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## **MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**

Second Meeting of Government-designated Experts  
on the Application of the Ecosystem Approach

Athens, 9-10 July 2008

### **REPORT**

## **OF THE SECOND MEETING OF GOVERNMENT-DESIGNATED EXPERTS ON THE APPLICATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH**



## **Introduction**

1. Acting on the recommendations of the first Meeting of Government-designated Experts on the Application of the Ecosystem Approach (Athens, 20-21 February 2007) and of the Meeting of MAP Focal Points (Madrid, 16-19 October 2007), the Contracting Parties decided at their Meeting in Almeria (15-18 January 2008) to progressively apply the ecosystem approach to the management of human activities that may affect the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment (Decision IG 17/6) and adopted the road map drawn up for that purpose, the first two steps of which had already been implemented.
2. With a view to proceeding with step 3 of the road map and with the requisite decisions and proposals, the second Meeting of Government-designated Experts was held at the Caravel Hotel in Athens (Greece) on 9 and 10 July 2008.

## **Participation**

3. Government-designated experts from the following Contracting Parties attended the Meeting: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, European Commission, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malta, Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Turkey.
4. The Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) Coordinating Unit was represented by the MAP Coordinator, the UNEP/MAP Consultant, the MED POL Coordinator, the MED POL Programme Officer and the Sustainable Development Officer.
5. SPA/RAC was represented by its Director and PAP/RAC by its Deputy Director.
6. Representatives of WHO, CIESM, ICES, HELCOM and Greenpeace also attended.
7. The full list of participants is attached as **Annex I** to the present report.

## **Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting**

8. Mr. Paul Mifsud, the MAP Coordinator, opened the Meeting and welcomed the participants. He reviewed the main developments that had led the Contracting Parties to adopt Decision IG 17/6 on the gradual implementation by MAP of the ecosystem approach at their Meeting in Almeria in January 2008. The objectives of the current Meeting were to prepare the implementation of step 3 and to plan steps 4 and 5 of the road map adopted in Almeria, in other words to determine the spatial scale of application of the approach, including the possible division of the Mediterranean into several management areas; to decide on the launching of pilot studies and their modalities; and to start work on a document identifying important properties of the ecosystem, with an assessment of its ecological status and of the pressures to which it was being subjected. In addressing those tasks, MAP should take into consideration the experience of other organizations such as HELCOM and others, which had made substantial progress in the area and whose presence at the second Meeting – just as at the first Meeting in February 2007 – would enrich the discussion. Lastly, as one of the regional seas of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Mediterranean should keep abreast of developments in UNEP, which had established an ecosystem management programme as one of the priorities of its medium-term strategy, with useful and effective tools.

**Agenda item 2: Election of officers**

9. In accordance with Rule 20 of the Rules of Procedure and after informal consultations held before the opening session, the Meeting unanimously elected the following Bureau:

Chair:	Mr. Gert Verreet	(European Community)
Vice-Chair:	Ms. Etleva Canaj	(Albania)
Vice-Chair:	Ms. Mawaheb Abu Elazm	(Egypt)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Nenad Smodlaka	(Croatia)

**Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work**

10. The Secretariat proposed and the Meeting adopted the agenda contained in document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.326/1 and its annotated version contained in document UNEP(DEP)/MED WG. 326/2. The agenda of the Meeting, as adopted, is attached as **Annex II** to the present report. The Chair announced that the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting would be adopted at the last session and that a detailed draft report would be sent to participants later for comment and adoption.

**Agenda item 4: Scope and purpose of the Meeting**

11. The Coordinator briefly reviewed the context of the Meeting and the expected outcomes. To begin with, the ECOMED project, financed by the European Commission and adopted by the Contracting Parties at their Meeting in Portoroz in 2005, had been launched to examine the implications for MAP of the possible implementation of an ecosystem approach and to develop a road map. An expert group had been set up and had held two meetings in 2006, and a document containing proposals had been prepared and discussed at the first Meeting of Government-designated Experts in February 2007. It had been agreed that the move to an ecosystem approach should not constitute a break with the past but a progressive and adaptive move towards the integrated management of human activities, focusing on the ecosystem implications. The first Meeting of Government-designated Experts had therefore recommended the progressive application of the ecosystem approach through a process involving scientists and decision makers and based on a road map, the first two steps of which had been completed at the same Meeting, namely the definition of an ecological vision for the Mediterranean and the setting of common Mediterranean strategic goals. It fell to the present Meeting to decide on the spatial scale, in other words on possible management areas for application of the approach, to provide for the launching of pilot projects that would serve as models for its application and to identify important ecosystem properties.

