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Synthetic Note on the status of implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol)

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(UN Environment/MAP)
Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC)
Boulevard du Leader Yasser Arafat
B.P. 337 - 1080 Tunis Cedex - Tunisia
E-mail: car-asp@spa-rac.org

Synthetic Note on the status of implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol)

Foreword

This document is a brief synthesis of the information provided by the Contracting Parties about the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol, in particular through the on line reporting system of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. The synthesis covers mainly the reporting period from January 2014 to December 2015. However, with the view of building a general picture of the progress made so far in implementing the SPA/BD Protocol, information from previous reporting periods were also considered.

At the time when this synthesis was finalized, six Parties submitted their reports (official submission) and seven national reports were available as working drafts.

The online reporting system set for the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols is based on the reporting format adopted at the Fifteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Decision IG 17/3). It aims at facilitating the reporting activities by the Contracting Parties under article 26 of the Barcelona Convention. For the SPA/BD protocol, the online reporting is based on the provisions of article 23 of the Protocol.

Synthesis about the Status of implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol

The Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) was open for signature on 10 June 1995 in Barcelona and from 11 June 1995 to 10 June 1996 in Madrid. It replaces the Protocol of 1982 concerning Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas (SPA Protocol) in the relationship among the Parties to both Protocols.

The SPA/BD Protocol entered into force in 19 December 1999. As at April 2017, 18 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are also Parties to the SPA/BD protocol and 4 are Parties to the SPA Protocol of 1982.

From the entry into force of the SPA/BD Protocol, most of the Mediterranean countries strengthened their action in relation to the conservation of marine and coastal natural sites, the preservation of endangered or threatened species and tackling threats to Mediterranean biodiversity.

Conservation of marine and coastal natural sites

Most of the Mediterranean countries compiled lists of natural sites of conservation interest. As for the previous reporting period, this was mainly within the Natura 2000 framework for the European Union member countries, while other Mediterranean countries kept benefiting from the assistance provided by international organisations to carry out inventories of marine and coastal sites with the view of setting up and/or strengthening their national network of protected areas.

During the reporting period (2014-2015), some Mediterranean countries issued new regulations aimed at improving the process for protected area planning and management. We also observed a small global evolution in the efforts made to reinforce existing marine and coastal natural sites through management and policy.

This said, it's been noticed that the Mediterranean MPAs still suffer from weaknesses in their management, in particular because of the lack of administrative management plans and financial resources. However, it appears from the information provided in the reporting systems that Contracting Parties were seriously tackling this issue, since many countries reported that new management plans were under preparation, revision or implementation for some of their MPAs. Regional projects coordinated by SPA/RAC and its partner organisations are providing assistance in this context.

From the 19th ordinary meeting of the Contracting Parties (February, 2016), the List of SPAMIs (Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance) includes 34 sites belonging to 10 countries and one transboundary site involving 3 countries and extending beyond their national jurisdictions. During the reporting period, two new SPAs were included in the SPAMI List, belonging to two new countries.

Although a significant emphasis was provided to the establishment of MPAs on open sea areas in the Mediterranean, the Pelagos Sanctuary is still the only Mediterranean MPA that covers zones located in ABNJ. However, consultation processes were made among concerned countries to prepare for the establishment of open sea MPAs in Alboran Sea, Sicily Channel and Adriatic Sea. These processes and the work done in the Mediterranean for the identification of EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas) benefited mutually.

Preservation of endangered or threatened species

The information provided by the Parties through the on-line reporting system of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols shows that most of the Mediterranean countries have (i) enhanced knowledge and organised trainings on the protected species (ii) enacted appropriate regulations protecting these species. The information about the actual enforcement of these regulations is however vague and cannot be used to draw conclusions as for their efficiency.

The countries directly concerned by the implementation of the Action Plan for the management of Mediterranean Monk Seal declared that they were undertaking a series of measures for the species, in particular:

- Granting a protection status for the species
- Establishment of MPAs covering important Monk Seal habitats
- Inventory of breeding caves and other habitats of importance for the species
- Programmes for data collection and programmes for awareness raising

Greece and Turkey, which are the countries with the largest Monk Seal populations in the Mediterranean, declared that they developed action plans for the species.

The measures taken in relation to the Action plan for the conservation of marine turtles relate mainly to the protection and management of nesting beaches. Although most of the countries declared that the turtle species are protected by law in their waters and that they were implementing measure to reduce incidental catches in turtles, the species remain poorly protected at sea since many turtle critical habitats are not granted appropriate conservation measures, in particular the feeding and breeding zones, migration routes, etc.

