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Malta, 22-24 May 2023

**Agenda item 5: Conservation of Species and Habitats**

**5.4. Mid-term assessment of the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the conservation of Monk seal in the Mediterranean**

**Mid-term assessment of the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the conservation of Monk seal in the Mediterranean for the period from 2019 – 2022**

Note:

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) and United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any State, Territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of their frontiers or boundaries.

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## **Note by the Secretariat**

Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have adopted the “Regional strategy for the conservation of Mediterranean monk seal” in 2013, which was revised and updated in 2019 (Decision IG.24/7).

The regional strategy has an overall vision that “Over the next two decades, the ecological recovery of monk seals in the Mediterranean will deem to have occurred, when multiple colonies have become established within all major habitats in their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other species, and inspiring and connecting human cultures”.

The suggested time horizon of this Strategy is six years, to be concluded in 2025, when a comprehensive review of the Strategy’s, with a consideration for potential actions to be taken beyond 2025, should be conducted. Such timing also coincides with the process requiring EU Member States to report concerning the Habitats, thereby facilitating the implementation of the Strategy’s actions by such States. It will also contribute to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) programme of measures in 2022.

The mid-term assessment of the implementation results in 2022 recommended, to evaluate upto-date attainment of Goals and Objectives within the Strategy’s timeframe and to identify, if needed, moderate adjustments.

Therefore, this document was drafted in order to address the status of implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Monk Seals in the Mediterranean for the period from 2019 – 2022 and to assess to what degree its goals are achieved.

This draft was prepared based on the updated information and literature published regarding the monk seal status in the Mediterranean, the online national reports to Barcelone convention and its Protocols and via direct communication with relevant Contracting Parties.

The document will go through each of the Goals mentioned in the Strategy and evaluate its implementation and provide the source of the information.

The SPA/DB focal points are invited to review and provide views on this mid-term assessment report.

## **Table of Acronyms**

APAL: Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement du Littoral.

AGER: Association de Gestion Intégrée des Ressources (Morocco).

CNRDPA: Centre National de Recherche et de Développement de la Pêche et de l'Aquaculture (Algeria).

CNRS: National Centre for Marine Sciences (Lebanon).

DEF: Département des Eaux et Forêts (Morocco).

EGA: Ministry of Environment (Environmental General Authority), (Libya).

EEAA: Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency

IBM: Institute of Marine Biology (Montenegro).

ISPRA: Italian National Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (Italy).

MSA: The Monk Seal Alliance.

MSAC: Monk Seal Advisory Committee.

MoM: Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal (Greece).

PPNEA: Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania.

RAPA-Valor: Regional Agency for Protected Areas (Valor, Albania).

SPA/RAC: Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (Tunisia).

SPA/BD Protocol: Barcelona Convention's Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean.

SPNL: Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon.



## Forward

Mediterranean monk seals (*Monachus monachus*) were once widely and continuously distributed in the Mediterranean and Black Seas, and in North Atlantic waters from Morocco to Mauritania, including the Cape Verde and the Canary Islands, Madeira, and the Azores (Johnson et al. 2006). Today fewer than 700 individuals are thought to survive in isolated subpopulations in the eastern Mediterranean, the archipelago of Madeira and the Cabo Blanco area in the north-eastern Atlantic Ocean (Karamanlidis et al. 2015). The largest aggregations of Mediterranean monk seals are found near Cabo Blanco (González and Fernandez de Larrinoa 2012, Martínez-Jauregui et al. 2012). Principal sites in the Mediterranean are located in the Ionian and Aegean seas, including the National Marine Park of Alonissos (Trivourea et al. 2011) and the Gyaros Marine Protected Area (Dendrinou et al. 2008), both in Greece. An increasing presence of monk seals has been also reported in the Levantine Sea (Beton et al., 2021; Kurt and Gücü 2021; Roditi-Elasar et al., 2021; SPA/RAC-UNEP/MAP, 2020). Moreover, within the Mediterranean Basin, there are recent indications that seals might be frequenting areas within their historical range where they had been extirpated in previous decades (Bundone et al., 2019)

Mediterranean monk seals have teetered on the brink of extinction for about one-half century (Notarbartolo di Sciara and Kotomatas 2016). After having been classified as Critically Endangered for almost two decades, their status was reassessed as Endangered on the IUCN's Red List (Karamanlidis and Dendrinou 2015). Reassessment was based on the notion that monk seal numbers in specific locations (i.e., the Madeira archipelago, Western Sahara-Mauritania, and selected localities in the Aegean Sea) have been stable or may even be increasing.

Since 1985, the Mediterranean monk seal is recognised within the framework of the Barcelona Convention as a species to be protected as a matter of priority. In that year, during their fourth ordinary meeting, the Contracting Parties adopted a declaration, referred to as the Genoa Declaration, which included, amongst the priority targets to be achieved in the decade 1986-1995, the "protection of the endangered marine species" with a specific reference to the monk seal. Following the Genoa Declaration, an Action Plan for the Management of the Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*) was adopted by the Barcelona Convention's Contracting Parties (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA & IUCN 1988, UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA 2003).

