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Meeting of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries

Madrid, Spain, 28 February – 1 March 2017

Report of the Meeting of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries

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Introduction

1. In accordance with the Programme of Work and Budget 2016-2017 adopted by the 19th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (Barcelona Convention), the meeting of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON), Biodiversity and Fisheries was held from 28 February to 1 March 2017 in the premises of the Puertos del Estado, Madrid, Spain. The meeting was organized by the Regional Activities Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) which served as the meeting secretariat.

Participation

2. The following Contracting Parties were represented at the meeting: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey.

3. The following institutions and organizations were represented at the meeting: the Agreement on the Conservations of Cetaceans in the Black Sea Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS); General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM); Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN-Med); and Mediterranean Organization to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET).

4. The Coordinating Unit and the following components of the Mediterranean Action Plan were represented at the meeting: Blue Plan/RAC, INFO/RAC and PAP/RAC.

5. A complete list of participants is set out in Annex I to the present report.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the meeting

6. The meeting was opened at 9:35 a.m. on 28 February 2017 by Mr. Khalil Attia, Director of SPA/RAC, who welcomed participants and thanked the Government of Spain for its hospitality and support in hosting the meeting. Opening remarks were made by Mr. Jorge Alonso, Spanish Focal Point for SPAs, on behalf of the host country, and Ms. Tatiana Hema, Deputy Coordinator, United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan/Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UN Environment/MAP).

Agenda item 2: Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

Adoption of the agenda

7. The meeting adopted its agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda and the provisional annotated agenda, including the proposed timetable, circulated, respectively, in documents UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.430/1 and UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.430/2/Rev.1. The agenda is reproduced in Annex I of the present report.

Election of officers

8. In accordance with the rules and procedures of meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI), which applied mutatis mutandis to the present meeting, the following officers were elected:

Chairperson: Ms. Jelena KNEZEVIC (Montenegro)
Vice-Chairpersons: Ms. Lara SAMAHA (Lebanon)
Mr. Laurent GUERIN (France)
Rapporteur: Mr. Ibrahim BEN AMER (Libya)

Agenda item 3 Implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP)

9. Under this Agenda Item, the Secretariat presented information on the Ecosystem Approach process, IMAP implementation and the agreed common indicators. It recalled the main objective of the ecosystem approach road map and the key steps to be undertaken in order to achieve the vision of “*A healthy Mediterranean with marine and coastal ecosystems that are productive and biologically diverse for the benefit of present and future generations*”.

a) Current status of national monitoring and assessment programmes on biodiversity and NIS

10. The representatives of the Contracting Parties briefly presented the current status of their relevant national monitoring programmes, highlighting the challenges identified / encountered and the lessons learned from their implementation providing elements about data availability, gaps and the main needs related to the implementation of IMAP at the national level.

11. The various interventions have revealed very significant differences in terms of achievements and availability of resources between the different countries. While some representatives reported satisfactory results in terms of data collection and processing, many others emphasized that the implementation of their national monitoring programmes remained embryonic or encountered many difficulties, due to the lack of technical and financial resources as well as the lack of scientific expertise and adequate equipment. Moreover, the available data were generally limited to coastal waters.

12. It was recognized that the absence of specialized national human resources made regional coordination essential. In this regard, one representative suggested that the mutualisation of resources with neighbouring countries through regional agreements such as the ACCOBAMS initiative or the deep-sea exploration campaign of the RAMOGE Agreement could be an effective solution.

13. Among the solutions advocated by representatives to formalize their national monitoring programmes in line with IMAP recommendations were:

- the development of financial, technical and institutional capacity,
- the strengthening of sub-regional and regional cooperation as well as the coordination at the expert level in order to prepare common methodologies and temporally and spatially harmonized surveillance programmes,

- the integration of monitoring programmes, standardization of methodologies used by different administrations for data collection, which were too often Incomplete, incoherent and unreliable, and, finally, a heightened awareness at the political level.

b) Exchange of best practices

14. Ms. Anna Cheilari, Marine Environment and Water Industry Unit, European Commission, gave a presentation on the findings of a recent technical assessment of the monitoring programmes being implemented by Member States of the European Union in accordance with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). She summarized the assessment findings concerning the coherence of those programmes within the regions defined in Article 4 of the Directive; the methodology for assessing that coherence; the results of the assessment in terms of the coverage over time of good environment status (GES) descriptors and of targets; the spatial scope and purpose of the monitoring programmes; the coverage of activities and measures by Member States; links to other monitoring programmes in place under other European Union policies; and references and links made to UN Environment/MAP in the monitoring programmes in place in the Mediterranean region.