**Agenda item 5: Spatial and temporal scale of the application of the approach**

12. Mr. Gabriel P. Gabrielides, UNEP/MAP Consultant, introduced the relevant section of the working document of the Meeting entitled "Implementation of the road map (step 3) for the application of the ecosystem approach" (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.326/3). It was necessary at the outset to distinguish between the existing system – which involved, for instance, reducing levels of pollutants and measuring the rates of reduction thus achieved – and that based on the ecosystem approach, which involved assessing the progress made by monitoring the quality of the marine environment itself by means of a whole range of indicators and keeping a record of progress made. In view of the differences between the constituent parts of the Mediterranean and the limited impact of measures taken by one

coastal State on others – especially more remote States, the application of the ecosystem approach and the management of the Mediterranean should be appropriately decentralized. The substantial work on the ecosystem approach undertaken under the Convention on Biological Diversity was particularly relevant and had led to the development of a number of broad principles and of operational guidelines. For instance, the approach should be based on spatial and temporal scales that were consistent with the objectives set, and management should be decentralized to the lowest possible level in order to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and equity. It was therefore essential to decide whether the approach was to be applied on a Mediterranean-wide scale or whether it was preferable to identify specific management areas. Clearly, it was difficult to proceed without identifying areas, because this would imply setting common goals for a sea with areas or basins that were normally considered separately and were faced with very different problems, for example the eutrophic status of the Adriatic Sea and the oligotrophic status of the Levant Sea. If the Mediterranean Sea were to be divided into areas, it would be possible to establish priorities, indicators and target values reflecting this diversity, while maintaining some common objectives for the whole of the Mediterranean or for several different areas. Identifying areas did not mean dividing countries into groups, since ecosystems ignored national boundaries. The document before the Meeting presented several options for division, illustrated by corresponding maps, but in his view the best solution was to divide the Mediterranean into four or five areas. The question of which option to choose would be addressed in the forthcoming discussion. It was proposed to defer discussion of the temporal scale until a later stage, once the ecological and operational objectives had been established.

13. The Chair observed that an informed decision on the best possible spatial division of the Mediterranean was expected to result from the discussion once the different differentiation criteria had been reviewed. That did not mean, however, that all objectives and activities would be differentiated, since a substantial amount of work would still need to be undertaken jointly by all States and unity was also necessary at the management level.

14. The representative of HELCOM reviewed her organization's experience with the ecosystem approach. The development of the approach had been launched after a joint ministerial meeting between HELCOM and the Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR) in 2003. The process was driven by a series of workshops and projects and during the first phase, a system of vision, goals and objectives for the Baltic Sea in good ecological and environmental status was developed focusing on four priority issues: eutrophication, hazardous substances, biodiversity and maritime activities. In the following phases, indicators and target levels have been developed for the ecological objectives. Each issue has given rise to a division into geographic areas in terms of the kind of work being done – assessment or management activity. For example, there were seven sub-areas for eutrophication. It should be emphasized, however, that the ecosystem approach was applied, in general, to the entire Baltic Sea and incorporated in the Baltic Sea Action Plan adopted in 2007. Using maps, the representative showed that the geographic areas could themselves be divided up, on the basis of the relevant issues, into sub-areas that were more circumscribed but easily adjusted to and integrated into the areas of the first division, and that harmonized methods were invariably used for the Baltic as a whole. In developing the process, HELCOM had drawn on its extensive experience in the area of assessment and continuous monitoring.

15. The representative of CIESM (International Commission for Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean Sea) reviewed the organization's main multilateral activities in various fields such as hydrodynamics, bioaccumulation and biomagnification of pollutants through the food chain, etc. Through monitoring programmes and oceanographic campaigns, CIESM acquires long-time series (on key features) of the Mediterranean Sea from the impact of climatic change on water masses and biodiversity to the biomagnification of selected

contaminants in molluscs. These data are being integrated into a geographic metabase, all of which could serve as models for the application of the ecosystem approach. This geographic metabase completed with trend analyses and synthetic comments will allow CIESM to issue periodic scientific reports on the State of the Mediterranean ecosystem for use by all stakeholders.

16. Several speakers, invoking a variety of arguments, drew attention to the complexity of the process of defining areas. While it should be relatively easy to reach a consensus on the strictly scientific aspect, such as biogeographical and oceanographic criteria, when it came to the political aspect, historical, cultural, economic and social considerations came into play, as well as levels of development and attitudes, and it was in that context that States would be required to ensure the joint management of a common area. A sea such as the Adriatic might seem to be unique, and indeed it was, but that did not prevent it from having a northern area and a southern area, entailing mutual interference that was difficult to assess; for instance, the reduction of nutrients to control eutrophication in the north had led after a number of years to new problems such as the reduction of primary producers and zooplankton. Caution must therefore be exercised when identifying areas. In Egypt, the Mediterranean coastline was also highly diverse, encompassing the unique Nile Delta, major differences in the availability of biological resources, and spatial and temporal interconnections that were difficult to assess. Thus, sponge fishing had died out and been supplanted by new types of fisheries, and the development of fish farming would complicate matters still further. It followed that whatever division was adopted should be based primarily on practical criteria and placed in a context that was, by definition, constantly evolving to keep pace with emerging issues.