The main aims of the Barcelona Convention's Action Plan for the Management of the Mediterranean Monk Seal are: i) to reduce adult mortality; ii) to promote the establishment of a network of marine reserves; iii) to encourage research, data collection, and rehabilitation programmes; iv) to implement information programmes targeting fishing communities and various other stakeholders; and v) to provide a framework for the coordination, review and financing of relevant activities.

The Mediterranean monk seal is listed in Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), in Annex II of the Barcelona Convention Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biodiversity in the Mediterranean, and is a priority species of Community Interest, listed in Annexes II and IV of the EU Habitats Directive. The species is protected throughout its range through national laws.

Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have adopted a "Regional strategy for the conservation of Mediterranean monk seal" in 2013, which was revised and updated in 2019 (Decision IG.24/7).

The regional strategy has an overall vision that "Over the next two decades, the ecological recovery of monk seals in the Mediterranean will deem to have occurred, when multiple colonies have become established within all major habitats in their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other species, and inspiring and connecting human cultures".

The suggested time horizon of this Strategy is six years, to be concluded in 2025, when a comprehensive review of the Strategy's, with a consideration for potential actions to be taken beyond 2025, should be conducted. Such timing also coincides with the process requiring EU Member States to report concerning the

Habitats, thereby facilitating the implementation of the Strategy's actions by such States. It will also contribute to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) programme of measures in 2022.

The mid-term assessment of the implementation results in 2022 is also recommended, to evaluate up-to-date attainment of Goals and Objectives within the Strategy's timeframe and to identify, if needed, moderate adjustments.

Therefore, this document was drafted in order to address the status of implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Monk Seals in the Mediterranean during the period from 2019 – 2022 and to assess to what degree its goals are achieved.

This draft was prepared based on the updated information and literature published regarding the monk seal status in the Mediterranean, the online national reports to Barcelona convention and its Protocols and via direct communication with relevant parties.

The document will go through each of the Goals mentioned in the Strategy and evaluate its implementation and provide situation for the source of the information.

The Mediterranean Strategy is structured to contain overall Goals that support the overall vision of the action plan and its aim to protect the monk seal population of the Mediterranean. These are:

- Goal 1. Mediterranean Range States implement the Strategy in pursuance of the Vision, through the expeditious development and adoption of appropriate national policies and administrative frameworks, and with the effective, coordinated support from relevant international organisations and civil society.
- Goal 2. Monk seal breeding nuclei in sites located in “Group A” countries are effectively protected from deliberate killings and habitat degradation, so that seal numbers in such sites increase and seals are able to disperse to and re-colonise the surrounding areas.
- Goal 3. Monk seal presence in sites where they are repeatedly seen today in “Group B” countries is permanently established, and breeding resumes. “Group B” countries are upgraded to “Group A”.
- Goal 4. Monk seal presence is reported repeatedly in the species' historical habitat in “Group C” countries, and these “Group C” countries are upgraded to “Group B”. Once all “Group C” countries are upgraded, Group C is deleted.

Under each Goal, there are specific and detailed Goal Targets that are set as an indication of the success of achieving each Goal followed by a set of Objectives and Objective Targets stating the actions that should be implemented, time frame for implementation, and the party(s) to implement the action to achieve the goals.

The document will examine each of these Goal Targets and provide input on the degree of their implementation and achievement. For more details about the Regional Strategy and to access the full document, refer to the following link.



## **GOAL 1. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION.**

1. Mediterranean Range States implement this Strategy in pursuance of the Vision, through the development and adoption of appropriate national policies and administrative frameworks, and with the effective, coordinated support from relevant international organisations and civil society.

***Goal Target 1.1. A framework for the implementation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal Conservation Strategy is established by the Mediterranean Range States. The framework will include the establishment of a Monk Seal Advisory Committee (MSAC).***

2. The framework for the implementation of the Conservation Strategy for the Monk Seal includes the creation of a Monk Seal Advisory Committee (MSAC), whose main tasks are to provide support to SPA/RAC in the implementation of the Strategy (e.g., by helping in defining the Actions needed to attain the different Objective Targets) and its review and updating.

3. However, this committee was not set up in 2020 as planned and the related assigned tasks has not been accomplished. We are taking the opportunity of this mid-term evaluation to submit the Terms of Reference given in annex I of this document for the consideration and review by the Sixteenth Meeting of SPA/BD Focal Points (Malta, 22-24 May 2023).

4. On the other hand, and in line with the objectives of the Mediterranean Monk seal strategy, SPA/RAC has carried out or/and participated during 2019-2022 in activities that have contributed to the achievement of certain objectives' targets.

5. As part of the WMMC conference<sup>1</sup> that took place in Barcelona in December 2019, SPA/RAC has organised a dedicated workshop titled "Definition of a road map for the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Monk seal in low density countries"<sup>2</sup> where a group of monk seal researchers from the low density countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia) participated to update the information on the species in each region, discussed possible bilateral collaboration between countries, defined requirements of capacity building, funding and equipment. Later, the results, recommendations and notes from this workshop were used to develop the Med Monk Seal Project proposal<sup>3</sup>: Enhancing knowledge and awareness on monk seal in the Mediterranean.

6. Indeed in 2019, a consortium was formed of like-minded foundations to optimize resources to support collaborative conservation and rehabilitation of the Mediterranean monk seal. The Monk Seal Alliance (here after will be referred to as MSA) was created in 2019 by five founding members experienced in funding Mediterranean monk seal conservation projects: the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, the MAVA Foundation, the Segré Foundation, the Sancta Devota Foundation and the Thalassa Foundation.