15. In outlining the conclusions of the assessment, she said that Member States had generally referred to regional coordination in their monitoring programmes and that coherence was moderate to high within the Member States of the Black Sea, North-East Atlantic Ocean and Baltic Sea regions, and low to moderate in the Member States of the Mediterranean Sea Region. Another conclusion had been that the latter should work to develop more consistent monitoring through regional efforts with respect to descriptor 2 (non-indigenous species) and descriptor 11 (underwater noise). Further information, including links to the relevant assessment reports, was available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/marine/eu-coast-and-marine-policy/implementation/reports_en.htm

Agenda item 4: Common indicator factsheets for biodiversity (EO1), NIS (EO2) and fisheries (EO3)

16. The secretariat presented the draft indicator factsheets contained in Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.430/3 and emphasised that the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Guide presented at the 19th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties (February 2016, Athens), provided indications on how to monitor the adopted indicators relating to biodiversity and NIS. The Draft indicator guidance factsheets for the six biodiversity and NIS indicators had been developed in order to better assist countries in updating their monitoring programmes.

17. The GFCM representative provided an overview of recent developments of relevance to EcAp concerning the indicators relating to EO3 and presented the related factsheets.

18. The representative of ACCOBAMS presented the regional initiative developed and implemented by ACCOBAMS - the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative (ASI) - with the objective to establish a coherent and regionally harmonized monitoring system for cetacean species in

the Mediterranean, based on objective, robust and comparable data. She emphasised that nearly eighty percent of the needed financial resources were secured thanks to donations from some Parties and of external donors and the survey was planned for the summer period of 2018 through visual and acoustic observation, by plane and by boat and using a common methodologies for data collection and processing. She stressed that the ASI fits fully into the international commitments of the countries, in particular those relating to the monitoring of the marine environment through the EcAp and the MSFD, which consider cetaceans as indicators of the state of the marine environment. For several years, the ACCOBAMS Secretariat has been working to promote a regionally harmonized methodological approach to cetacean surveillance in collaboration with SPA/RAC that accompanies the development and implementation of the project as a Member of the Steering Committee of the project. The Permanent Secretariat of ACCOBAMS thanked SPA/RAC for its support for this project, and in particular for the development of the Common Indicators Fact Sheets for marine mammals that take into account the methodological elements developed by ACCOBAMS.

19. She confirmed the interest of the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to pursue its collaboration with SPA/RAC and, more generally with UNEP/MAP, to support the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach process in order to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for cetaceans in the region, and ultimately to improve the state of the marine environment in the Mediterranean.

20. Participants were invited to provide suggestions, comments and recommendations pertaining to further work on indicators with a view to revising and finalizing the factsheets for consideration by the next meeting of SPA/RAC Focal Points, to be held in May 2017. The conclusions and recommendations by the participants appears in Annex III to this report.

Agenda item 5: Common indicator assessment factsheet (EO1 and EO2)

21. The representative of the secretariat introduced document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.430/4, containing a draft template of common indicators assessment factsheet (EO1 and EO2). Following the debate on this Agenda item, the participants agreed to give further consideration to the proposed assessment factsheet after the meeting and to provide their possible additional comments and suggestions in writing, before 10 March 2017, for consideration by SPA/RAC Focal Points at their forthcoming meeting in May 2017.

Agenda item 6: Monitoring data management and reporting

22. Participants were informed about the progress thus far made in developing the new Data Centre for the InfoMAP knowledge platform, which was designed to improve governance for knowledge sharing and to support cooperation and data sharing/interoperability between InfoMAP and other networks or regional nodes.

23. The representatives of the Contracting Parties and of partner organizations were then invited to provide an overview of the situation in their countries or organizations concerning the management of data obtained from monitoring and regular surveys on biodiversity and NIS, as well as concerning any reporting obligations.