17. Other experts considered that any decision on a division into areas was premature, since it was the issues themselves that determined the boundaries, as demonstrated by the example of eutrophication: while an area based on that issue could be justified in the western Mediterranean, it would serve no purpose in the eastern basin. The proposed options for division were purely geographical and, significantly, based on the conventional and age-old division of the Mediterranean into secondary seas and basins, which were no longer relevant in today's complex Mediterranean. The correct approach was to identify the issues at stake and to prioritize them before undertaking a spatial distribution by means of a multifactorial analysis. It would clearly have been preferable to discuss agenda item 7 before broaching the question of areas.

18. On the other hand, five representatives, while conceding that some objections were valid and accepting that some countries might be reluctant to contemplate the possibility of management areas across different countries' borders, nonetheless argued in favour of adopting one of the divisions proposed in the working document, since the ecosystem approach required that the whole ecosystem of a given coherent geographical area be addressed in an integral manner and further theoretical considerations of the scientific optimum scale might unduly delay the agreed process. The way forward was to start conducting the assessments that would constitute the main component of step 3 and in the process consider whether the sub-division was adequate. If participants were uneasy with the word management, it could be set aside for the time being so that the Meeting could concentrate on scientific and biogeographical criteria. The Consultant reminded participants that the Contracting Parties had adopted a decision on the progressive application of the ecosystem approach to human activities and had also adopted a clear-cut road map that was the outcome of extensive discussions. Moreover, the word management should not be construed as an administrative straitjacket that would be imposed on countries. The aim was to agree on an appropriate framework for a scientific activity, drawing on the soundest information and knowledge available on the ecosystem, and proceeding at a later stage to develop ecological and operational objectives with indicators and target levels. The question

could, in fact, be reversed: was it possible to envisage the application of the ecosystem approach on a Mediterranean-wide scale, in other words to contemplate the application of, by definition, common priorities and objectives, even though the discussion had just demonstrated that the existence of differentiation was generally recognized? Ideally, the smaller the region, the easier it would be to implement the approach. The Secretariat had proposed a very broad division in order to avoid complicating the task and to ensure flexibility.

19. The discussion eventually focused on the appropriate number of areas, with some advocating four and others five or even six or seven areas. The Spanish delegation proposed the Alboran Sea as a separate area not only for its biogeographic and oceanographic features but also for its specific socio-economic situation. The Aegean Sea was also mentioned due to the influence of the Black Sea. A proposal was made to use the terms "assessment areas" or "study areas". Other speakers felt that this would merely add to the confusion, and it was finally decided to use only the term "area". It was further proposed to coordinate and summarize the main points of the studies carried out in the four areas in order to take stock of the overall situation in the Mediterranean and to identify certain manifestly common objectives.

20. Following a fresh exchange of views, the Chair noted that the Meeting, with a view to implementing step 3, had virtually unanimously endorsed the proposal to divide the Mediterranean Sea into four areas, but with the following two provisos: (a) the division was provisional and was to be viewed as a working basis designed to facilitate the implementation of step 3; it would be revoked, corrected, confirmed or supplemented in the light of the results of the forthcoming studies and assessments; (b) at this stage, no description of the areas was being adopted in order to avoid complicating or compromising the process by non-scientific considerations. The four areas selected were those shown in figure 4 of document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG 326/3, namely: 1. Western Mediterranean; 2. Adriatic Sea; 3. Ionian Sea – Central Mediterranean; 4. Aegean Sea – Levantine Sea.

21. The Turkish delegation expressed its opposition to any arbitrary division of the seas and oceans. Turkey attached importance to cooperation among the coastal States of the Mediterranean on common objectives, in line with a long-established MAP principle. It might be prepared under certain circumstances to accept a division of the Mediterranean into two areas, but it saw no justification for any further division. Nevertheless, given the provisional nature of the division into four areas, Turkey agreed to this provisional arrangement without prejudice to its right to come back to this question at a later stage.

#### **Agenda item 6: Initiation of pilot project(s)**

22. The Consultant, introducing the relevant section of the working document, referred to the recommendation of the first Meeting of experts held in February 2007 to "consider the launching of pilot projects as a model for the application of the ecosystem approach". The initial idea was that, once a decision had been taken on the division into areas, one area should be selected for a pilot project. This had triggered reactions from countries that were concerned about the possible sidelining of other areas. The present Meeting should therefore consider the proposal and take a decision on its appropriateness.