7. For each MSA funded project<sup>4</sup> a Steering Committee was created along with an overall Coordination Committee that is supervised directly by MSA. The latter's role is to facilitate exchange of good practices, communication and coordination between the supported projects.

8. The overall objective of the Med-Monk seal Project is to support the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention involved in this project (Algeria, Egypt, Italy, Morocco, Libya, Syria, Tunisia) to implement the Priority Goals stated in the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Mediterranean Monk Seal.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wmmconference.org/workshops/#Definition%20of%20a%20road%20map>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rac-spa.org/node/1817>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rac-spa.org/node/2176>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.monksealalliance.org/en/projects>

9. This will be done in harmony with the Ecosystem Approach IMAP using the Guidelines for the Monk seal Monitoring adopted by the EcAp Coordination Group in 20219, in conducting field surveys in the project' countries<sup>5</sup> and collecting the data to cover the relevant IMAP Ecological Objectives 1.1 (Species distribution is maintained), 1.2 (Population size of selected species is maintained) and 1.3 (Population condition of selected species is maintained).

10. A capacity building programme will be conducted to increase the capacity of organisations from countries where monk seal sightings are occurring more and more frequently.

11. Therefore, Sub-regional workshops are planned to be organized during May and June 2023 to train participants from the countries of Groups B and C on Monitoring methodologies of Monk seal and its habitats. Two Trainee will be designated from the following national project partners AFWP; AGIR; APAL; CNRDP; CNRS, EGA; the High Institute of Marine Research (Syria); ISPRA. The later partner will propose invitation of some MPA managers in Italy to join the training courses. However, training organizations should be from countries of Group A, the project will then tailor country-specific monitoring initiatives in collaboration with the national partners to be implemented in the second and third years.

12. Finally, a public awareness campaign will be launched in synergy with other project leaders supported by the Monk Seal Alliance.

13. Monitoring is under-way in Greece and Türkiye, as part of the MSA funded projects and other initiatives<sup>6</sup>. However, in Cyprus the monitoring activities for the monk seal distribution and abundance is under the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research (DFMR)s National Budget as well as European Structural Funds.

## GOAL 2. "GROUP A" COUNTRIES

***Goal Target 2.1. Maintain and secure monk seal presence in Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs) identified by the IUCN Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force with special attention to the following locations: a) Greek Ionian islands (Lefkada, Kefallinia, Ithaca, Zakynthos, and surrounding islets and seas); b) Northern Sporades; c) Gyros; d) Kimolos and Polyaigos; e) Karpathos-Saria; f) Turkish Aegean and Mediterranean coasts; g) Cyprus. Breeding nuclei in the locations listed above are effectively protected from deliberate killings and habitat degradation, so that seal numbers in such sites increase and young seals are able to disperse and re-colonise the surrounding areas.***

14. Objective Target 2.1.1<sup>7</sup> enforcement of existing laws about firearms and explosives is under-way in Greece at least. No information about enforcement was located for both Türkiye and Cyprus. Also, no information or statistics depicting the case of firearms and explosives was found at the time this report was written.

15. Regarding Objective 2.1.2<sup>8</sup>. although the species is considered a priority and is protected under several MPAs and Natura 2000 sites including the ones mentioned in the list above, no information was found about the creation of a dedicated MPAs for monk seals during the present assessing period (2019-2022)

<sup>5</sup>Algeria, Egypt, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia

<sup>6</sup> In Türkiye , Another project has been carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry DKMP 4th Regional Directorate and covers various research, awareness/education, and conservation activities within the Muğla Province Seal Species Action Plan Monitoring and Implementation program, which is planned to be conducted for a period of 5 years on all coastal areas of Muğla Province. Fethiye and Babadağ Pilot Coastal Zoning and Management Planning supported by UNDP GEF-SGP includes habitat determination and classification, analyzing human activity densities, threats and seascape mapping.

<sup>7</sup> Objective 2.1.1. Current legislation prohibiting to carry firearms and explosives aboard fishing vessels in Greece, TÜRKİYE, and Cyprus is enforced, with a special attention in locations listed in Goal Target 2.1.

<sup>8</sup> Objective 2.1.2. Locations listed in Goal Target 2.1, and other equally important locations that may be eventually discovered in the future, are geographically delimited and legally protected/managed. The resulting MPA network should be ecologically coherent and effectively managed in order to guarantee favourable conservation status.

16. It should be noted that in Cyprus there are currently the following 4 MPAs dedicated for the protection of Monk Seals and their breeding / resting habitats. which are declared through Ministerial Decrees: Halavro; 9Agios Georgios Alamanou MPA10: Aya Napa Sea Caves11: Peyia Sea Caves12:

17. Also, no update or further information regarding Objective 2.1.3<sup>13</sup>, no information can be found apart from that stated in the previous evaluation of the regional strategy (UNEP/MED WG.461/5 Rev.1, 2019)<sup>14</sup> that states “*These 8 important monk seal locations all scored positively to the question on the likelihood of the species’ protection benefit through the establishment of an MPA network. However, the higher proportion of negative response obtained for some areas suggests that either some respondents had limited knowledge for such areas (Greek Ionian, Kimolos/Polyaigos, Cyprus) or that there is concern that the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing MPAs are not sufficient in such areas*”.