Agenda item 7: Progress in the preparation of the 2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report related to biodiversity and NIS (EO1-EO2)

24. The representative of the UN Environment/MAP Secretariat gave a slide presentation concerning the 2017 Quality Status Report (QSR2017), which was to be based on existing data and on the common indicator assessment factsheet (EO1 and EO2) covered under agenda item 5. She outlined the steps and timelines involved in producing QSR2017, as well as its structure, adding that much of the work would be conducted through the online working groups to be established for each Ecological Objective. It was an ambitious task requiring the full commitment of UN Environment/MAP and the full support of Contracting Parties.

25. In the ensuing discussion, one representative commented that the aim of completing QSR2017 within the set timelines was indeed ambitious, taking into account the existing workloads of Contracting Parties. Moreover, it would first of all be necessary to finalize the common indicator factsheet.

26. Another agreed that the deadlines were short but recognized that QSR2017 was intended to provide information on progress achieved and identify the gaps to be addressed.

27. The representative of SPA/RAC confirmed that the aim of QSR2017 was to monitor progress achieved in the areas of biodiversity and NIS, particularly in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, including through reliance on case studies in order to compensate for the current lack of available data.

28. One representative proposed that such case studies might include a pilot marine spatial planning project being implemented in her country, within the framework of EcAp.

29. Following the discussion, participants were invited to provide comments and suggestions in writing on all issues of relevance to QSR2017, including the draft template of the common indicator assessment factsheet (EO1 and EO2), before 10 March 2017.

Agenda item 8: Any other matters

30. The representative of the ACCOBAMS Permanent Secretariat briefly presented the QUIETMED project related to underwater noise monitoring in the Mediterranean and funded by the DG Environment ("Joint programme on noise (D11) for the implementation of the Second Cycle of the MSFD in the Mediterranean Sea"). She explained that this project aims at enhancing cooperation among EU Members States in the Mediterranean as regard noise monitoring, part of their commitments under the MSFD. This project will deal mainly with policy recommendations on noise monitoring and the development of technical and methodological tools.

31. The project aims also at promoting and facilitating the coordination of underwater noise monitoring at the Mediterranean Sea level with third countries of the region, in particular through building capacities of non-EU Countries and taking advantage of the ACCOBAMS-UNEP/MAP cooperation related to the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Process on underwater noise monitoring. She explained that the capacity building

will be done through the organization of training workshops dedicated to national representatives and national experts from non-EU countries.

Agenda item 9: Conclusions and recommendations

32. The Participants were invited to review the draft conclusions and recommendations prepared by the Secretariat taking into account the views, opinions and remarks expressed during the meeting. The proposed conclusions and recommendations were amended and approved by the participants. The approved text of the **conclusions and recommendations** is included in Annex III of the present report.

Agenda item 10: Closure of the meeting

33. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the meeting was declared closed at 5:20 p.m. on 1 March 2017.

Annex I
List of participants

List of participants

<p>ALBANIA / ALBANIE</p>	<p>Mrs Silvamina ALSHABANI Head of Protected Areas Unit Ministry of Environment Tel: +355692490833 Mobile: +355692490833 E-mail: Silvamina.Alshabani@moe.gov.al</p>
<p>BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA / BOSNIE-HERZÉGOVINE</p>	<p>Mr Admir ALADZUZ Researcher Hydro-Engineering Institute Sarajevo Mobile: +387603285402 E-mail: admir.aladzuz@heis.ba</p>
<p>CROATIA / CROATIE</p>	<p>Ms Katja Jelik Head of the Sea Section Croatian Agency for the Environment and Nature Tel: +385 1 5502 977 Mobile: +385 91 780 6149 Fax: +385 1 5502 901 E-mail: katja.jelic@dzzp.hr</p> <p>Ms Vanja CIKES KEC PhD Insitute of oceanography and fisheries Tel: +38521408005 Mobile: +385958317759 E-mail: cikes@izor.hr</p>
<p>EGYPT / ÉGYPTE</p>	<p>Mr Moustafa FOU DA (Dr) Minister Advisor Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) Nature Conservation Sector (NCS) Tel: +20 225 274 700 (direct line) Mobile : +20122-2283890 Fax: +20 225 280 931 E-mail: drfoudamos@gmail.com</p> <p>Ms Reda ABOUMOSTAFA Environmental Researcher Nature Conservation Sector, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) Tel: +2 057 2282455 Mobile : +2 01061151582 E-mail : reda_abomoustafa@yahoo.com</p>
<p>EUROPEAN UNION (EU) / UNION EUROPÉENNE (UE)</p>	<p>Ms Anna CHEILARI Policy officer European Commission Tel: +3222965348 E-mail: anna.cheilari@ec.europa.eu</p>