23. During the ensuing discussion, many speakers presented extremely diverse interpretations of the pilot project concept. Some proposed launching concurrent projects in each of the four areas, while others suggested omitting areas for which essential information was lacking, launching projects at the national or local level, or focusing on a single Mediterranean-wide project, invoking in that regard a provision of European Union

legislation. National examples were cited in support of the extension of such projects to other parts of the Mediterranean: the creation of marine parks (France); the study of deep-sea ecosystems (Italy). HELCOM had no pilot project for specific geographical areas but a project financed by external funds, which focused on developing the system of vision, goals and ecological objectives for the Baltic in good ecological status. In the course of the discussion, increasing emphasis was placed on the question of funding, which was far from being readily available for such projects, and on the desirability, as an alternative, of integrating the ecosystem approach into current MAP activities, in cooperation with other relevant organizations or initiatives operating in the Mediterranean such as IUCN, ACCOBAMS and "Horizon 2020".

24. The MED POL Coordinator expanded on this point, arguing that any pilot project would have to be based on the assessments to be undertaken in the four areas and could not be launched at once in a particular area and on a specific issue. In the meantime, the existing system within and outside MAP – MED POL, SAP-MED, SAP-BIO, NAPs, European Marine Strategy, "Horizon 2020", FEM Partnership – offered a framework that was perfectly suited to the gradual application of the approach, using the substantial mass of available data. The Director of SPA/RAC endorsed this argument, listing his Centre's activities that anticipated the approach, such as open-sea studies, for which only international governance existed since the high seas were beyond national jurisdiction, and the new Biodiversity Action Plan.

25. The MAP Coordinator suggested that the Meeting might envisage collecting all available relevant data – such as those compiled in the Adriatic – and working on a pilot project document that would be transmitted to the 2009 Meeting of the Contracting Parties for adoption under the programme-budget for the next biennium.

26. At this point in the discussion, the Chair noted the great diversity of views expressed, the lack of a realistic proposal for the immediate launching of a pilot project, and the problem of financing. It was therefore decided to postpone further discussion until after consideration of agenda item 7, which might shed light on the most urgent needs in terms of ecosystem knowledge and the usefulness of such a project.

27. At a subsequent session, the Meeting would have the opportunity to revert to the item in order to defer for the time being the launching of a geographically based pilot project and to propose instead to undertake as a pilot project (in the form of a desk study without formal commitment from the Parties) the implementation of the further steps of the road map starting with the ecological and operational objectives corresponding to two strategic goals: reduction of pollution and biodiversity.

**Agenda item 7: Identification of important ecosystem properties and assessment of ecological status and pressures**

28. The Consultant noted that this item constituted the core component of step 3 of the road map. It called for a description of the ecosystem based on available knowledge of its structure, function and environmental status as well as the description of pressures and impacts. The idea was to task a group of experts for each of the four areas, comprising at least one expert from each coastal State concerned, with the preparation of a document based on a homogenous and comparable table of contents set out in section 4 of the working document, which participants were invited to examine, modify and expand if necessary.

29. Most of the participants proposed a wide variety of additions to the table of contents, ranging from sedimentology and maritime activities to socio-economic and cultural

characteristics and cross-cutting issues such as capacity-building and public participation. It was emphasized that most of the information and data needed to prepare the documents were already available within MAP – for instance in the MED POL database – and in other regional bodies. It followed that the studies could be completed within a relatively short period of a few months. Two participants drew attention to the need for an overall summary of the four documents for the Mediterranean region as a whole. The Secretariat suggested that it could assume responsibility for the study of socio-economic aspects, which would cover the goods and services provided by the ecosystem and the costs of environmental degradation.

30. It was proposed that each group should comprise at least one expert from each coastal State concerned, but that it should also be open to all Contracting Parties. The groups, which should receive support from all MAP components in the field of their competence, would first collect and compile data, then identify gaps and lastly proceed with the actual assessment phase. The process would thus involve three sequential steps. If information was lacking, it would prove more difficult or even impossible to proceed, and the Secretariat would then decide on the kind of assistance required to address the problem.

31. Other questions were raised regarding the proposed process. The same working method should be adopted, as far as possible, in the four areas in order to facilitate the planned comparison and overview and to foster contacts between the areas. Stakeholders and the general public in each area should have access to the results, if possible through a media information campaign. Ecological status should also be defined and the reference to be used should be specified. The geographic scale of the area assessments would have to be determined: it was proposed to include, in addition to the marine area, the coastal area and the drainage basin (following the example of HELCOM). Some experts further stressed the importance of full temporal coverage of the data series, starting with the most recent and working back to the oldest, and of sufficient frequency of parameter measurements in order to guarantee the reliability of assessments. The timetable for the process was also crucial in view of the timelines set by the regional and international agenda. It was proposed that the first two phases of the assessment process should be completed in time for the third Meeting of Government-designated Experts to be held in spring 2009 and that the third phase should be completed, at the latest, in time for the Meeting of the Contracting Parties at the end of 2009 which could be asked to endorse conclusions and recommendations and strengthen action where necessary. Emphasis was also laid on the need for a dynamic, forward-looking and proactive assessment process, as in the case of the expected impact of climate change on the ecosystem properties. Lastly, two speakers proposed that pressures and impacts should be dealt with in separate sections.