**Goal Target 2.2. Implementation of Goal Target 2.1. is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities. Despite the fact that the Regional strategy has emphasised that capacity building activities are necessary for better implementation of Goal Target 2.1, very little information was found about training or capacity building activity taking place in the range of the areas mentioned previously. The monk seal alliance funded project “Monk seal protection at the Eastern Mediterranean” implemented by IUCN-med, seems to have organised Capacity Building and Training: Knowledge transfer between partners using two planned technical workshops.**

### GOAL 3. “GROUP B” COUNTRIES.

**Goal Target 3.1. Monk seal presence in Albania is confirmed and permanently established.**

18. Referring to Objective 3.1.1.<sup>15</sup> There are several local networks that are reporting the presence of the species in Albania. These networks are mostly established with local communities, fishers and local NGOs. These networks are managed by several organisations such as PPNEA, RAPA-Valor with support of MoM, and Archipelagos. However, no evidence was found on the existence of centralised or country-wide network reporting or collecting information on the status of the species.

19. Objective 3.1.2.<sup>16</sup> monitoring activities implemented by PPNEA and MoM in the framework of the Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal Project funded by MSA are underway since the first phase of the project launched in 2017 along with other activities implemented by Archipelagos and RAPA-Valor. Habitat surveys were conducted in several stages across the entire coast of Albania to identify the suitable areas for the monk seal including possible pupping and resting cave. In this regard, the southern area of the country seemed to be the most relevant to the species especially the National Marine Park of Karaburun-Sazan and Butrinti National Park (reported in Panou et. al. 2023). 2 caves in that region were found to be use by seals

<sup>9</sup> MPA: [http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/A9B42AD68456101EC225876800402845/\\$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2091.2023.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/A9B42AD68456101EC225876800402845/$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2091.2023.pdf?OpenElement)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/70FDB914904E8997C2258955002D4BDE/\\$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2047.2023%20%20%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%A0%CE%A0%20%CE%91%CE%93%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A3%20%CE%93%CE%95%CE%A9%CE%A1%CE%9](http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/70FDB914904E8997C2258955002D4BDE/$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2047.2023%20%20%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%A0%CE%A0%20%CE%91%CE%93%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A3%20%CE%93%CE%95%CE%A9%CE%A1%CE%9)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/1F7FB860B56FA121C2258955002D222E/\\$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2046.2023%20%20%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%A0%CE%A0%20%CE%98%CE%91%CE%9B%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%95%CE%A3%2](http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/1F7FB860B56FA121C2258955002D222E/$file/%CE%9A%CE%94%CE%A0%2046.2023%20%20%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%A0%CE%A0%20%CE%98%CE%91%CE%9B%CE%91%CE%A3%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%95%CE%A3%2)

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/DAFEF742C80FCAA942258397002378C2/\\$file/%CE%9A.%CE%94.%CE%A0.%2028.2019%20\(%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%BD%CE%AD%CF%82%20%CE%A3%CF%80%CE%B7%CE%](http://www.moa.gov.cy/moa/dfmr/dfmr.nsf/All/DAFEF742C80FCAA942258397002378C2/$file/%CE%9A.%CE%94.%CE%A0.%2028.2019%20(%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CE%BC%CE%B1%20%CE%98%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%B1%CF%83%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%BD%CE%AD%CF%82%20%CE%A3%CF%80%CE%B7%CE%)

<sup>13</sup> Objective 2.1.3. Areas in locations listed under Goal Target 2.1 are effectively protected through a) appropriate management actions, and b) the involvement of the local communities, which will both ensure the good conservation status of monk seals found there. A management framework is in place and implemented, defining the spatial, temporal and specific measures needed in the species’ critical habitats (e.g., regulating access to caves), thereby affording effective protection to haul out and pupping sites.

<sup>14</sup> [https://rac-spa.org/nfp14/documents/01\\_working\\_documents/wg\\_461\\_05\\_en\\_rev1.pdf](https://rac-spa.org/nfp14/documents/01_working_documents/wg_461_05_en_rev1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Objective 3.1.1. A reporting scheme to detect monk seal presence and alert authorities continues to be implemented along the Albanian coastal zone and awareness actions are conducted in areas with seal sightings

<sup>16</sup> Objective 3.1.2. Long-term cave monitoring is established in the caves identified in previous studies in the Karaburun Peninsula and nearby locations.

while others (up to 25 caves were identified and mapped) are still under consideration for monitoring (Bundone et al., 2022). While monitoring was taking place, capacity building workshops, interviews and questionnaire surveys with local community and public awareness activities are also implemented.

***Goal Target 3.3. Monk seal presence in Italy, in areas with recurrent sightings, habitat availability and proximity to nearby breeding colonies, is permanently established, and monk seal breeding resumes.***

20. Sightings of monk seals has increased in Italy in the last 20 years with sightings being reported from several parts of the Italian peninsula. In the Adriatic, a recent habitat survey has been conducted in Apulia region which resulted in identifying 15 caves that can be suitable for the species. However, no evidence was found if the caves has been visited by monk seals (Bundone, 2016). This is despite the fact that a pup was found in a beach in Brindisi in 2020 which (according to genetic analysis) is likely belonging to the Greek population (Fioravanti et. al., 2020). In sightings has also been reported from the Tyrrhenian (the Tuscan archipelago), and the Ionian seas (the Sardinian smaller islands) (Mo, 2011 and pers. comm). most of these sightings are collected and validated by ISPRA who is also implementing conservation and awareness actions (Mo, 2011).

