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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 2022-2023

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 2022-2023

Note:

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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 2022-2023

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. 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).
3. The 16 independent specialists were designated in 2020 by the SPA/BD Focal Points for a period of two years (2020-2021). This period was extended until the end of 2023 by the last (15th) meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (videoconference, 23-25 June 2021). The representatives of the partner organizations' scientific bodies were designated by the relevant organizations.

II. Report on the AGEM activities during the interim period

II.1. Third meeting of AGEM

4. The first meeting of AGEM for the biennial period 2022-2023, i.e., the third meeting of AGEM, was organized by teleconference on 1 March 2022, in presence of 14 of its members. The report of the AGEM meeting is presented in the information document UNEP/MED WG.548/Inf.8.
5. The meeting was aimed at: (i) discussing and agreeing on the outputs of the working group on coherence (WG-Coherence); (ii) providing guidance on 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 - particularly the OECM strategic pillar - and on the development of its evaluation and monitoring framework; and (iii) discussing and agreeing on the programme of work of AGEM for the 2022-2023 period.

Outputs of WG-Coherence

6. Based on a literature review and the working group discussion, the WG-Coherence developed a document entitled "Coherence in Mediterranean MPAs: Conditions and recommendations". This output is intended to provide a reflection on defining and measuring ecological coherence of MPA networks and includes the following sections: (i) criteria for an MPA system to be coherent and connected, (ii) enabling conditions to ensure those criteria are met, and (iii) recommendations to decision-makers.

7. The “Coherence in Mediterranean MPAs: Conditions and recommendations” document was discussed and reviewed by AGEM. The final document appears in the information document UNEP/MED WG.548/Inf.9.

8. The document will be published and widely disseminated through the SPA/RAC website and other channels.

Guidance on the implementation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean

9. Considering its role in supporting the Secretariat and Contracting Parties to progress with the implementation of the ambitious Post-2020 Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs, AGEM provided the following recommendations:

- Communication and guidance to countries:

10. AGEM recommended to the Secretariat to have more intense and tighter communication with the countries to push forward the implementation of the MCPA and OECM Strategy, possibly through expert visits and face-to-face meetings with governmental stakeholders (political and technical), to explain how to implement the strategy and what is required for its implementation. It was even proposed to have a first discussion under the Chatham House Rule, so that people can speak openly and freely about the root causes for not moving forward. Some partners could facilitate such dialogue.

11. AGEM underlined the fact that it's important to support all Contracting Parties in achieving the objectives and targets under the strategy and that “no country should be left behind”. Special support may be required to assist the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Institutional responsibilities and partnerships are also important elements in implementing the strategy and would require financial and technical resources.

- Building on positive experiences from the less advanced countries:

12. AGEM recommended to highlight the advances and achievements of Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, which are in many respects more advanced than Northern countries (e.g., the proportion of management plans and strictly protected areas, experience in co-management), and enable building on and scaling up of such examples.

- Communication with donors, implementing agencies and regional/international organizations:

13. AGEM recommended to consider informing and influencing donors (including private donors) investment priorities, and enhance their complementarities, based on the Barcelona Convention's interactions with national stakeholders and knowledge about the Mediterranean Southern and Eastern countries' problems and concerns. It was proposed to convene a high-level meeting involving high-level country representatives and key donors (e.g., UNDP, World Bank and other GEF implementing agencies) to discuss about what is needed to move forward. Such a meeting can also support in enhancing coordination and complementarities of the donors' investments. AGEM could provide some elements to inform the discussion.

- Adopting a systemic thinking:

14. AGEM emphasized the need for all the involved actors to shift towards adopting a systemic thinking. So far, conservations (and investments) on MPAs have been largely approached on a project-by-project and site-by-site basis, with very little investment in institutional capacity and very little thinking on how to go from the bottom up. Shifting toward thinking and designing the system of both MPAs and OECMs would enable identifying the most critical gaps and provide better guidance on implementing the strategy.

- Providing simple and clear guidance:

15. AGEM highlighted the importance of providing guidance to the countries in implementing the strategy with enough details to be practical, but without being prescriptive. Guidance or technical assistance could be provided to support countries develop national implementation plans or road maps, considering their particular challenges and specificities. AGEM members could provide technical support in guiding the countries that request it.