32. With regard to the organization of the four area groups, it was agreed that the Secretariat – in other words not just MEDU but also any other MAP component – would ensure overall coordination and monitor progress, but that each group would remain free to make its own working arrangements and, possibly, to designate a person who would be responsible for organizing its work. In accordance with established MAP practice, the participant Contracting Parties would appoint their own experts within each group.

33. The Meeting was informed that, at the 9th Meeting of the Croatian-Italian-Slovenian Commission for the Protection of the Adriatic Sea, all the coastal States had decided to step up cooperation with a view to applying the ecosystem approach. To that end, they had agreed to set up a sub-commission that would focus on methods of assessment and the development of common indicators. The sub-commission would be tasked with application of the assessment, as required by the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It could therefore contribute, on the basis of procedures to be determined in due course, to the assessment of the Adriatic area.

**Agenda item 8: Planning for the future**

34. The Consultant introduced the relevant section of the working document. Now that the ground had been largely prepared for the implementation of step 3, the Meeting could proceed to establish the programme of activities for the following two steps of the road map, i.e. step 4 – development of a set of ecological objectives corresponding to the vision and strategic goals – and step 5 – derivation of operational objectives with indicators and target levels. This would involve taking decisions on the content of the programme and on related matters that had already been briefly addressed under agenda item 7, such as assessment methodologies, determination of good ecological status, ecological modelling, socio-economic considerations and public awareness.

35. It was noted in the ensuing discussion that the Secretariat could contribute a great deal to the assessment methodologies through the RACs and MED POL. This view was shared by the MAP Coordinator, who drew attention to the expertise that had been built up by SPA/RAC in biodiversity and protected areas, by PAP/RAC in CAMPs and coastal management, and by the Blue Plan in handling socio-economic aspects, especially relating to sustainable tourism. All these Centres could work together to ensure better integration of the ecosystem approach into existing activities. The MED POL Coordinator drew attention to the two assessments of the environmental status of the Mediterranean that had already been published in cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA). The third assessment was currently being prepared. Work on indicators was also being undertaken with the EEA as well as work specifically related to Blue Plan indicators. All this meant that a corpus of methodological data was gradually being developed. The application of the ecosystem approach could trigger a series of favourable chain reactions. With the entry into force of the amendments to the LBS Protocol, MED POL intended to prepare, by the end of 2009, a set of Mediterranean-wide legally binding common measures and objectives concerning the reduction of emissions of priority substances, with appropriate deadlines. A differentiation mechanism was currently being prepared. For the time being, MED POL was working in parallel with the programme of activities planned by the present Meeting, but at a later stage the measures and objectives could be adjusted to the sub-regions of the ecosystem approach. MED POL was prepared for such a development, since its phase IV had integrated the ecosystem approach concept before it was officially decided to apply it within MAP. One representative mentioned that MED POL's report on marine indicators would prove very useful in assessing the status of the ecosystem. The Deputy Director of PAP/RAC noted that the entire text of the ICZM Protocol adopted in Madrid in January 2008 reflected the principles underlying the ecosystem approach and the preservation of coastal ecosystems, and that the Split Centre was going to concentrate on integrating the approach into the Coastal Area Management Programmes (CAMPs) and the coastal management activities for which it was responsible.

36. The participants also discussed the need to involve stakeholders such as civil society and economic sectors in order to maintain a dialogue that increases the exchange of information and views and to shape the right measures to achieve the overall objectives, since this was one of the keys to the project's ultimate success. One participant drew attention in this connection to the concept of "mainstreaming", the participatory involvement of all actors concerned with a view to awareness-raising and education. This aspect was also emphasized in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report. The participants commended the report's weighty content, noting that it advocated a pilot programme for the Mediterranean. It was proposed and agreed that the Secretariat should draw up a plan for involving stakeholders and for promoting participation and public awareness. With regard to awareness-raising, HELCOM indicated that the ecological objectives set by its study groups were designed to be simple and accessible to the layperson: clean water, safety of seafood for consumption, general indices of well-being, etc.

37. The view was expressed that it was premature to discuss future activities when the ecological status and the actual implementation procedures of the approach have not yet been decided. Two speakers considered that it was too early to plan activities for the following steps and that it would be preferable to await the results of step 3, since they would determine the prospects for the ecological and operational objectives. They also expressed support for the launching of a pilot project that would assist in reaching preliminary practical conclusions regarding the application of the approach. Two other representatives, responding to an appeal to the Meeting from the MAP Coordinator for a more constructive attitude, expressed the hope that the programme for the next steps would reflect an overview of all activities undertaken to date by MAP and its components, cooperation with other organizations as well as the EU Marine Strategy, with a view to implementing one or two objectives, possibly within the framework of a specific project.

38. Noting this willingness to take action and expressing sympathy with the reluctance of some participants to extend the planning horizon beyond step 3, the Consultant made two suggestions, while ruling out the idea of a pilot project in a geographic area, which was bound to provoke reservations: (a) the Secretariat would launch an activity involving the selection of a strategic goal such as pollution reduction, on which MED POL and the RACs had accumulated a substantial body of knowledge and data, with a view to devising ecological and operational objectives, with indicators and target levels, as a model exercise in which the staff of all relevant MAP components would constitute a think tank, with external experts, to draw up a desk study; (b) the Secretariat, with the assistance of experts, would collect all available material and compile a bibliography on assessment methodologies within and outside MAP with a view to establishing a common methodology and qualitative ecosystem descriptors for examination by the third Meeting of experts.

39. The Meeting warmly welcomed the two proposals, noting that they would certainly facilitate progress. However, numerous questions were raised about the organizational arrangements for the groups that would carry out the studies, and about their timetable, mandates and possible links with other bodies and initiatives such as the EEA and "Horizon 2020" and with the assessment groups for the four areas. These questions would be addressed by the Secretariat in the overall planning document (see Annex III para 7c).

40. The MED POL Coordinator, whose programme would be primarily concerned by the desk study, announced that the idea of integrating pollution reduction and biodiversity had been aired during informal exchanges of views. These were two MAP areas of activity that were well advanced and corresponded to two basic ecosystem components; moreover, each had a Strategic Action Programme – SAP-MED and SAP-BIO – and they maintained close links. Given the solid basis that was thus available for file work, it should be possible to establish ecological and operational objectives within a reasonable time frame, in other words to undertake what might be termed a "model exercise" which would then facilitate the implementation of steps 4 and 5 of the road map throughout the region.

41. One representative noted a tendency to misuse the term "integration of the ecosystem approach" when referring to activities that were still implemented in accordance with a highly traditional approach. This was particularly true of the RACs which could, at best, be described as applying the ecosystem approach to a very partial extent. The Centres' biennial programmes of activities should therefore include, in each case, one basic activity devoted exclusively to integration of the approach.

42. The Coordinator noted that a decision in that regard had been taken in Almeria in January 2008 and that, while the previous speaker's comment was well-founded, there were now plans to review the entire MAP programme in order to integrate the approach. This work

would be undertaken progressively, which meant that there would be no sudden break with the past. However, the process was under way, as attested by the current Meeting.

43. Replying to questions about his proposal, the Consultant said that the proposed model exercise – or desk study – would not interfere with the work of the four area groups. It would be undertaken by a group comprising relevant MAP components and external experts, unrelated to the present group of government-designated experts who had been assigned the task of ensuring and monitoring implementation of the road map. The study group in question would operate on the basis of currently available data, using them to develop first ecological and then operational objectives, with indicators and target levels. This would provide a preliminary indication of the methodologies to be applied when proceeding to the practical implementation of steps 4 and 5. It was difficult to envisage any timetable for the time being; the working groups would have to present their findings within six months of September 2008; it was even more difficult to set a date for submission of the desk study, although June 2009 seemed to be a plausible deadline. With regard to the Secretariat group tasked with compiling methodologies, it should start work as soon as possible in order to assist the area groups and transmit its findings to the third Meeting of Government-designated Experts in spring 2009.

44. The Director of SAP/RAC expressed unreserved support for the proposal to work jointly with MED POL on the pollution-biodiversity combination. He admitted that the work programme of the individual Centres, determined on a biennial basis by the programme-budget adopted by the Parties, made only partial provision for the integration of the ecosystem approach. If the work of the RACs was considered globally, however, it would be found that such integration was more advanced. Hence, any improvement in the situation would call for closer cooperation among the MAP components, and commendable steps in that direction had been taken for some time, as attested by the meetings of MEDU and the Directors of the RACs in the Executive Coordination Panel, which were now held four times a year instead of only once.

45. The Chair reviewed the decisions taken by the Meeting, as set out under the preceding agenda items. He took note of the request by CIESM to participate in the desk study. He furthermore invited the Secretariat, in addition to undertaking the socio-economic study, for which responsibility would probably be assigned to the Blue Plan, to prepare a document for the implementation of the steps of the road map which should set out clearly: (1) the time schedule for the steps; (2) the actors, their functions and their tasks; (3) the expected outcomes; (4) links with other regional activities and initiatives.