FRANCE	<p>Mr Laurent GUERIN MSFD Project Officer Muséum National de l'Histoire Naturelle Mobile : +33 6 83 94 09 00 tél : +33 (0)2 23 18 58 82 E-mail : lguerin@mnhn.fr</p>
GREECE / GRÈCE	<p>Ms Evangelia STAMOULI Officer Ministry of Environment and Energy Tel: +30 210 696 980 7 Fax: + 30 21 06 96 95 01 Mobile : + 30 69 41 59 59 76 E-mail: e.stamouli@prv.ypeka.gr</p>
ISRAEL / ISRAËL	<p>Ms Ruth YAHIEL (Dr) Marine Ecologist Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) Tel: +972 2 500 5427 Fax: +972 2 500 6281 Mobile: +972 532300191 E-mail: ruthy@npa.org.il</p> <p>Mr Nir STERN (Dr) Researcher Israeli Oceanographic and Limnological Research Institute (IOLR) Tel : 972-48565230 Mobile: 972-524626425 E-mail: nirstern@ocean.org.il</p>
ITALY / ITALIE	<p>Mr Leonardo TUNESI Research Executive Head of the Area“Marine Biodiversity, Habitats and Species Protection” ISPRA – High Institute for Environmental Protection and Research Tel: +39 06 5007 4776 Fax: +39 06 5007 4955 Mobile: +39 334 624 3333 E-mail: leonardo.tunesi@isprambiente.it</p> <p>Mr Roberto GIANGRECO Officer Italian Ministry of the Environment, Territory and Sea Tel: +390657228406 Fax: + 390657228424 Mobile: + 393473313191 E-mail: giangreco.roberto@minambiente.it</p>
LEBANON / LIBAN	<p>Ms Lara SAMAHA Head of Department of Ecosystems Directorate General of Environment Ministry of Environment Tel: +961 1 976 555 ext. 417 Fax: +961 1 976 535 E-mail: l.samaha@moe.gov.lb</p>

LIBYA / LIBYE	<p>Mr. Esmail SHAKMAN University Staff EGA, Libya and Oceanography unit - Tripoli University Tel: +218214628152 Fax: +2184628117 Mobile: +218922761703 E-mail: shugmanism@yahoo.com</p> <p>Mr. Ibrahim BEN AMER MSc. University of Omar Mukhtar, El-Bayda, Libya Mobile : +216 22724279 E-mail: benamer.ly@gmail.com</p>
MALTA / MALTE	<p>Mr. Gilbert GAUCI Assistant Environment Officer Environment & Resources Authority Tel : +35622923616 Mobile : +35679958192 E-mail : gilbert.a.gauci@era.org.mt</p>
MONACO	<p>Mr Ludovic AQUILINA Chef de Section Gouvernement de la Principauté de Monaco Tel: +377 98 98 44 21 Fax: +377 92 05 28 91 E-mail: luaquilina@gouv.mc</p>
MONTENEGRO / MONTÉNÉGRO	<p>Ms Milena BATAKOVIĆ Advisor for Biodiversity and SPA/BD Focal Point Department for Monitoring, Analyses and Reporting Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro Tel: +382 20446 531 Fax: +382 20 446 215 / 587 Mobile: +382 68354845 E-mail: milena.batakovic@epa.org.me</p> <p>Ms. Jelena KNEZEVIC Head of Department Department for Sustainable Development and Integrated Coastal Zone Management Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism Tel: +382 20 446 225 Fax: +382 20 446 215 Mobile: +382 67 255 604 E-mail: jelena.knezevic@mrt.gov.me</p>