21. A recently formalized project, established and funded by the Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition, has entrusted ISPRA with the role of coordinating and setting up a national monk seal monitoring program involving the direct participation of staff belonging to institutional bodies dedicated to environmental monitoring and protection. The areas in which the monitoring work will be carried are those indicated as priority in the Strategy and mentioned previously. Indeed, the Italian national monitoring program is being conducted, together with capacity building activities, in the Egadi islands (objective 3.3.2), Tuscan archipelago (objective 3.3.4) and the Apulia region (objective 3.3.5) Italy will also be involved in the capacity building and awareness activities to be implemented by the MMS project led by SPA/RAC.

***Goal Target 3.4. Monk seal presence in Lebanon is permanently established.***

22. According to several published reports, monk seal presence and sightings in Lebanon has increased in the last 20 years<sup>17</sup>. between 2003 and 2020, 47 sightings were recorded mostly between Tripoli and Beirut in northern Lebanon and 2 - 4 individuals seem to be frequently sighted around Palm Island Nature Reserve (SPA/RAC, 2020). Indications of caves use was also documented in May 2017 when an individual was found resting in cave not very far from Beirut 18 and a pregnant female was also found bycaught in a fishing net in January 2015 at Raouche area (1). more data and information will be available soon since Lebanon is partner in both the MMS project led by SPA/RAC and the Monk seal protection at the Eastern Mediterranean Project led by IUCN.

***Goal Target 3.5. Monk seal presence in Israel is permanently established.***

23. With reference to the Objective 3.5.1.19 and Objective 3.5.2. 20 A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along the Israeli coastal zone. Almost 100 sighting reports were collected by Delphis NGO since 2010, 14 of them photographed, with 3 different animals identified. One of the animals, a female in reproduction age, was identified in 5 different visits (2010, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018), as well as a recent extended visit over a few weeks in May 2023.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cepf.net/sites/default/files/sg71038-final-report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.spnl.org/news-in-photos-rare-monk-seal-found-in-raouche/?fbclid=IwAR3kl8PPxCYZj34hexx4DWzG\\_3wZUTYKim-cjX\\_1Endlp6VMtgliGb2xliw](https://www.spnl.org/news-in-photos-rare-monk-seal-found-in-raouche/?fbclid=IwAR3kl8PPxCYZj34hexx4DWzG_3wZUTYKim-cjX_1Endlp6VMtgliGb2xliw)

<sup>19</sup> Objective 3.5.1. A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along the Israeli coastal zone and awareness actions are conducted in areas characterised by recent sightings or coastal habitat suitability :

<sup>20</sup> Objective 3.5.2 A coastal habitat assessment study is conducted, and a long-term cave monitoring program is implemented in northern Israel

24. In a survey, guided by Dr. Luigi Bundone (Archipelago Italy) and designed to examine the presence of suitable caves for the MMS along the Israeli coast, two small caves were found. Other caves, which are assumed to be used by MMS in the last century, have collapsed or flooded. From a combination of sighting data and habitat survey, we concluded that even when animals did visit the Israeli coast, they did not stay for more than few days, due to the lack of a suitable place to rest, let alone breed. To overcome this obstacle and prepare the Israeli coast for future scenario of the MMS population expansion from the north, two suitable caves for restoration were detected within Rosh Haniqra Marine Reserve as part of a future international project (2024-2027). Artificial caves in existing and planned breakwaters are also being considered.

***Goal Target 3.6. Monk seal presence in Montenegro is permanently established.***

25. Objective 3.6.1.<sup>21</sup> Detection of occasional monk seal presence has been indicated by Panou et. al., (2017), who confirmed that monk seals sightings has increased during the period between 1985 - 2010 in Montenegro but no further information nor new observations were found in the time this report was written.

26. Objective 3.6.2<sup>22</sup> the last Coastal habitat assessment studies dated between 2013 and 2015, where three surveys were conducted to map the underwater caves of Montenegro in which more than 20 caves were found to be suitable for monk seals. However, during the surveys, no evidence was found for their presence in the caves (Mačić et. al., 2019).

***Goal Target 3.7. Implementation of Goal Targets 3.1 - 3.6 is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities and sub-regional cooperation.***

27. In the framework of the three regional projects<sup>23</sup> funded by MSA and led by SPA/RAC, IUCN and EuroNatur, several capacity building programme has been prepared and will cover various topics on training, field practice and even training in rehabilitation and necropsy. In the case of SPA/RAC, and through the MMS Project, Lebanon will be involved in the 2 training workshops which will take place in the Spring/summer 2023 in Türkiye and Greece.