**Agenda item 9: Other business**

46. No matters were raised under this agenda item.

**Agenda item 10: Conclusions and recommendations**

47. The Meeting had before it the draft table of contents prepared by the Secretariat, reflecting the amendments and additions made by the participants under agenda item 7. It examined the draft and made further additions. The Meeting also had before it the draft conclusions and recommendations. A number of comments and requests for corrections were made and it was agreed that the participants would receive the new versions of the two texts shortly but that the final versions would be prepared within 30 days by the Secretariat. During the intervening period, the participants would be free to send further proposals for amendments in writing before giving their approval. The final version of the conclusions and

recommendations, as approved by the participants, is attached as **Annex III** to the present report, together with the final version of the table of contents. Lastly, the detailed Meeting report would be sent to the participants by the end of the month for consideration and adoption.

**Agenda item 11: Closure of the Meeting**

48. The MAP Coordinator introduced Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Director of the UNEP Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI) in Nairobi, who had attended the last working session of the Meeting and who wished to address the participants.

49. Mr. Thiaw first congratulated the Chair of the Meeting on his skilful stewardship of the proceedings and his dynamic contribution to the resulting conclusions. The delegates had also impressed him during the discussion by their businesslike approach and their thorough understanding of the subject. The issue before the Meeting was one of the most crucial on the international agenda, as demonstrated by the decisions of the ninth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, held in Bonn in May 2008, and the conclusions of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report, which constituted a milestone in global awareness-raising. The establishment of an Intergovernmental Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB), combined with the follow-up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, would result in an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which was to be adopted at a conference that would probably be held in Malaysia in November 2008. In conclusion, Mr. Thiaw emphasized the rich ecological heritage of the Mediterranean as well as its fragility, which made recommendations such as those just adopted by the Meeting all the more imperative.

50. After the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chair declared the Meeting closed at 6.50 p.m. on Thursday, 10 July 2008.



## ANNEX I

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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## **ANNEX II**

### **AGENDA**

- Agenda item 1.** Opening of the Meeting
- Agenda item 2.** Election of Officers
- Agenda item 3.** Adoption of the Agenda and Organization of Work
- Agenda item 4.** Scope and Purpose of the Meeting
- Agenda item 5.** Spatial and Temporal Scale of the Application of the Approach
- Agenda item 6.** Initiation of Pilot Project(s)
- Agenda item 7.** Identification of Important Ecosystem Properties and Assessment of Ecological Status and Pressures
- Agenda item 8.** Planning for the Future
- Agenda item 9.** Other Business
- Agenda item 10.** Conclusions and Recommendations
- Agenda item 11.** Closure of the Meeting



### ANNEX III

#### **Conclusions and recommendations of the Second Meeting of Government-designated Experts on the application of the ecosystem approach**

**(Athens, 9-10 July 2008)**

1. The Meeting agrees that, for the purpose of implementing step 3 of the road map for the application of the ecosystem approach relevant to the assessment of the ecological status, four areas are identified in the Mediterranean as shown in Fig. 4 of document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG 326/3 as follows: Area 1: Western Mediterranean Sea, Area 2: Adriatic Sea, Area 3: Ionian Sea and Central Mediterranean, Area 4: Aegean-Levantine sea. The identification is based on bio-geographic and oceanographic considerations and it is provisional, liable to modification on the basis of the results of the assessment studies and further consideration.
2. The Meeting agrees that activities related to the implementation of the ecosystem approach road map should be carried out in all four areas and that there is no need at this stage to have a pilot project on a geographical basis. However, the Meeting considers that pilot projects could be identified on specific issues to prepare the ground for the implementation of some steps of the road map, taking into account all relevant information.
3. Following an exchange of views, the Meeting agreed that the Secretariat, assisted by experts, initiates, as soon as possible, an activity to apply the approved road map on a selected number of ecological objectives, common, to the extent possible, to all four areas, and falling under the competence of MED POL and SPA/RAC. It will be a brain storming exercise and desk study based on existing available information with an aim to test and develop methodologies. Not only operational objectives with indicators and target levels will be developed but an attempt will also be made to adapt ongoing MAP activities and processes to the requirements of the ecosystem approach.
4. The Meeting agrees that for the fulfillment of step 3 of the road map an assessment document should be prepared for each one of the four areas. The preparation of the assessment document for each area will be undertaken by a group of experts consisting of at least one expert from each bordering state and with the support of the MAP components. The groups will be open to all Contracting Parties. Overall coordination of the groups will be assumed by the Secretariat; however, if considered necessary, each group may designate a coordinator. The table of contents of the document should be the same for each area but slight flexibility is allowed if properly justified. The Meeting agreed on a provisional Table of Contents (attached) but the final version will be prepared by the Secretariat after 30 days during which Contracting Parties can send in writing their specific suggestions for modifications.
5. The first task of the groups is to collect and collate existing information (including grey literature within the countries) and identify information gaps. If there are no gaps or the gaps are not serious to prohibit an assessment, the group will continue with the assessment of the situation. If the gaps do not allow an assessment to take place, these shall be referred (if possible, with suggestions) to the Secretariat which will decide how to solve the problem e.g. initiation of activities to generate the missing information. It is expected that the first task of the groups will be completed within six months from the day the kick off meetings take place. A synthesis of the results of the groups will be undertaken reflecting the situation in the entire Mediterranean basin.