<p>SLOVENIA / SLOVÉNIÉ</p>	<p>Mr Borut MAVRIČ PhD/Scientific Associate National Institute of Biology, Marine Biology Station Piran R. Slovenija Mobile: +386 40 234 457 E-mail: borut.mavric@nib.si</p> <p>Ms Tina CENTRIH GENOV Nature Conservation Adviser The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation R. Slovenija Tel: +386 5 67 10 900 Mobile: +386 41 658 508 Email: tina.centrih-genov@zrsvn.si</p>
<p>SPAIN / ESPAGNE</p>	<p>Mr Jorge Alonso RODRIGUEZ Ministry Of Agriculture And Fisheries, Food And Environment E-mail: jarodrigz@magrama.es</p> <p>Ms Maria Sagrario ARRIETA ALGARRA Head of Unit of Community Affairs Tel: +34915975565 Mobile: +34629913917 E-mail: sarrieta@magrama.es</p> <p>Mr Francisco ALEMANY Senior Researcher Instituto Español de Oceanografía Tel: +34971401561 Fax: +34971404945 Mobile: +34667561549 Email: francisco.alemany@ba.ieo.es</p> <p>Ms Maria Isabel LOPEZ Head Of Service Of Marine Species Ministry Of Agriculture And Fisheries, Food And Environment Tel: +34 91 597 66 09 Mobile: +34 620 96 56 97 E-mail: milopez@magrama.es</p> <p>Ms Laura DIAZ Water and Marine Policy Advisor Division for the Protection of The Sea Ministry Of Agriculture And Fisheries, Food And Environment Tel: +34 91 59 75 570 E-mail: LDiaz@magrama.es</p>
<p>TUNISIA / TUNISIE</p>	<p>Ms Leila BEN ABDELADHIM Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement du Littoral Tel : +21671906577 Mobile : +21658159612 Fax : +21671908460 E-mail : l.babdeladhim@gmail.com</p>

<p>TURKEY / TURQUIE</p>	<p>Mr Niyazi can GÖKÇINAR Msc Engineer General Directorate of Fisheries and Aquaculture Republic of Turkey Ministry of Food Agriculture and Livestock, Tel: +90 31 22 58 30 74 Fax:+90 31 22 58 30 39 Mobile : +90 53 34 20 28 27 Email : niyazican.gokcinar@tarim.gov.tr</p> <p>Ms Emine AYDAR Biologist The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock Tel: +9 0312 258 30 98 Mobile : +9 0533 547 76 44 E-mail: emine.aydar@tarim.gov.tr</p>
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**REPRESENTATIVES OF UNITED NATIONS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND
OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS /
REPRESENTANTS DES INSTITUTIONS SPECIALISEES DES NATIONS UNIES ET
AUTRES ORGANISATIONS INTERGOUVERNEMENTALES**

<p>GFCM / CGPM</p> <p>General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations</p> <p><i>Commission Générale des Pêches pour la Méditerranée Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture</i></p>	<p>Mr Paolo CARPENTIERI Consultant on Fisheries Management E-mail: Paolo.Carpentieri@fao.org</p>
<p>ACCOBAMS</p> <p>Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area</p> <p><i>Accord sur la conservation des cétacés de la mer Noire, de la Méditerranée et de la zone Atlantique adjacente</i></p>	<p>Ms Célia LE RAVALLEC Project Officer Jardin de l'UNESCO, Terrasses de Fontvieille 98000 Monaco Tel: +377 9898 4074 Fax: +377 9898 4208 E-mail: cleravallec@accobams.net</p>

**OTHER ORGANISATIONS
AUTRES ORGANISATIONS**

<p>IUCN / UICN</p> <p>International Union for Conservation of Nature - Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation</p> <p><i>Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature- Centre de coopération Méditerranéenne</i></p>	<p>Ms. Maria Del Mar OTERO Marine Programme Officer Email mariadelmar.otero@iucn.org</p>
<p>MEDASSET</p> <p>Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles</p> <p><i>Association Méditerranéenne pour la sauvegarde des tortues marines</i></p>	<p>Ms Fotini VRETTOU Programme Officer Tel : +302103613572 Mobile : +306947261264 E-mail : fvrettou@medasset.org</p>

**UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME - COORDINATING UNIT
AND COMPONENTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**

**PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT - UNITE DE
COORDINATION ET COMPOSANTES DU PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA
MEDITERRANEE**