**GOAL 4. "GROUP C" COUNTRIES**

***Goal Target 4.1. Monk seal presence in locations of the Maghreb's Mediterranean coasts and annexed islands in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and the Chafarinas Islands (Spain) is repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

28. No new information is available about activities on monk seal research and conservation in Morocco. Previously, areas of importance to the species were identified namely; Al Hoceima National Park, Cap Trois Fourches and Cap de l'Eau (MedMPA 2002 and 2004, Bayed and al. 2005, Mo et. al., 2003 and 2011). These areas were previously surveyed for suitable caves (Mo et. al., 2011) but apart from the previous sightings reported in the previous surveys, no new ones were found during the period of writing this report.

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<sup>21</sup> Objective 3.6.1. A reporting scheme to detect occasional monk seal presence and alert authorities is implemented along the coastal zone of Montenegro.

<sup>22</sup> Objective 3.6.2. Coastal habitat assessment studies are completed, and long-term cave monitoring programmes are implemented in Montenegro.

<sup>23</sup> [Med Monk Seal](#) coordinated by SPA/RAC; Monk seal protection at the Eastern Mediterranean coordinated by IUCN-Med; and [The Eastern Adriatic Monk Seal Project, Phase II](#) by coordinated by EuroNatur Foundation

A final note to mention is the seal sighting that was reported in March 2022 in the Province of Driouch which was for a grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)<sup>24</sup>

29. Since Morocco is one of the countries involved in the MMS project, a monitoring scheme will be applied in Al Hoceima National Park in the 2 identified caves in 2023 -2024.

30. In the case of Algeria and Tunisia, no data or information can be found on recent sightings of the species in the last 3 years nor information on any relevant conservation activities. Both countries are involved in the MMS project and new data and results should be available by the end of 2024.

31. In the case of Tunisia, camera traps will be installed in the caves already mapped and assessed in La Galite Island (Ouerghi et. al., 2001) while a habitat survey will be implemented in Cani islands in northern Tunisia.

***Goal Target 4.2. Monk seal presence in the Balearic Islands, Spain, is repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

32. Apart from the previously reported sightings on a beach in Congreso island, (Bundone et. al., 2019), no new sightings of monk seal were reported or documented in the Balearic Islands vicinity. Also, no data or information can be found on establishing a reporting scheme nor relevant awareness activities.

***Goal Target 4.3. Monk seal presence in Bosnia Herzegovina, and Slovenia repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

33. No data or information can be found on documented sightings of the species in the last 3 years nor information on any relevant activities such as habitat surveys, monitoring, awareness campaigns or capacity building.

***Goal Target 4.4. Monk seal presence in Corsica is repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

34. No data or information can be found on documented sightings of the species in the last 3 years nor information on any relevant activities such as habitat surveys, monitoring, awareness campaigns or capacity building.

***Goal Target 4.5. Monk seal presence is reported again from continental France.***

35. No data or information can be found on documented sightings of the species in the last 3 years nor information on any relevant activities such as habitat surveys, monitoring, awareness campaigns or capacity building.

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV73NIh4zeI>

***Goal Target 4.6. Monk seal presence in Libya and nearby western Egypt is repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

36. Since the monitoring programme that was implemented in 2009 in eastern Libya (Cyrenaica), little follow-up was made to continue the survey to the other targeted areas and to identify and locate suitable caves or to monitor the already discovered ones (Hamza et. al., 2003). In 2012, a juvenile female was caught in a fishing net in El-Elba island and within Ain Gahzalla MPA vicinity (Alfaghi et. al., 2013; Karamanlidis et. al., 2015). For its importance and the frequent sightings of monk seal, the Cyrenaican coast was nominated and selected as an Area of Interest under the IMMA criteria (Gulf of Bomba to Marsa Matrouh AoI) 25

37. Regarding recent sightings, there was only one of an adult monk seal (probably female) in the further western side of the country near the city of Zwara and close to the Tunisian borders. The individual was resting on a beach when it was spotted by beach pedestrians who took some pictures and videos of the encounter 26. Following that, a rapid assessment was conducted by the local BADO NGO who explored the sandy coastline west of Zwara looking for possible resting caves or further sightings with no clear results. Libya is also involved in the new Med Monk Seal project and a monitoring programme is to be established in Cyrenaica while public awareness activity will be conducted in the city of Zwara where the last sighting was made. In the case of Egypt, apart from the sighting reported by Notarbartolo di Sciara & Fouad (2011) near Salloum MPA close to the Libyan borders, No further data or information can be found at the time of writing this report. Being another country targeted by the MMS project, Egypt will conduct a habitat survey of the western area near Salloum MPA to locate any suitable caves before proceeding to monitoring.

***Goal Target 4.7. Monk seal presence is reported from Malta.***

38. No data or information can be found on documented sightings of the species in the last 3 years nor information on any relevant activities such as habitat surveys, monitoring, awareness campaigns or capacity building.

***Goal Target 4.8. Monk seal presence in Syria is repeatedly reported and permanently established.***

39. Apart from the previously documented sightings of monk seal reported by Ibrahim (2013), Jony & Ibrahim (2006) in the last 10 years, no other confirmed sightings were found at the time of writing this report. Most sighting seems to be located around the province of Latakia in the north close to the Turkish borders. More information about the status of the species in Syria should be available via the MMS project that should take place in Syria during 2023 - 2024.