16. In addition, simple guidelines on novel elements of the strategy could be developed, providing detailed steps and milestones. Every country should be able to adapt such guidelines slightly according to its particular needs. The model of the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD's) 2004 Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) has been acknowledged as a possible inspiration. It was also proposed to organize consultation meetings with some experts to explain the strategy and to see what the needed actions in the concerned country are.

Guidance on the OECM strategic pillar

17. AGEM members reflected on the potential sectors that could be responsible for OECMs in the Mediterranean. These comprise: fisheries, energy (oil, gas and wind farms), shipping/maritime transport, cultural heritage, and possibly military navy areas, as well as conservation sites that could qualify as OECMs if they are not counted as protected areas at the national level, such as Ramsar sites and Biosphere Reserves.

18. AGEM recommended that the coastal area should be also considered beyond the strict marine surface, as per the definitions under the Barcelona Convention. This may require revising the scope of the regional Database for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (MAPAMED) to ensure all relevant areas are accounted for.

19. AGEM recommended that countries should start OECM assessments from existing measures and assess their compliance with the CBD criteria, before the identification of complementary measures, as needed.

20. AGEM stressed the need of having a Mediterranean workshop on OECMs involving the various stakeholders. The main objectives of the workshop should be (i) to reflect on what should constitute a biodiversity outcome for an OECM, with some clear examples, taking into account the specificities of the Mediterranean context, and (ii) to have a consistent and harmonious way of considering OECMs in the region (based on voluntary Mediterranean case studies to be identified). The SPA Criteria adopted by COP 22 could be helpful in providing guidance in that respect; and Annexes II and III to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) and the Barcelona Convention Reference List of Mediterranean Habitat Types could be at the core of the minimum requirements for OECM biodiversity outcomes.

21. The AGEM proposed that the SPA/BD Focal Points should play a role of facilitation and coordination at national level (including providing the useful contacts of relevant sectors representatives and contact persons). As a starting point for such a process, SPA/RAC is requested to develop a scoping questionnaire on OECMs to be shared with the countries.

Guidance on the development of an evaluation and monitoring framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean

22. AGEM requested SPA/RAC to prepare an overview of data and resources available, including reporting requirements, indicators and data in the framework of:
- the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO);
 - the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP);
 - the Barcelona Convention Reporting System (BCRS);
 - the European Union (EU) Biodiversity Strategy processes;
 - the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) reporting;
 - the CBD Post-2020 Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF);
 - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
 - Regional Seas contribution to the GBF; and
 - the zero draft of the MCPA-OECM strategy indicators, mid-term and final targets (drafted in 2021 during the strategy elaboration process).
23. AGEM also suggested aligning, where relevant, the evaluation and monitoring framework with the ongoing work on management effectiveness indicators in the EU's Natura 2000 network of protected areas.
24. AGEM recommended to have the evaluation and monitoring framework focused on the minimum requirement of indicators to ensure that the strategy's objectives and achievements are effectively monitored; and to involve the SPA/BD Focal Points since the early stages of its development.
25. AGEM agreed to establish a dedicated working group on evaluation and monitoring (WG-E&M) formed by volunteer members, to focus on the development of the EMF, before validating it within the whole group.

Programme of work of AGEM for the 2022-2023 period

26. During its third meeting, AGEM agreed on a programme of work for the period 2022-2023. This indicative programme of work is included in [Annex I](#) to this document.
27. It is to be highlighted that the activities related to the OECMs have not started within the expected timeframe and that their implementation should be activated during the second half of 2023.

II.2. Development of a draft Evaluation and Monitoring Framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean

28. After the adoption by CBD COP 15 (Montreal, Canada, 7-19 December 2022) of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework as well as the Monitoring framework for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the Secretariat was able to compile a comprehensive background document to help the AGEM working group members to discuss and develop the evaluation and monitoring framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean.
29. Two meetings of the AGEM WG-E&M working group were held on 31 March 2023 and 5 April 2023, by teleconference, and led to the discussion and development of a draft Evaluation and Monitoring Framework. The draft was circulated for review and endorsement by all the AGEM members, before being submitted by the Secretariat for informal consultation with the SPA/BD Focal Points (teleconference, 18 April 2023).
30. The resulting draft Evaluation and Monitoring Framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean is submitted to this meeting for review and endorsement in the working document UNEP/MED WG.548/12.