<p>UN ENVIRONMENT/MAP ONU ENVIRONNEMENT/PAM</p>	<p>Ms. Tatjana HEMA Deputy Coordinator Tel: +30 210 7273115 Mobile: +30 694 5935318 E-mail: tatjana.hema@unepmap.gr</p> <p>Ms. Gyorgyi GURBAN Ecosystem Approach Project Manager Tel: +30 210 7273105 E-mail: gyorgyi.gurban@unepmap.gr</p> <p>Mr Pascal PEDUZZI Director Grid-Geneva Tel:+41229178237 E-mail: pascal.peduzzi@unep.org</p>
<p>Plan Bleu/RAC- Regional Activity Centre For The Blue Plan</p> <p><i>Centre d'Activités Régionales pour Le Plan Bleu</i></p>	<p>Ms Carla MURCIANO Consultant Ecosystem Approach to Marine Management Tel. +33 (0)4 84 08 00 50 E-mail: carlamurciano@gmail.com</p>
<p>INFO/RAC- Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication</p> <p><i>INFO/CAR- Centre d'Activités Régionales pour l'Information et la Communication</i></p>	<p>Mr Arthur PASQUALE Officer/researcher Tel: +390650072227 E-mail: arthur.pasquale@isprambiente.it</p> <p>Mr Giordano GIORGI Researcher Tel : + 39 065 007 46 40 Mobile : + 39 33 16 40 88 19 E-mail: giordano.giorgi@isprambiente.it</p>
<p>PAP/RAC- Regional Activity Centre For The Priority Actions Programme</p> <p><i>CAR/PAP- Centre d'activités régionales pour le Programme d'Actions Prioritaires</i></p>	<p>Ms Vesna TUNGUZ University professor University of East Sarajevo Faculty of Agriculture Tel : +387 57 340 401 Mobile: +387 66 192 354 E-mail : vesna.tunguz@gmail.com</p>

<p>SPA/RAC – Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas</p> <p><i>CAR/ASP - Centre d'Activités Régionales pour les Aires Spécialement Protégées</i></p>	<p>Mr. Khalil ATTIA Director E-mail: director@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Mr Mehdi AISSI EcAp-MEDII Project Officer E-mail: mehdi.aissi@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Ms Asma YAHYAOUI Assistant of the EcAp-MED II Project E-mail: asma.yahyaoui@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Ms. Lobna BEN NAKHLA Species Conservation Programme Officer E-mail: lobna.bennakhla@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Mr. Atef OUERGHI Ecosystems Conservation Programme Officer E-mail: atef.ouerghi@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Ms. Naziha BEN MOUSSA Administrative Assistant E-mail: naziha.benmoussa@rac-spa.org</p> <p>Ms. Imtinène KEFI Finance Assistant E-mail: imtinene.kefi@rac-spa.org</p> <p>SPA/RAC Consultants: Mr. Chedly RAIS E-mail: chedly.rais@okianos.org</p> <p>Mr Simone PANIGADA Email: panigada69@gmail.com</p> <p>Mr Vasileios GEROVASILEIOU E-mail: vgerovas@hcmr.gr</p> <p>Ms. Sarah ANSAH English Report Writer E-mail: sara.ansah@efive.plus.com</p> <p>Mr. Jean Pierre LERAY French Report Writer E-mail: leray.engel@gmail.com</p> <p>Mr Jose SANDÍN Interpreter LEMA Translators Tel : +34 91 541 28 14 E-mail: paco@lematraductores.com</p> <p>Ms Mónica GARCÍA Interpreter LEMA Translators Tel : +34 91 541 28 14 E-mail: paco@lematraductores.com</p>
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Annex II
Agenda of the meeting

Agenda

- Agenda item 1.** Opening of the Meeting
- Agenda item 2.** Adoption of the agenda and election of officers
- Agenda item 3.** Implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP)
 - a) Current status of national monitoring and assessment programmes on biodiversity and NIS
 - b) Exchange of best practices
- Agenda item 4.** Common indicator factsheets for biodiversity (EO1), NIS (EO2) and Fisheries (EO3)
- Agenda item 5.** Common indicator assessment factsheets (EO1 and EO2)
- Agenda item 6.** Monitoring data management and reporting
- Agenda item 7.** Progress in the preparation of the 2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report related to biodiversity and NIS (EO1-EO2)
- Agenda item 8.** Any other business
- Agenda item 9.** Conclusions and Recommendations
- Agenda item 10.** Closure of the meeting

