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Agenda item 6: Updating of the Reference List of Marine Habitat Types for the Selection of Sites to be included in the National Inventories of Natural Sites of Conservation Interest in the Mediterranean

Draft Classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region

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Introduction

In order to draw up the updated Reference List of Marine Habitat Types, an updated and more comprehensive [draft classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region](#) was elaborated based on :

- Classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region of the Barcelona Convention (1998),
- the schemes of the new EUNIS classification system¹ (Table 1),
- the List of French Mediterranean habitats (Michez et al, 2014),
- the Spanish inventory of marine habitats (Templado et al., 2012),
- the Croatian List of Marine Habitats (Bakran-Petricioli, 2011) and,
- new habitats based on the experts inputs.

Furthermore, the following lists were taken into account:

- the European Red list of marine Habitats in the Mediterranean
- the list compiled by OCEANA, with the contribution of experts on Mediterranean deep-sea habitats, in order to implement the UNGA Resolutions for the protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs)² in the GFCM context.

Given that the habitats that deserve specific attention are those displaying certain features that make them important for conservation and are vulnerable to disturbances, the criteria used for inclusion in the Reference List take into account a series of eight traits that define more accurately this “importance” and “vulnerability”. While they are sometimes correlated, these traits account for different features of the habitats that make them worthy (or not) for protection.

They are partially based on those used in the last edition of the Mediterranean Reference List of marine habitat types (1999) and take into consideration the FAO’s criteria³ for identification of VMEs which were used by OCEANA in order to develop the list of VMEs in the GFCM context.

The present version of the draft classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region specifically addresses deep-sea habitats facing significant adverse impacts from deep-sea fisheries, focusing on geomorphological aspect. This problem should be tackled to have a list clearly defined on the basis of benthic bionomy.

¹ EUNIS is the European Nature Information System and brings together European data on habitat and species among others. It provides the reference information system to assist in the designation of Natura 2000 sites. It was submitted for EIONET consultation in 2015 and could be adopted in 2017.

² United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions 59/25, 61/105 and 64/72.

³ FAO (2009). International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas