



UNITED
NATIONS

EP

UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.6



UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME
MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

UNEP

19 May 2015
English
Original: French

Twelfth Meeting of Focal Points for Specially Protected Areas

Athens, Greece, 25-29 May 2015

Agenda item 7: Ecosystems conservation

- 7.1. Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea**
- 7.2. Action Plan for the Conservation of the Coralligenous and other Calcareous Bioconcretions in the Mediterranean Sea**
- 7.3. Action Plan for the Conservation of Habitats and Species associated with Seamounts, Underwater Caves and Canyons, Aphotic Hard Beds and Chemo-synthetic Phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark Habitats Action Plan)**
- 7.4. Activities for the elaboration of national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest**

Agenda item 10 Marine and Coastal Protected Areas, including in the open seas and deep seas

- 10.1. List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI List)**
- 10.1.2. Inclusion of sites in the SPAMI List**

Progress Report of the “Project on Mapping of key marine habitats in the Mediterranean and promoting their conservation through the establishment of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs)” (MedKeyHabitats Project)

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I. THE MEDKEYHABITATS PROJECT DATA SHEET

TITLE: Mapping of key marine habitats in the Mediterranean and promoting their conservation through the establishment of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)

DURATION: 2013-2016 (30 months)

OBJECTIVE: The aim of the MedKeyHabitats Project is to make cartographic inventories of key marine habitats of conservation interest in order to extend the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI) network, as advocated by the SPA/BD Protocol of the Barcelona Convention. This project will help partner countries to implement the necessary actions as regards SAP BIO priorities and the recommendations of the action plans on the conservation of marine vegetation, the conservation of the coralligenous and other bioconstructions and the conservation of dark populations of the Mediterranean Sea (underwater caves, canyons, etc.).

BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES: 8 countries bordering on the Mediterranean, i.e. Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Egypt, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco and Tunisia

FUNDING SOURCE: MAVA Foundation / € 765 785

RAC/SPA CO-FUNDING: € 171 500 (in cash) + € 66 460 (in kind)

TOTAL COST OF PROJECT: € 1 004 285

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES:

Objective 1: Elaboration of cartographic inventory of marine key habitats of conservation interest

- Action 1 : Undertake, by field surveys, an inventory and characterization of the most important habitats and the ones that could be considered as natural monuments.
- Action 2 : Mapping selected marine key habitats with conventional (transects, aerial photos) and / or innovative methods (satellite imagery and side-scan sonar).
- Action 3 : Strengthen existing monitoring networks and to initiate new ones for key habitats.
- Action 4 : Communicating on key habitats and their role, on the progress and results of the studies and on undertaken monitoring.
- Action 5 : Provide training for national experts on the techniques used.
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Objective 2: Strengthening of the SPAMI network.

- Action 6: To organize a seminar to discuss about the SPAMI list, in particular by assessing the listed sites and proposing new ones for inclusion on the list. SPAMI managers, scientists, policy makers and donors will be invited to the seminar.
- Action 7: Assist countries to nominate sites for inclusion on the SPAMI list by providing the necessary expertise in accordance with the procedure adopted.

II. State of implementation of the MedKeyHabitats project

After the signing of the partnership agreement with MAVA Foundation and reception of the first instalment, RAC/SPA started implementing the project, as follows:

1. Setting up the unit for implementing the project

As agreed when the project was proposed, RAC/SPA has appointed a project assistant. A recruitment notice was issued on 15 and 16 March 2014. The selected candidate started work with the project on 1 May 2014.

2. Ad hoc experts' group meeting for the planning of the Medkeyhabitats project activities

To finalise the project's logical framework and monitoring plan and to plan the project's activities, a meeting was held on 24 and 25 February 2014 in Tunis (Tunisia). Three experts in the field of habitat mapping attended the meeting.

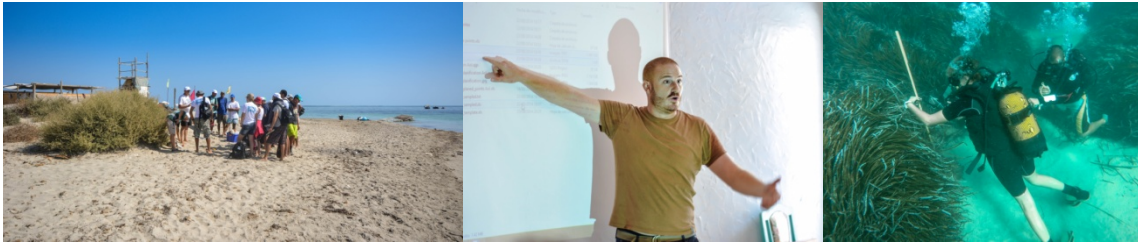
3. Meeting on planning and coordinating with the countries

To launch activities in the countries, in particular those where cartographic inventories of marine habitats of conservation importance will take place, planning and coordinating meetings were organised as follows: i) Libya, 28 January 2014, ii) Morocco, 26 June 2014, iii) Montenegro, 6 June 2014, and iv) Tunisia, 30 June 2014. These meetings resulted in Memoranda of Cooperation (MoC) with Morocco, Montenegro and Tunisia. These MoCs were very important for deciding on pilot sites, planning and ways of implementing activities in these countries, bearing in mind their specific features. For Libya, given the political situation, it was not possible to establish a MoC. Contacts concerning the project implementation in Algeria are on-going.



4. Training in the 'inventorying, characterization, cartography and monitoring of key marine habitats of conservation interest'

The main aim of this activity is to train national experts in the countries concerned by the MedKeyHabitats project (Algeria, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco and Tunisia) in mapping techniques, providing them with the practical tools needed for the inventorying, characterization, cartography and monitoring of key marine habitats of conservation interest in the Mediterranean Sea. A training session was organised From 17 to 24 August 2014 and attended by fifteen participants from the participating countries. It offered to the participants an opportunity to practice several mapping methods (transect and hydroplane) for characterizing the marine habitats (Posidonia meadows and the *Cystoseira* forest) and for setting a monitoring network in the upper edge of the Posidonia meadows. The work done took 3 days in the Kuriat Islands site, a future Marine Protected Area in Tunisia.



5. Editing and publishing

In order to promote the standardized techniques adopted within the framework of the Barcelona Convention, the following tools are being edited and printed and will be ready for dissemination from May 2015:

- handbook for interpreting types of marine habitats for the selection of sites to appear in the national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest
- standardized methods for inventorying and monitoring the coralligenous and marl populations
- Lists of coralligenous populations and the main species to be considered in the inventories and monitoring
- Guidelines for the Standardization of Methods of Cartography and Monitoring of Marine Magnoliophytes in the Mediterranean
- Protocol for setting up monitoring of the Posidonia meadows.

A brochure on the project was elaborated and printed in three languages (French, English and Arabic). The project unit established a web page providing information on the project, its activities and its results. The page is available on the RAC/SPA website. Information on the the project is now also available on social networks (Facebook¹, Google² and Youtube³).

6. Organising symposiums on the conservation of key Mediterranean marine habitats

Mediterranean symposiums were organised as part of implementing the following Action Plans adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention.

- Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea, adopted in 1999
- Action Plan for the Conservation of the Coralligenous and other Mediterranean Bio-constructions, adopted in 2008
- Action Plan for the Conservation of Habitats and Species Associated with Seamounts, Underwater Caves and Canyons, with Aphotic Hard Bottoms and Chemo-Synthetic Phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Action Plan for Dark Habitats), adopted in 2013

These symposiums serve the aims of the MedKeyHabitats project and are also intended to provide an opportunity for exchange and dialogue between Mediterranean scientists. The 2014 Symposiums thus brought together specialists from the entire Mediterranean region to discuss the state of available knowledge, and present the most recent developments as to their conservation, and the results of their research work. These symposiums took place in Portorož, Slovenia, as follows:

- 5th Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation (27-28 October 2014)

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/medkeyhabitats>

² <https://plus.google.com/u/0/b/100907538472043875455/100907538472043875455/videos>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/user/medkeyhabitats>

- 2nd Mediterranean Symposium on the Conservation of the Coralligenous and other Bio-constructions (29-30 October 2014)
- 1st Mediterranean Symposium on the Conservation of Dark Habitats (31 October 2014)

RAC/SPA organised these symposiums in collaboration with the Slovenian Nature Protection Institute. Over 140 participants attended these events. Given the high scientific level, with over 126 articles and posters, the Proceedings will be printed and disseminated



The project contributed in organising the 4th workshop on magnoliophytes in the Mediterranean (Oristano, Italy, 18-22 May 2015), by supporting the participation of participants from the countries covered by the project.

III. Implementing objective 1: Elaboration of cartographic inventory of marine key habitats of conservation interest

Morocco

Preliminary mission of inventorying and characterizing the most important habitats (Jbel Moussa, Morocco)

A preliminary visit was organised from 13-20 September 2014 for inventorying and characterizing the most important habitats in the marine part of the Jbel Moussa Site of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBE), a pilot site chosen in agreement with the "Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte Contre la Désertification", to implement the project's activities.

The marine part of the Jbel Moussa SIBE site presents a satisfactory state of conservation although some anthropic impacts were identified (Port of Tanger-Med and the Dalia shelter for fishermen).

Several habitats of conservation interest were observed and subjected to scientific investigation. The list of marine habitats of the Jbel Moussa SBEI appears below:

- Mediollittoral detritic biocenosis
- Upper mediollittoral rock biocenosis
- Association with *Lithophyllum lichenoides*
- Mediollittoral caves
- Association with *Zostera marina* in euryhaline and eurythermal environment
- Biocenosis of wave-brought coarse sand and fine gravel
- Association with rhodoliths

- Infralittoral algal biocenosis
- Association with *Cystoseira sp*
- Facies and association of the Coralligenous biocenosis (in enclave)



The *Zostera marina* meadow, the association with *Lithophyllum*, and the facies and associations of the Coralligenous biocenosis are among the area's most remarkable habitats. Detailed mapping of its habitats, and the setting up of a monitoring system, are necessary to ensure that the long term conservation of this site.

Being a place where the topography of the marine area is rather special and where the habitats occupy slopes going down to a depth of 50 m., use of the side-scansonar cannot be envisaged. A survey will be planned over an extended time, using an ROV. Also, it is vital to have a detailed map of the site. The second survey could be planned for September 2015 with the same team and the same logistic elements.

Tunisia

As agreed with the Tunisian authorities, it is anticipated to improve the mapping of the key marine habitats in the Cap Negro-Sidi Mechreg area, an area of enhanced protection in the future Cap Negro-Cap Serrat MCPA supported by the "Agence de Protection et d'Aménagement du Littoral" (APAL), and to start a network for monitoring key habitats. On-the-job training of nationals is included in the action.

A tender was issued on 12 March 2015 and a contract has been signed with the select firm. The works started in May 2015

Montenegro

As agreed with the Montenegro authorities, it is anticipated to improve the mapping of the key marine habitats in the Platamuni and Ratac site using side-scan sonar and to start a network for monitoring key habitats. On-the-job training of nationals is included in the action.

A tender was issued on 24 April 2015. The selection process is underway and the works are expected to start by end of May 2015.

Algeria

As agreed with the Algerian authorities, it is anticipated to map the key marine habitats around Rachgoun Island and to start a network for monitoring key habitats. This activity will provide a precise description and an inventory of the floral, faunal and landscape heritage, in particular the key marine habitats, to help the site's being listed as a Protected Area (Law no. 11-02 on Protected Areas in the context of sustainable development). On-the-job training of nationals is included in the action.

A tender is expected for early June. Traditional methods will be used during the field work that will start in July 2015.

Libya

Given the present situation in Libya, the mapping activities planned as part of the MedKeyHabitats were replaced by a programme of capacity-building for three Libyan participants from Libya's Environment General Authority (EGA). The training includes the following action:

1. A training course on mapping the main habitats by satellite images and ROV
2. A training course on using GIS to map the main habitats
3. A practical course on use of side-scan sonar for mapping, planned as part of the survey in the Cap Negro-Sidi Mechreg area (northern Tunisia).

IV. Implementing objective 2: Strengthening of the SPAMI network

RAC/SPA informed its partners about a conference on SPAMIs to evaluate the Barcelona Convention SPAMI process (set up in 2001). The ACCOBAMS and GFCM Secretariats and MedPAN showed an interest in organising working sessions on MPAs at the conference. A joint RAC/SPA-GFCM-ACCOBAMS and MedPAN conference is planned for the period between 9 and 12 June 2015 in Tunis.

Furthermore, contacts have been established with Albania, Croatia, Egypt and Libya to propose sites for inclusion on the SPAMI List. Conditions prevailing in Libya (El Kouf National Park) and Egypt (Salloum MPA) prevented the Management Plan (Libya) made by the MedMPAnet⁴ project from being finalised, and its elaboration process (Egypt) from being started. Albania showed its interest in proposing the Karaburun Sazan National Marine Park. As for Croatia, because of the fisheries management reform now under way, the authorities suggested waiting for this process to be finalised (it should further improve conservation in Croatian MPAs) to propose sites for inclusion on the SPAMI List

⁴ Regional Project for the Development of a **M**editerranean **M**arine and Coastal **P**rotected Areas (MPAs) **N**etwork through the boosting of MPAs creation and management