6. For the purpose of assisting the groups on assessment methodologies to be used, the Meeting requested the Secretariat with the help of experts, to compile and examine already available assessment methodologies. They will also examine possible qualitative descriptors of the ecosystem. The results of this work as well as the results of the first task of the Area groups will be forwarded to the Third Meeting of Government-designated Experts on the Application of the Ecosystem Approach by MAP, which is expected to take place in late spring 2009.
7. The Meeting also discussed other relevant issues and requested the Secretariat (a) to undertake a socio-economic analysis of the goods and services provided by the ecosystem and the cost of degradation of the marine and coastal environment, (b) to prepare a plan for stakeholder involvement and public awareness and participation and (c) to prepare a more comprehensive planning document for the implementation of the road map, including: (i) time schedule, (ii) actors with their responsibilities, including terms of reference of the groups in paragraph 4, (iii) deliverables and (iv) links with other ongoing activities such as Horizon 2020 and EEA activities.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### I. Marine and coastal ecosystem status

#### **Executive summary**

1. Introduction
2. Physical and chemical characteristics
  - 2.1 Topography, bathymetry and nature of seabed
  - 2.2 Spatial and temporal (all available data but at least 5 years) distribution of salinity; annual and seasonal temperature regime; currents, air sea interaction, water masses, mixing, upwelling, turbidity, etc.
  - 2.3 Spatial and temporal (all available data but at least 5 years) distribution of nutrients (dissolved inorganic nitrogen and phosphorus, total nitrogen and phosphorus), dissolved oxygen and pH
  - 2.4 Sedimentology
  - 2.5 General description of the catchment area in relation to the analysis
3. Biological characteristics
  - 3.1 Description of water column biological communities (basically phyto- and zooplankton) including the species and seasonal and geographical variability
  - 3.2 Information on invertebrate bottom fauna, macro-algae and angiosperms including species composition, biomass and annual/seasonal variability
  - 3.3 Description of population dynamics (including evolution trends), natural and actual range and status of species of marine mammals, reptiles and seabirds
  - 3.4 Inventory of the temporal occurrence, abundance and spatial distribution of exotic, non-indigenous and invasive species
  - 3.5 Information on the structure of fish populations including abundance, spatial distribution and age/size structure
  - 3.6 To the extent not described above, description of coastal biological communities including species composition and abundance
4. Habitat types  
Predominant habitat types should be described in terms of physical, chemical and biological features. Habitats of special scientific or economic or biodiversity interest or habitats subject to intense or specific pressures should be identified. Identification and mapping of special habitat types including MPAs, etc.
5. Conclusions and identification of gaps

II. Pressures and impacts (Note (1) Should cover cumulative and synergistic effects (2) Ecosystem goods and services to be included in the socio-economic assessment)

1. Contamination (including biomagnification) by hazardous substances (includes heavy metals, halogenated and petroleum hydrocarbons, antifoulants, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, etc. from all sources as well as radionuclides)
2. Dumping activities (introduction of substances and impact)
3. Nutrient and organic matter enrichment. Inputs of fertilizers and other N-P rich substances (e.g. from point and diffuse sources including agriculture, aquaculture and atmospheric deposition). Inputs of organic matter (e.g. sewers, mariculture, riverine inputs)
4. Biological disturbance (non-indigenous and invasive species, microbial pathogens, impact of fisheries on target and non-target species)
5. Physical disturbance
  - 5.1 Effects from man-made structures and constructions on and off shore
  - 5.2 Impacts on the seabed and siltation changes (e.g. from fishing and boating activities, dredging material, outfalls, exploration and exploitation of living and non-living resources on the seabed and subsoil, marine erosion, etc.)
  - 5.3 Effects of underwater noise and marine litter
6. Other interferences; on temperature (e.g. power plants); on salinity (e.g. in lagoons from constructions); desalination plants
7. Tourism and recreational activities
8. Maritime activities
9. Emerging issues such as climatic change effects and deep sea ecosystem modifications

III. Conclusions including policy considerations and priorities

This chapter could include the conclusions and all issues of serious concern (e.g. health issues) and hot spot areas where urgent action is needed. Where policies are in place and measures have been taken relevant to the application of the ecosystem approach, these could be taken into account.

Note 1: In addition to the above, the Secretariat will undertake an economic and social analysis of the use of the waters and of the cost of degradation of the marine and coastal environment. The study will address the role of the marine and coastal ecosystem as provider of goods and services to mankind and may also include the socio-economic situation in the region.

Note 2. For the environmental evaluation, when appropriate, the measures already taken and their effectiveness may also be addressed.