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**Agenda item 12: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of RAC/SPA (1985-2015)**

**Outlines of a Communication Strategy for RAC/SPA**

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## **Foreword**

The present document was prepared for the Twelfth Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs that will be held in Athens (Greece) from 25 to 29 May 2015, in the presence of the representatives of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and regional organisations working on the preservation of the Mediterranean marine environment.

The document presents a summary of the diagnosis undertaken for the preparation of a communication strategy and the main orientations for its elaboration. It does not go into detail about organizing the proposed structures. The processes as well as the management and organisation methods will be set out in the coming stages of the study and put together as a “toolkit” to be used in workshops for the Centre’s staff.



## 1. Summary of the diagnosis

Historically, in the RAC/SPA's budgetary structure, communication has not had any special section devoted to it and the communication function has neither been technically structured nor managed.

In this field, it has been usual to meet the needs appearing in the implementation of activities by using the running (functioning) expenses from various budgets.

This lack of means (that seems not to be specific solely to RAC/SPA in the UNEP/MAP system) has created habits that have acted as a brake on the search for the Centre to have a wider visibility and bigger audiences for and dissemination of its work and activities.

The first communication material (mainly printed material) was seen more as a materialization of the "outputs" (work, studies and papers at symposiums, colloquiums, meetings etc.) to be handed over to the Contracting Parties, partners, institutions etc. than as communication material to be circulated by listing the concerned publics. The only publics identified were therefore those of the sphere where the RAC/SPA staff worked and where its activities were located (MAP's publics). With the development of activities, these publics widened to include the experts, researchers, technicians, and lawyers who the Centre worked with and those encountered at symposiums, colloquiums and other meetings. But the lack of a real communication strategy and financial means restricts the creation and organisation of files and of dissemination structures, and indeed data management generally.

With the development of new information technologies, RAC/SPA has also developed data management tools and created its own web material (sites, newsletters, social network pages, etc.) and it is always the staff who have been responsible for these new activities using the means at their disposal.

Communication activities exist (making print and web material, data management). They are carried on by RAC/SPA staff with its empirical knowledge, without any help or advice from professionals in the matter and, especially, without financial means for their development.

However, an entire important part of communication activities remains to be carried out: firstly, the need to get the Centre better known and organize its public relations. RAC/SPA has produced much work of high scientific quality and several international scientists in the field (including scientists outside the Mediterranean) have contacted RAC/SPA and stressed the seriousness and the quality of its activities and production. Most of these had been unaware of the Centre and its assignments and had discovered it by pure chance while doing research. This illustrates the need for RAC/SPA to look for and identify all the concerned target-publics and go beyond those of the usual sphere of activities where it seems to operate in a 'closed circuit'.

Also, RAC/SPA should do everything necessary to fulfil one of its assignments, i.e. information, awareness and education for the wider public. This has particularly suffered from the absence of communication structures.

As for the points previously raised, it is only within such structures that action strategies and communication plans for the various targets of the wider public and other target publics yet to be identified can be elaborated.

With the development of RAC/SPA's activities, with the elapsed time and with the past experience, an urgent need has been felt to find permanent solutions to come up with suitable financial means that will allow lasting structural bases to be created to organise RAC/SPA's communication function.

To conclude, we must stress that organizing a communication function should enable RAC/SPA to:

- possess tools for managing, developing and mastering communication strategies and techniques;
- lose none of the data of every kind that has accumulated since it was set up, especially the mass of past work and activities in different action plans, programmes and projects (insufficiently known about, little disseminated, and often unpublished) that must be listed and put at the disposal of the concerned public;
- organize and manage the Centre's public relations (PR);
- provide the best possible conditions for making (print and digital) material, for the promotion, dissemination and archiving of work and activities now and in the future.

## **2. Outlines for elaborating a communication strategy**

### **2.1. Identifying RAC/SPA communication actions, topics and themes**

The actions, topics and themes for which the suggested structures will be responsible are:

- **Enhancing RAC/SPA's visibility and identity**

Subjects and arguments exist. They are mainly the high level and quality of the Centre's production and services, and the references of achievements and results obtained in the various programmes, action plans and projects. These are important arguments to be used for making the Centre, its production, and its assignments and activities better known. This involves several actions, such as:

- creating dossiers on the organisation, management and follow-up of the Centre's public relations, not underestimating the press-media dossier (magazines and journalists specialising in research, the environment, the Mediterranean...);
- the need to list all the Centre's production to make a complete catalogue that will be organised, put on line, and promoted;
- the need to improve data management and file elaboration .

This last activity requires a serious programme of reorganisation to structure, put together, file and manage all the data, including the Centre's works and production, scientific, technical, legal and iconographic data, and also to bring together all the scattered data stored in the various computer tools of the Centre's staff.

