

Press Release

Mediterranean countries discuss the conservation of biological diversity in the region

- *The Mediterranean is one of the world's 25 top biodiversity hotspots*
- *Implementation of the Integrated monitoring and assessment programme is a key achievement for the region in order to reach the Good Environmental Status*
- *Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance are crucial to protect the marine and coastal natural heritage*

The Focal Points of the UN Environment/Mediterranean Action Plan Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UN Environment/MAP-SPA/RAC), representing the 21 Mediterranean riparian countries and the European Union, held their 13th meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, from 9 to 12 May 2017. Representatives of four regional institutions and organizations (ACCOBAMS, IUCN-Med, MedPAN and Oceana) were also present at the meeting as observers.

The meeting reviewed technical documents that would be forwarded to the MAP Focal Points meeting for endorsement, then to the 20th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention for adoption in December 2017.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Khalil Attia, SPA/RAC director, who presented the progress achieved by the centre throughout the last two years: “the biennium had been prosperous in terms of activities undertaken. However, Mediterranean biodiversity is facing major challenges and the coming years would be critical at many levels”. Mr. Attia welcomed existing and future collaboration with many organizations, which would help in achieving common regional objectives.

Thanking Egypt for its kind hospitality, Mr. Gaetano Leone, Coordinator of the UN Environment/MAP highlighted that biodiversity and the ecosystem approach are at the core of the work of the Mediterranean Action Plan system and Mid Term Strategy for 2016-2021. He said: “the improvement of the quality of the marine environment remains the priority objective of the Barcelona Convention, with the commitment to achieve Good Environmental Status and integrate the ecosystem approach in the management of human activities. The situation in the region remains challenging in terms of biodiversity conservation and achieving the global goals for the effective extension and management of marine protected areas. Mediterranean ecosystems continue to be degraded, but with small although relevant steps, we will achieve our common ambitious goal.”

Dr. Mona Mohamed Kamal, Chief Executive Officer of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), said in her welcoming address: “in spite of all efforts, marine biodiversity suffers from various sources of pressure. A greater response is needed, such as implementation of national and regional action plans”. Dr. Mona Mohamed Kamal declared that Egypt had elaborated its national action plans on marine biodiversity monitoring, marine mammals, turtles, non-indigenous species and management of marine protected areas (MPA). Finally, H.E Mr Mohamed Sultan, Governor of Alexandria welcomed the participants to the meeting.

Participants endorsed a number of documents and recommended their submission to the 20th Conference of the Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 20) for adoption. Once adopted, these documents will serve as reference documents to further enhance and improve national policies concerning the conservation of the marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean Sea.

These included an updated Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species listed as endangered and threatened species in the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, as well as proposals to add four Anthozoa species¹, who live mainly in deep-sea zones, to Annex II to the SPA/BD Protocol. The inclusion to the Annex II of these species would encourage the creation of MPAs in deep seas.

Factsheets on the progress of implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) related to Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species (NIS), were also among the documents to be sent to the COP 20 for adoption. That process will allow to regularly quantify how good the status of conservation of the whole Mediterranean environment is.

In addition, two proposals of areas for inclusion in the List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance will be submitted to the COP 20. Those are the Calanques National Park, France, and the Cetaceans Migration Corridor, Spain, once its legal status is established.

During the meeting, SPA/RAC presented its new online tool, “[the Mediterranean Platform on Marine Biodiversity](#)”². The platform has three main features: (i) thematic maps organised in various themes, such as Mediterranean MPA and Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance; (ii) a catalogue, containing the metadata of the 150 layers already included in the platform; and (iii) creating user’s maps by selecting data from the catalogue.

The next focal points meeting for Specially protected areas is expected to be organised in mid-2019.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Photos of the meeting are available here: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskWBBgrJ> and on SPA/RAC Facebook and Twitter pages @SPARACinfos.

The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) of the UN Environment / Mediterranean Action Plan, was established in Tunis in 1985 by decision of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, which entrusted it with responsibility for assessing the situation of natural heritage and assisting the Mediterranean countries to implement the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean ([SPA/BD Protocol](#)).

For more information visit: www.spa-rac.org. For additional information, please contact SPA/RAC secretariat on +216 71 206 649 or at car-asp@rac-spa.org.

¹ *Isidella elongata*, *Dendrophyllia cornigera*, *Dendrophyllia ramea* and *Desmophyllum dianthus*

² <http://data.medchm.net/>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

IMAP and Ecosystem Approach

The Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) aims to lay down the principles for the update of the existing national monitoring and assessment programmes, specially those related to Biodiversity and Non-Indigenous Species in the marine and coastal environment.

The IMAP is implemented in Mediterranean within the framework of the Ecosystem Approach process (EcAp) of the Barcelona Convention that will enable for the first time a quantitative, integrated analysis of the state of the marine and coastal environment, covering biodiversity, non-indigenous species, pollution and marine litter, coast and hydrography, based on common regional indicators, targets and Good Environmental Status (GES) descriptions. The IMAP ultimate goal is to assess the status of the Mediterranean Sea and coast, as a basis for enhanced action.

List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)

The SPAMI's List includes sites which:

- are of importance for conserving the components of biological diversity in the Mediterranean;
- contain ecosystems specific to the Mediterranean area or the habitats of endangered species;
- are of special interest at the scientific, aesthetic, cultural or educational levels.

According to the provisions of the SPA/BD Protocol, all the Parties to the Protocol are committed to respect the protection and conservation measures defined in the proposal for inclusion.

Since the 19th ordinary meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, the SPAMI List includes 34 sites, among which one encompasses an area established on the high sea: the Pelagos Sanctuary for marine mammals.