Annex III
Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

The meeting noted that:

1. While some Mediterranean countries do not have yet IMAP compatible national monitoring programmes for marine biodiversity, they nonetheless frequently implement monitoring initiatives and projects for areas of special interest and/or for flag species and habitats. The Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) should therefore build on such activities, using the available data, after assessing their comparability, in order to select reference sites and habitats and, where possible, to establish baselines for assessment.
2. Biodiversity monitoring involves complex methodologies, requires specific scientific skills and implies the mobilization of financial means that are unavailable in many Mediterranean countries;
3. Capacity building initiatives, such as the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative have a key role in IMAP implementation.
4. Regional and/or subregional cooperation and mutual assistance may promote joint efforts among countries and, as such, joint surveying campaigns involving two or more countries are to be encouraged.
5. Furthermore, in relation to sub-regional cooperation, the ongoing cooperation between the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention Secretariat and the Secretariat of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) in order to establish an Eastern Mediterranean subregional pilot on non-indigenous species, in relation to fisheries, is welcomed, with emphasis on cooperation between fisheries and environmental experts.
6. Citizen science can provide data for certain species and habitats, but clear procedures for data acquisition and quality control must be established in order to check the accuracy of the data produced by citizen science before they are used for IMAP purposes.
7. The ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative could provide valuable data, including as a baseline, for the determination of the cetacean distributional range (Core indicator 3) and cetacean population abundance (Core Indicator 4), as well as provide inputs for future demographic indication of cetacean population and possibly input with data on some of the biodiversity common indicators.

Conclusions and recommendations of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring Biodiversity and Fisheries relating to monitoring of fisheries common indicators:

8. It was noted that integration at the regional and national levels will be key for the implementation of IMAP EO3-related monitoring, including addressing different approaches between fisheries management and biodiversity conservation, with the common aim of achieving sustainable management of marine resources.
9. It was noted that **indicators 7 to 12** (EO3 Fisheries, EO1 Biodiversity) are in line with Targets 1 and 4 of the Mediterranean and Black Sea midterm strategy of GFCM: towards sustainability of Mediterranean Black Sea Fisheries.

10. The description of indicators 10, 11 and 12 should be further validated in the GFCM-Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries (SAC). For all fisheries indicators, the SAC should also reflect on cooperation at the regional level and how to aggregate those indicators at the sub-regional and regional scales in order to assess their performance.
11. In the light of concerns relating to the availability of data necessary for the assessment of the stock and data on discard and incidental catch of vulnerable species, it was stressed that limited data are available. Specific actions (including capacity building and training) should therefore be provided on these issues and are currently planned in the GFCM-midterm strategy.
12. Considering the potential impact of fisheries on biodiversity, there is a need for further cooperation between the scientific fisheries community and environmental experts.
13. Considering that large pelagic species (tuna, swordfish, etc.) are covered by the International Commission for Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), the meeting recommended that means of collaboration with the ICCAT Secretariat should be explored and that access to the data available for those species should be provided.

Conclusions and recommendations of the Correspondence Group on Monitoring Biodiversity and Fisheries relating to common assessment factsheets and the Quality Status Review process:

14. Welcomed the Secretariat's work on the draft common assessment factsheets and the Quality Status Report of 2017, noting the very challenging timeline and the parallel process of developing national integrated monitoring programmes and regional work on the assessment factsheets.

Conclusions and recommendations of the Correspondence Group on Biodiversity and Fisheries relating to data management and reporting

15. Highlighting the importance of information and data sharing for IMAP, it was noted that national platforms may require adjustment in order to ensure that regional and national systems are compatible and reflect regional data related policies and national legislation.
16. The gap analysis performed by INFO/RAC is the first step in developing an IMAP pilot platform as part of INFO/MAP, reflecting national platform needs by June 2017. Best practices of other Regional Seas will be taken into account, where compatible, as appropriate.