Also, there is a lack in steps taken to reduce by-catch of this species. Nevertheless, important awareness raising programmes are implemented in the countries with important occurrence of turtles, with significant contribution from NGOs. NGOs contribute also in scientific monitoring programmes, in particular regarding stranding, migration, and nesting activity. The country reports show that turtle rescue centres are being implemented in the Mediterranean with no evolution in the number between previous and current reporting periods.

Most of the Mediterranean countries being Parties to the ACCOBAMS Agreement, they agreed that their common obligations towards the Action plan for the conservation of cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea are fulfilled by the implementation of ACCOBAMS (14th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, Portoroz, Slovenia, November 2005). However, it appears from the country reports that National Action Plans for the conservation of cetaceans were not enough developed in most of countries and that the measures undertaken concerning cetacean conservation relate mainly to the monitoring of strandings and raising public awareness. Scientific monitoring activities were reported by some countries, but many gaps in knowledge were reported, in particular, population size, structure and distribution and mitigation of by-catch and depredation in fishing nets.

According to the information provided by countries in their reports about the implementation of the Action plan for the conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea, the marine vegetation species are lacking specialist training programmes and Action Plans in most of the Mediterranean countries. However the Posidonia meadows are protected in all the European Union countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The conservation measures reported by countries regarding the implementation of the Action Plan relate specially to the protections statuses and regulation concerning environmental impact assessments. Some countries declared that they established MPAs to protect Posidonia beds. The mapping of Posidonia meadows is reported as being carried out in some Mediterranean countries. In this context, regional projects provided financial, technical and training assistance to countries with the support of private foundations and European Union funding initiatives.

Concerning the implementation of the Action Plan on cartilaginous fish species, most of reports mentioned that the cartilaginous fish species were protected by Law. Unfortunately, it seems that training programmes for specialists & fishing technicians & managers were almost not undertaken.

For the Action Plan for the conservation of bird species, all the reports of Parties mentioned that bird species are protected by law and protected areas were established to conserve bird species populations and their habitats, in particular within the context of other conservation instruments, such EU Directives, AWEVA Agreement. Only some Parties reported that they developed and implemented Action Plans for one or several of

the bird species appearing in Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol. These Action Plans concern the osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, the Eleonora's falcon *Falco eleonora*, and the Audouin's gull *Larus audouinii*.

In their reports about the implementation of the Action Plan on introductions of species and invasive species in the Mediterranean Sea, most of the Parties mentioned that they have enacted legislation to control the introduction of marine species or transposed in their domestic regulations the pertinent provisions of the relevant international agreements. Mechanisms to monitor the arrival of non-indigenous marine species were in place in some countries. However, the information provided by Parties in the online reporting systems about this Action Plan are vague and cannot be used to draw a clear picture concerning its implementation. Most of the activities undertaken in the region concerning non-indigenous species are done by regional organisations and by some scientists on their personal initiatives.

Bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation

It appears that bilateral cooperation among Parties in relation to the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol has been a bit improved, but is still very low, in particular in the South Mediterranean region. The rare cases of bilateral or multilateral cooperation were reported in relation with the implementation of regional or sub regional projects initiated by international or regional organisations.

Main difficulties and constraints

Reporting on the main difficulties they encountered in implementing the provision of the SPA/BD Protocol, Parties indicated that these difficulties were mainly concerning (in order of relevancy):

- Lack of financial resources
- Lack of technical and scientific capacity
- Complex administrative arrangements
- Intuitional constraints and overlapping of competencies
- Low awareness about the conservation issues.

Conclusion & step forward

The Barcelona Convention Reporting System is a very important tool that allows assessing the evolution of the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol by Contracting Parties. This tool should be filled in by all Contracting Parties in order to allow the convention secretariat to make accurate analysis and to report on the results during the SPA Focal Points Meeting. The fact that several Contracting Parties do not comply with this exercise at a continuous basis and do not submit their reports in due time, does not allow SPA/RAC to do this reporting exercise in a relevant and efficient manner.

On the other hand, two Action Plans (the last adopted ones: the Action Plan for the conservation of the coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea (2008) and the Action Plan for the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemosynthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (2014)) are still not listed in the reporting system and Parties cannot report about their activities.