II.3. Forthcoming steps

31. 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 (especially the activities related to OECMs) under the facilitation of the Secretariat and with a close contribution from the Contracting Parties and relevant partner organizations.
 - Convene the 2023 annual AGEM (fourth) meeting during the second half of 2023.
 - Review the AGEM terms of reference, so that they fit with the terms and planning of the Post-2020 MCPA and OECM Strategy and its future Evaluation and Monitoring Framework; and use them to renew (wholly or partially) the composition of the AGEM group for the forthcoming period (starting in 2024), in close consultation with the SPA/BD Focal Points.
32. AGEM is a group of individuals who volunteer their time to support the SPA/RAC Secretariat and Contracting Parties. To better harness the potential of AGEM to provide such support, effective and timely planning of its activities is highly recommended. The Secretariat is advised to consider planning for activities that require AGEM support with at least 3 months in advance of the deadline to enable the effective participation of the experts.

Annex 1: Programme of work of AGEM for the period 2022-2023

Activity	Responsible	Expected deliverable	Timeline of implementation 2022-2023
<p>A 1: Develop an evaluation and monitoring framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs, using to the extent possible existing monitoring tools in the region in particular those established under UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention as well as in the framework of SDG, Post-2020 Biodiversity and related target monitoring</p>	<p>WG-E&M, AGEM, Secretariat (SPA/RAC)</p>	<p>D 1: An evaluation and monitoring framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ March 2022: AGEM third meeting: setting-up a working group (volunteer members). ▪ March 2022: setting up of a work/meeting schedule. ▪ March-April 2022: Secretariat prepares an overview about data and resources available, including reporting requirements, data, indicators (Post-2020 SAPBIO, IMAP, Barcelona Convention Reporting System (BCRS), CBD reporting, SDGs, ongoing CBD GBF, EU Biodiversity strategy processes, Regional Seas contribution to GBF, ...) ▪ April-September 2022: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Preparation of an outline/format in consultation with SPA/BD Focal Points; 2) preparation of a draft evaluation and monitoring framework. <p><i>*Important milestones: SBSTTA 24: Geneva, 14-29 March 2022; CBD COP 15: September-October 2022 (TBC)</i></p> ▪ October 2022: discussion and review of the draft evaluation and monitoring framework at the AGEM fourth meeting (October 2022). ▪ November 2022-January 2023: online consultation with SPA/BD Focal Points. ▪ February-March 2023: finalization of the draft evaluation and monitoring framework. ▪ May 2023: submission of the draft evaluation and monitoring framework to the 16th meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (May 2023). ▪ September 2023: submission of the draft evaluation and monitoring framework to the MAP Focal Points meeting, as reviewed by the SPA/BD Focal Points. ▪ December 2023: submission of the draft evaluation and monitoring framework to the Barcelona Convention COP 23, as reviewed by MAP Focal Points.

<p>A 2: Provide support for SPA/RAC actions on OECMs:</p> <p>A 2-1: Develop a questionnaire to scope progress on OECMs in countries and document their experiences and challenges</p> <p>A 2-2: Organize an introductory webinar to raise awareness and explain the OECM concept to Mediterranean stakeholders (present the results of the scoping questionnaire)</p> <p>A 2-3: Assess objectives and complementarities among different area-based conservation measures in the Mediterranean, and develop recommendations for new designations and measures (including OECMs) to enhance connectivity and effectiveness</p> <p>A 2-4: Organize a workshop on OECMs in the Mediterranean (late 2022) involving SPA/BD Focal Points and other stakeholders</p> <p>A 2-5: Prepare a simplified factsheet illustrated by key best practices on OECMs and disseminate it widely (website (a dedicated page), social media, meetings, conferences, etc.)</p> <p>A 2-6: Support SPA/RAC in providing guidance to the Contracting Parties on the application of the OECM criteria particularly to ensure maintaining a coherent threshold on biodiversity outcomes</p> <p>A 2-7: Enhance intersectoral dialogue and invite additional experts from other secretariats to AGEM OECM related discussions (particularly GFCM)</p> <p>A 2-8: Collaborate with other processes on OECM in different fora and inform Mediterranean countries on best practices and lessons learned on OECMs. (e.g. IUCN, FAO, etc.)</p>	<p>AGEM, Secretariat (SPA/RAC)</p>	<p>D 2-1: A questionnaire on OECMs to countries and an analysis of the results of the questionnaire</p> <p>D 2-2: Introductory webinar organized</p> <p>A 2-3: Objectives and complementarities among different area-based conservation measures in the Mediterranean assessed and recommendations for new designations and measures (including OECMs) developed</p> <p>D 2-4: Workshop organized and recommendations on the way forward issued</p> <p>A 2-5: Factsheet prepared and disseminated</p> <p>A 2-6: Guidance provided to the Contracting Parties</p> <p>A 2-7: GFCM Secretariat and other relevant organizations invited to AGEM OECM related discussions/meetings</p> <p>A 2-8: Collaboration with other processes and fora maintained and feedback provided to the Mediterranean region</p>	<p>A 2-1 Questionnaire to SPA/BD FPs: March-April 2022 (requesting information on potential OECM involved sectors and related governmental departments/contact persons).</p> <p>A 2-2 AGEM members propose potential OECM case studies in their countries/countries they know about: March-April 2022</p> <p>Webinar (half-day): May-June 2022 (involve sectors other than fisheries; find ways to maximize the participation of targeted stakeholders; present examples, not in-depth case studies).</p> <p>A 2-2' Questionnaire to all stakeholders: June-September 2022 (in-depth, procedure in countries). Relevance of this questionnaire is to be confirmed during the process.</p> <p>A 2-3 Assessing objectives and complementarities among different area-based conservation measures (study): May 2022-March 2023 (discuss its objectives with AGEM) have it finalized after the workshop, to include effectiveness aspects.</p> <p>A 2-4 Workshop on OECMs: December 2022 (involve sectors, including governmental representatives and individual experts; have case studies; link with other experiences, e.g. sustainable blue economy initiatives, discuss the minimum requirements on biodiversity outcomes)</p> <p>A 2-5 Factsheet on best practices: January-March 2023 (after the workshop)</p> <p>A 2-6 Providing guidance to the Contracting Parties: January-December 2023 (based on the results of the regional workshop)</p> <p>A 2-7 Enhance intersectoral dialogue: March 2022-December 2023 (all through the process)</p> <p>A 2-8 collaboration with other processes: January 2022-December 2023 (all through the process)</p>
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<p>A 3: Provide guidance to SPA/RAC in order to have a systemic, efficient and timely implementation of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MCPAs and OECMs</p> <p>A 3-1: Provide directions resulting in outlining an implementation plan for the Strategy</p>	<p>AGEM, Secretariat (SPA/RAC)</p>	<p>D 3-1: An implementation plan outlines and directions set up for SPA/RAC action</p>	<p>A 3-1: March 2022-December 2023.</p> <p>At national level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communicate and have discussions with individual countries; Plan expert visits and meetings with individual countries (decision-makers, technical staff and other stakeholders, including donors). ▪ Search for root causes. ▪ Shift towards a system thinking. ▪ Link the implementation to available means (institutional, legal, capacities, financial, etc.). ▪ Provide guidance for setting up national implementation plans (with milestones and objectives). <p>At regional level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Find opportunities to inform and influence donors and other regional/international organizations. ▪ Have a regional consultation meeting on the Strategy details. ▪ AGEM: Input to the funding strategy, provide key priority for donors' investment to enhance means of implementation. <p>Main outputs:</p> <p>1- <u>Regional level</u>: means of implementation/input for the funding strategy: orientation key priorities for donors' investment in the Mediterranean.</p> <p>2- <u>National level</u>: develop a guidance document for implementation at national level.</p>
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