By mastering the major evolution and development of the new information and communication technologies, the entire body of data to be gathered and organised could enhance the existing databases, thus helping strengthen the Centre's visibility.

Concerning the visual identity of the Centre, here are two suggestions before getting onto the issue of the Graphic Charter:

- The first concerns graphic research work to propose changing the logo,

- The second would be to study the opportunity of creating a sort of 'pseudo' identity (preferentially Franglais) that evokes the Centre's activities better than the mere acronym 'RAC/SPA' and 'CAR/ASP'. Of course, these two acronyms and the official names will remain what they are, the 'pseudo' identity being an addition.

These suggestions once studied and either adopted or rejected, what remains is to take stock and take in hand what has been more or less well done for at least five years concerning the Graphic Charters for print, web and other materials to harmonise and perfect a complete, definitive Graphic Charter that will lay down rules for putting the Centre's visual identity on all the materials the public comes into contact with.

As to the Graphic Charter, remodelling and harmonising the websites and other on-line materials will help improve the identity and visibility of the Centre.

- **RAC/SPA's information, awareness and education missions**

The summary of the diagnosis showed the importance of elaborating a strategy for perfecting and carrying out communication action plans for these RAC/SPA missions which would be impossible without a special budget or communication structures.

It is useful to state that all the communication actions and plans envisaged for these RAC/SPA assignments must be crafted working closely with MAP components, as regards both funding and achievement. Similarly, it is vital to have the collaboration of the Focal Points of the countries where these actions are being put into effect. The role of the Focal Point is essential for mobilizing the concerned institutions and machinery (media, environment, teaching etc.) in the concerned country, which will be the intermediaries for the actions.

Several possibilities could be considered for this kind of communication action. This can be actions on the particular theme of an activity carried out in one of the concerned countries, or even general themes. This can also be a 'ready-made' plan with an itinerant programme including debates and conferences in the schools, colleges and universities, debates or even TV and radio programmes and materials (leaflets, brochures, posters, DVDs, CDs etc.). A great variety of communication plans and actions can be prepared according to the means and budgets obtained in collaboration with interested member countries, with donors etc. If these actions can take shape, it would be useful to plan for a range of materials, print and digital, offering messages about the basic themes, suited to the various age groups of the wider public.

## **2.2. Identifying RAC/SPA's publics and lines of communication**

- **Identifying publics**

It has been stated above that the target publics identified are those of the sphere where the RAC/SPA staff evolves. But it is vital to classify them by typology to produce the fullest and most detailed data files possible, showing who does what and how to permanently update this data.

In this sphere, we have to draw a distinction among publics: the UNEP/MAP institutions, the Contracting Parties, the partners, the partners in the wider sense (NGOs), the various professional actors/organisations (fishing, littoral, tourism, maritime transport etc.), donors, scientific experts,

researchers, technicians, lawyers working with the Centre, and other researchers, academics and technicians met at symposiums, conferences and other events.

For this public of researchers, scientists, university technicians, lawyers, collaborating or not with RAC/SPA, it is useful to obtain data from the bodies, centres, universities, establishments etc. of which they are members or where they work. For member countries, this data search can be undertaken with the help of the Focal Points who can also provide data on their countries' opinion leaders and on the specialist media and reviews which might at least be interested in the newsletters, which ought also to interest the professional organisations in the marine and coastal sectors and the environmental NGOs in the partner countries.

In the scientific and technical sectors, the search for new target publics must extend to the international sphere of research centres, universities, networks of actors in the Marine Protected Areas field (including those outside the Mediterranean) and, naturally, the specialist media and press.

This data search concerning target publics involves all the staff. There must be a reflex to systematize this data collection and updating.

It is useless to repeat the importance of the recommendations appearing earlier in this document concerning data management and file elaboration. But on this point of identifying target publics, we must stress how important it is that these tools for the data collection activity should be improved to quickly enrich organised, user-friendly files.

#### **- RAC/SPA's lines of communication**

Identifying communication lines should enable the proposed structures to better organize their activities and management of data and to refine the various approaches for carrying out their activities.

Each communication line action identified will obey certain formulation rules of form and content (content of messages, documentary and iconographic research, choice of material, respect for the rules of the Graphic Charter, choice of outside actors and providers, circulation etc.). These approaches, rules, processes and constraints differ according to the activities that must be carried out, the target publics concerned and the dossiers to be managed.

