identification and designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas in relation to SPAMIs

26. The meeting welcomed, as a useful, practical tool, the draft guidance for identifying and designating Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas in relation to SPAMIs, prepared by REMPEC in cooperation with SPA/RAC and reviewed by the Fourteenth Meeting of REMPEC focal points.

Agenda item 7: Status of implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Roadmap

7.1. Implementation of the second phase (2019–2021) of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP - Biodiversity and non-indigenous species) in the framework of the EcAp Roadmap

27. The Meeting acknowledged the progress made in implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), related to the biodiversity cluster, in the framework of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Roadmap, including mobilization of national experts through the informal online working group and the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON).

28. The Meeting endorsed the (i) “updated protocols for benthic habitats” and (ii) the “monitoring and assessment scales, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values related to marine mammals and marine turtles”, emphasizing their importance for preparation of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR). It encouraged the Secretariat to amend the “monitoring and assessment scales, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values on non-indigenous species” with the thematic informal online working group before its submission to the next CORMON meeting (2022) for consideration.

29. The Meeting reviewed the draft revised guidance fact sheet for IMAP Common Indicator 6 related to non-indigenous species and agreed on its submission to the 8th EcAp Coordination Group Meeting for endorsement.

7.2. Status of implementation of the ODYSSEA project on Mediterranean observatories

30. The Meeting took note of the document ODYSSEA project: Opportunities for supporting the IMAP through integrated marine observing systems, capacity-building and information services. It expressed its appreciation for the support provided to development of numerous ocean observatories around the Mediterranean and the engagement of several Parties in the initiative and requested the Secretariat to strengthen existing synergies with other useful data sources for the 2023 MED QSR.

7.3. Status of implementation of the GEF Adriatic project on EcAp and MSP

31. The meeting expressed its appreciation for the work and results achieved in the GEF Adriatic project, which contribute to implementation of the IMAP and marine spatial planning (MSP) processes under the Barcelona Convention in the Adriatic Sea and particularly in Albania and Montenegro.

Agenda item 8: Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAP BIO)

32. The meeting took note of the conclusions and recommendations of the 8th Meeting of SAPBIO national correspondents held on 22 June 2021. The meeting welcomed synergies with CBD post 2020 GBF and mandated the Secretariat to align this document where appropriate, once the CBD GBF is adopted.

33. The meeting reviewed and endorsed sections 1 to 5 of the document UNEP/MED WG.502/17 Rev.1 and established a working group to review the remaining sections of the document. The working group will meet online on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning (1-2 July 2021). The meeting agreed that the focal points will provide the Secretariat, by email before the meeting of the working group, with their written comments and remarks in relation to Annex II (Correspondences of the Post-2020 SAPBIO Objectives and Targets with international biodiversity-related frameworks), Annex IV (Post-2020 SAPBIO National Correspondents terms of reference) and Annex V (Post-2020 SAPBIO Advisory Committee terms of reference). The Secretariat will prepare a consolidated version of the revised draft document and circulate it to the focal points for endorsement as an annex to the report of the 15th Meeting of the SPA/BD focal points, with a view of submitting it to the next MAP focal points meeting and COP 22 for adoption.

Agenda item 9: Draft Programme of work of SPA/RAC for the biennium 2022–2023

34. The meeting congratulated the Secretariat on the quality of the document and welcomed the ambitious draft programme of work of SPA/RAC for the biennium 2022–2023.

35. The meeting made some comments and suggestions on the programme of work, which SPA/RAC will forward to the MAP Secretariat for inclusion in the relevant draft decision to be submitted to the COP 22.