***Goal Target 4.9. Implementation of Goal Targets 4.1 - 4.8. is enabled through appropriate capacity building activities and sub-regional cooperation.***

40. As part of the WMMC conference<sup>27</sup> that took place in December 2019, Barcelona, a dedicated workshop titled "Definition of a road map for the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Monk seal in low density countries"<sup>28</sup> was conducted to bring together a group of monk seal researchers from the low density countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia) to update the information on the species in each region, discuss possible bilateral collaboration between countries, define

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=938184420242232>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.wmmconference.org/workshops/#Definition%20of%20a%20road%20map>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.rac-spa.org/node/1817>

requirements of capacity building, funding and equipment. Later, the results, recommendations and notes from this workshop were used to develop the Med Monk Seal Project working plan<sup>29</sup>.

41. As part of the project, there will be 2 sub-regional workshops that will train teams from each of the involved countries on establishing monitoring schemes using the protocol and guidelines of the IMAP/Ecosystem Approach.

## **Conclusion**

42. It is obvious that the Monk seal alliance MSA has established, since 2019, a dynamic that bring together the entire community of stakeholders working to protect the Mediterranean monk seal with the ambition of co-constructing conservation action plans for the species and its habitat, throughout its range of distribution, and harmonise research programmes and sharing data thanks to its sustainable, dedicated funding.

43. Hence, the MSA 'regional and national funded projects is largely contributing to the achievement of the Goal, objectives and targets of the Mediterranean strategy which was the base for the Monk seal alliance approach.

44. However, it's recommended to set up the Monk Seal Advisory Committee, whose terms of reference are presented in Annex 1, no later than December 2023, in order to provide support to SPA/RAC in the development and implementation of specific conservation actions having a regional scope for the remaining of its period as described in the Strategy itself.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.rac-spa.org/node/2176>



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## **Annex I**

**Monk Seal Advisory Committee (MSAC)**  
***Terms of References and Modality of Work***



**Table of Context:**

1. Introduction and Context
2. Draft Terms of Reference
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**Abbreviations and acronyms:**

<b>CMS</b>	The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals
<b>EcAp</b>	Ecosystem Approach
<b>EO</b>	Ecological Objective
<b>GFCM</b>	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
<b>MSAC</b>	Monk Seal Advisory Committee
<b>SPAs</b>	Special Protected Areas
<b>SPA/RAC</b>	Special Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre
<b>SPA/BD</b>	Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean
<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>IUCN</b>	The International Union for Conservation of Nature



## 1. Introduction and Context

1. The Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*, Hermann, 1779) is the only representative of the sub-order Pinnipedia in the Mediterranean Sea. Once was present in the entire basin, the black sea and the nearby Atlantic region, the species is nowadays reduced to several hundred individuals dwelling in remote and isolated areas where little human disturbance is present. The **known** colonies of Mediterranean monk seals are now residing either in the eastern side of the Mediterranean (mainly in Cyprus, Greece and Turkey), or in the northeast Atlantic region off the coast of northwest Africa (Mauritania, Morocco, Cabo Blanco and the archipelago of Madeira) with no observed interaction between the two populations.

2. From a conservational point of view, the species was emphasised by literature as “The rarest marine mammal in the world and one of only few pinniped species to reside in tropical and subtropical waters”. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has highlighted its status as Endangered in its Red List criteria and this critical status was also emphasised by regional and international conventions such as; The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (also known as the Bonn Convention); The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (The Bern Convention); and The Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea (The Barcelona Convention).

3. In the later-mentioned convention, the Mediterranean Monk Seal was recognised as a priority for conservation in September 1985 and an “Action Plan for the Management of the Mediterranean Monk Seal” was elaborated through their dedicated Special Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) in what was later known as the Genoa Declaration. The Action Plan has set a number of both Immediate and long-term Actions that need to be adopted and implemented by the contracting countries in the convention to reduce the pressure on monk seals and prevent its continuing decline. Afterward, a more detailed strategy was elaborated by SPA/RAC and then adopted by the countries in 2014 as a continuation of the conservation effort under the Barcelona Convention. The legally binding “Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Monk Seal in The Mediterranean” had a main Vision of to “Over the next two decades, the ecological recovery of monk seals in the Mediterranean will deem to have occurred, when multiple colonies have become established within all major habitats in their historic range, interacting in ecologically significant ways with the fullest possible set of other species, and inspiring and connecting human cultures”. The Strategy identified a number of strategic Goals for the next stage of conservation, these includes; the effective protection of “nuclei” breeding colonies of the species Group A Countries (defined as Cyprus, Greece and Turkey); investigate and then protect any presence or new colonies in areas where the species was recently sighted (Group B Countries including Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Croatia, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Spain, Syria and Tunisia); investigate the status of the species in its historic habitat (Group C Countries including Bosnia and Herzegovina Monaco, France, Malta, Montenegro, and Slovenia). Under each Goal, there are number of Objectives that must be achieved by the relevant countries (more details will be addressed later in this document).

## 2. Draft Terms of Refence to Monk Seal Advisory Committee (thereafter MSAC)

4. The Special Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) was established by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols in order to assist Mediterranean countries in implementing the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the role of SPA/RAC is to guide the Mediterranean countries in establishing conservation measures and programmes to the different habitats and species that are mentioned under the convention including the monk seal (referred to as Annex II of endangered or threatened species). In this regard, and under Goal Target 1 (Strategy Implementation) of the previously mentioned regional strategy, a “framework for the implementation of the Mediterranean Monk Seal Conservation Strategy should be

established by the Mediterranean Range States” and this should be done through the creation of a Monk Seal Advisory Committee (MSAC) by SPA/RAC. This document presents the main elements of the Terms of Reference necessary for the establishment of this Committee including its main objectives, tasks, membership and modality of work.