#### **Thus we can make out 3 major lines of communication:**

##### **• Institutional communication**

This represents the communication about the brand image and the visibility that promote a favourable picture of the Centre and its achievements, production and activities. Its main materials are the main website and the programme and project websites, newsletters and other pages, on-line videos and information, and all the print material that can introduce the Centre and its programmes, projects and action plans. It is also everything touching its visibility in the concrete and figurative senses. Visibility as such means the visual identity whose rules are set by the Graphic Charter so that on all materials a homogeneous visual identity and a single 'brand name' appear. Visibility in its figurative sense means all the Centre's and its representatives' presence in relations with the MAP components and structures, and also the dissemination of all the communication material and their presence at every kind of event (symposiums, forums, meetings, debates, conferences, etc.) and their presence in the media. Public relations' management will guarantee the follow-up. Once guaranteed at the Centre, institutional



communication could also be extended, depending on the resources available, to improve the visibility of the focal points in the countries.

- **‘Product’ communication**

This is the most important form of communication, involving boosting the Centre’s activities, work and productions. It is also the most important in terms of volume and time of work. It involves editing and putting online the Centre’s work and productions. It involves ensuring their dissemination and promotion. It involves elaborating, designing and updating sites, writing newsletters and other online material and pages. It involves responsibility for elaborating strategies and preparing and carrying out communication actions and campaigns.

- **Events communication**

This is communication that (partly) manages the public events organised by the Centre: the symposiums, colloquiums, meetings, debates, and also the stands, participation at fairs or exhibitions etc. It involves systematically being responsible for ‘an information point’ to ensure promotion of the Centre at all symposiums, colloquiums and other meetings where the Centre participates, with all the necessary material (leaflets, brochures, posters, CDs, DVDs, derivative items and signage material).

### **2.3. Identifying needs**

- **Financial needs**

There is an urgent need to create ‘communication’ sections with substantial budget items when elaborating the different budgets, those of permanent activities, mainly the RAC/SPA operating budget, i.e. MTF, and those of more temporary activities, i.e. those of programmes, action plan, projects and others. The principle is that permanent budgets should bear the cost of creating and running permanent structures likely to manage and organise the communication function. The budgets for temporary activities should bear the costs of making the back-up materials and communication actions managed by structures.

Different working leads can be envisaged for funding. This is the responsibility of the RAC/SPA leaders and the UNEP/MAP leaders and experts, partners, Contracting Parties, donors etc. Even it is funds consuming at its beginning, the communication strategy will be, once being implemented, a great support to efforts to mobilize funds for the Centre projects, in particular for providing assistance to countries in implementing the SPA/BD Protocol.

What is possible, within the lines of the present study, is to assess the operating costs of the permanent structures that the study proposes (fixed costs).

Assessing the costs of achieving, promoting and circulating projects’, programmes’ and action plans’ activities, work and productions could be seriously and professionally done, when the content of the temporary activities is known, on the basis of technical features and determining parameters (as regards topics, targets and details of work and activities) to elaborate and assess the communication plans of each of these projects, plans, programmes etc. (proportional costs).

- **Human resources**

Starting the structures to be set up could and must be done with officers who already have some knowledge and are more or less specialists in carrying on the concerned activities. Professional advisers could join them, to coach them for a given period to set up the organisation, methods and processes of the concerned activities.

**3. How to manage and organize the communication function at RAC/SPA?**

The communication function is a function of direction and management whose budgets and options are basically determined by the Director. This is particularly true for RAC/SPA, given the importance of institutional communication, public relation and the role of the RAC/SPA director in relations with the MAP components, partners, donors, member countries, Contracting Parties, etc.

Thus structure suggestions will involve creating:

- **A communication unit**, under the direct supervision of the Centre's Director, that will ensure the execution and management of the activities set out in the 3 above-mentioned lines of communication. This unit will function under the authority of the Centre's Director, ensuring management and follow-up of public relation. It will be closely linked to those programme officers responsible for the plans, programmes and projects for which it will provide all the material for communication (print, web, digital), without, however, taking unilateral decisions regarding the scientific and technical content of the information that will remain under the full responsibility of the above-mentioned programme officers. It will act as a communication and public relation service.
- **A data committee**, chaired by the Director of the Centre and including those plans, programmes and projects officers and the person in charge of data management. This committee will meet regularly in order to determine, decide, monitor and coordinate the actions planned, data management, and the development of web material and tools, regarding their architecture, consistency and links. The committee will make sure computer material and requirements (hard and soft) are developed and data is kept up, made secure and protected. This committee will ask its members to have a perfect knowledge of decisions taken and make sure these are enforced. It will thus do its best to provide conditions that enable the Centre to possess effective and up to date means to confront the ever-growing, rapidly-growing, development in this field of new information and communication technologies, for very soon it will be impossible to do without them.