The Secretariat is requested to:

17. Provide detailed information regarding the recommended methodologies, further specify best available knowledge and technologies, and promote innovation while building on the experience gained in the Mediterranean.
18. In addition to the above work, in areas where methodologies allow, develop a practical guide to the monitoring guidance factsheets for use by field teams at the national level, addressing the key monitoring terms, adapted to the national context, to be included in the national monitoring programmes.

19. In view of the importance of baseline information for the assessment of indicators, develop detailed technical guidance as part of the common indicator guidance factsheets, including specific information on the setting of baselines for each indicator.
20. Include in the common indicator guidance factsheets clear indications about the frequency of monitoring and the timeline and, where possible, harmonize the indicator factsheet with MSFD requirements, methodologies, geographical scales and the timeline.
21. Limit the scientific references provided in the common indicator guidance factsheets to publications on methodological aspects of the monitoring, with priority given to recent and updated bibliographies;
22. Include in the common indicator guidance factsheets the comments and suggested recommendations of meeting participants, such as:

For Indicator 1:

Inclusion in the factsheet for Indicator 1 of:

- A habitat priority list, using, where appropriate, the SPA/RAC habitat reference list;
- The recommended methodology for each habitat on the retained list;
- The methodology for calculation of the construction footprint in the "Modelling habitats and mapping against impacts" option proposed for calculation of the indicator;

For Indicator 2:

Inclusion in the factsheet for Indicator 2 of:

- Further clarification concerning the meaning of "condition of species and communities";
- A list of species (or group of species) to be considered for each habitat;
- Further clarification for temporal scales adapted for each considered species or community, including the ideal temporal scale (e.g.: 1 year) and the minimum required (2 per period of 6 years)

In view of their importance, pelagic habitats should be more specifically monitored in future.

For Indicators 3, 4 and 5:

- In relation to marine mammal monitoring, consider:
 - the technical specifics of monitoring in relation to all taxonomic groups, including monk seals;
 - A subregional implementation approach for the cetacean surveying campaign, in line with agreed common, regional methodologies, existing, shared Protocols, with the facilitation, as appropriate, of ACCOBAMS;
- Inclusion in the factsheet for Indicators 3, 4 and 5 a priority bird species list.

For Indicator 6, participants noted the unevenness of monitoring efforts in most Mediterranean countries and stressed that a network of monitoring sites must be urgently established. In relation to their social-economic implication, the issue of “beneficial” and “negative impact” of NIS should be considered.

The spread of NIS should be assessed at the regional (rather than national) level and focus on a limited number of species only. The output from this indicator should be used as input to the habitat indicators.

23. Continue work on developing the Quality Status Report, in line with the IMAP timeline, and assess the potential input to be provided from ongoing projects;
24. Explore means of collaboration with the ICCAT Secretariat and of access to the data available for those species.
25. In light of the capacity needs of individual countries for IMAP implementation, develop a funding strategy and provide further information on possible funding sources for the implementation of national IMAP-compatible monitoring programmes, including for capacity building in the Southern Mediterranean.
26. Continue the ongoing cooperation with GFCM in order to establish an Eastern Mediterranean subregional pilot on non-indigenous species, in relation to fisheries, in which fisheries and environmental experts should be involved.

In addition to the specific recommendations above, the Contracting Parties are encouraged to:

27. In accordance with the decision taken at the 4th EcAp Coordination Group meeting, held in Athens in October 2014, establish an informal online expert group on biodiversity and non-indigenous species (Biodiversity Working Group) and reconfirm their nominated experts and/or nominate experts for membership of the Working Group, ensuring that sufficient time is allocated for enabling contributions to be made to the Group’s work in both the shorter and longer terms, with the aim of further identifying outstanding monitoring and assessment technical issues with respect to biodiversity, non-indigenous species and fisheries-related common indicators.
28. Provide written comments and suggestions, both in relation to the draft common indicator factsheets for biodiversity and fisheries and the common indicator assessment factsheets for biodiversity and non-indigenous species, by 10 March 2017.
29. Identify and provide information to the Secretariat concerning specific case studies of potential relevance to the draft Quality Status Report.
30. Increase the coordination between administrations dealing with fisheries management and environmental aspects to facilitate the finalization, validation and assessment of the different indicators.
31. In accordance with the IMAP objectives, clarify national needs and indicate the final use of data provided in order to support the development of a common data policy.