### **2.1. Aims and objectives of the Committee:**

5. The MSCA is an independent entity that will be created by SPA/RAC in consultation with the contracting Parties. . The main objective of the Committee is to support SPA/RAC in the development and implementation of specific conservation actions related to monk seal research and conservation in the framework of the mediterranean Monk seal strategy and other initiatives/programmes in the region.

### **2.2. Tasks to be undertaken:**

- **2.2.1.** Support SPA/RAC in achieving **Goals 2,3 and 4** of the updated strategy (for more details, please refer to the Strategy document [here](#)) taking in consideration to harmonize their implementation within the scope of the EU Habitats Directive, and the Ecosystem Approach process for the attainment of Good Environmental Status in the Mediterranean, specifically in relation to the Ecological Objective EO1 “Biodiversity” and Operational Objectives 1.1 (“Species distribution is maintained”), 1.2 (“Population size of selected species in maintained”), 1.3 “Population condition of selected species is maintained”), and 1.4 (“Key coastal and marine habitats are not being lost”).
- **2.2.2.** Assist SPA/RAC in planning and promoting training and capacity building activities in the relevant countries taking in consideration the national stakeholders involved in monk seal research and conservation. This will be done according to the priorities set by the Strategy according to the presence of monk seal colonies in each country group (Country Group A, B and C). This will be supported by the creation and managing of a dedicated multilingual website and a newsletter.
- **2.2.3.** Collaborate with SPA/RAC to facilitate national and regional communication and collaboration between different experts, researchers, and stakeholders. This should include the organizations and conduction of workshops and similar events to share experience and best practices.
- **2.2.4.** Advise SPA/RAC on setting and the elaboration of a sensibilization and awareness programme per country or sub-regional, taking in consideration the level priorities set in the updated strategy.
- **2.2.5.** Support SPA/RAC in implementing specific activities in accordance with the Strategy such as the completion of monk seal breeding site inventories, obtaining data on population dynamics parameters (e.g. abundance, distribution and breeding), setting up a common database (e.g., photo-id catalogues) and the facilitation of a standarised region-wide protocol for rescue and rehabilitation.
- **2.2.6.** Elaborate with SPA/RAC a thorough contingency and emergency intervention plan for the monk seal in the case of disastrous events occurred (e.g., lethal epizootic outbreaks, massive oil spills within monk seal habitat) and promote this plan to relevant parties.
- **2.2.7.** Work closely with SPA/RAC on other monk seal relevant subjects based on agreement by the two parties.

### **3. Structure and membership:**

6. The MSAC should be composed of geographically representative members of the region. Membership in the committee should be rotative to allow for adequate share of advisory roles by different experts with respect to Ecap reporting timeframes. It is proposed to have up to three representatives from the three group<sup>30</sup> of Mediterranean countries defined in the Mediterranean Strategy for the conservation of Monk seal acting during the time horizon of this Strategy , which is six years.

7. The MSAC functioning is supported by SPA/RAC, and may benefit from relevant bodies within IUCN, the GFCM and other relevant international organizations.

8. Permanent members should be experts in phocid conservation; involved in EcAp/IMAP and MSFD /Habitat Directives implementation; marine conservation governance; bycatch and mitigation of marine mammal-small scale fishing conflicts; IUCN seal specialist group (to provide adequate scientific support)

### **4. Working Languages:**

9. English and French will be the main Languages used within MSAC.

### **5. Functional Modalities:**

10. Once members are selected and appointed, the MSAC experts shall elect among them a chairperson that can be re-elected annually. On the other hand, SPA/RAC will act as secretariat and appoint a representative and Coordinator that will follow up on the organisation and work of the committee.

11. The chairperson will assist the Coordinator in organising the dedicated meetings of the committee, review documents, communication and contact with the committee members. A mailing list will be created to include all the members and will facilitate the exchange of documents, news and announcements.

12. Taking in account any relevant restrictions or limitations, and logistics/financial considerations, the group can arrange meetings online when necessary but should have at least one face-to-face meeting per year in a location that can be suggested by the Coordinator and agreed upon by the members.

### **6. Reporting and Record-keeping**

13. Along with any relevant reports, news and the conclusions of each meeting, the SPA/RAC Coordinator will communicate these and any other relevant material to the Committee and will make sure that this material is made available on the SPA/RAC's website. Furthermore, the progress and recommendations made by the Committee has to be presented during the meeting of the Focal Points for SPA/DB by the coordinator and/or the chair.

14. From their side, the Parties to the Barcelona Convention will ensure that the activities that the MSAC recommends are addressed and will adopt resolutions in support of specific MSAC recommendations concerning the implementation of this Strategy.

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<sup>30</sup> Group A" countries (where monk seal breeding has been reported after year 2010). "Group B" countries (where no monk seal breeding is reported, but where repeated sightings of monk seals (>3) were reported since 2010). "Group C" countries (where no monk seal breeding is reported, and where very rare or no sightings of monk seals (≤3) were reported since 2010).