MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Meeting of experts to review the MED POL Biomonitoring Programme

Malta, 29 September - 1 October 1997

REPORT OF THE MEETING OF EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE MED POL BIOMONITURING PROGRAMME

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Introduction

1. The Meeting of Experts to review the MED POL Biomonitoring Programme was held at the Foundation for International Studies, University of Malta, Valletta, Malta from 29 September to 1st October 1997, following the invitation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Environment and the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics.

2. Experts from the following Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention attended the Meeting: Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, European Community, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

3. The list of participants is attached as Annex I to this report.

Agenda item 1. Opening of the Meeting

4. H.E. George Vella, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Environment opened the Meeting and welcomed the participants to his country. He said that one of the major objectives of the MED POL programme is to establish and enhance marine pollution monitoring programmes in the Mediterranean members states. Such MED POL monitoring programmes have been ongoing for the past 20 years and they have yielded a number of notable results including the identification of some “hot spots” of marine pollution, the training of personnel, intercalibration exercises, and the availability of cash grants for the purchase of equipment by the less developed countries.

The Minister said that proper monitoring should include the right mixture of chemical and biological parameters, that is, the assessment of the quality of the environment also depends on the responses of the organisms to pollution or other contaminants and stressors. However, we are aware of the difficulties which need to be overcome in order to develop such a comprehensive monitoring programme.

He was sure that such limitations would be discussed by the workshop and wished the Meeting every success in the deliberations.

5. During the opening session, Mr Leslie Agius, Acting Director, Foundation for International Studies, Mr Gabriel P. Gabrieliades, MAP Senior Programme Officer and Mr Charles Galdies, Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics also made statements.

Agenda item 2. Election of officers

6. The Meeting unanimously elected Mr Victor Axiak (Malta) as Chairperson, Mr Aldo Viarengo (Italy) as Vice-chairperson and Ms Amel Chaffai (Tunisia) as the Rapporteur.
Agenda item 3. Adoption of the Agenda and organisation of work

7. The Meeting adopted the proposed agenda contained in document UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.132/1 which appears as Annex II to this report.

Agenda item 4. Background and scope

8. Mr G.P. Gabrielides, Senior Programme Officer reviewed the activities that have taken place in the framework of the MED POL programme since the Contracting Parties took the decision that biological effects monitoring should be initiated to complement the chemical monitoring already going on in the framework of the MED POL programme. The emphasis was placed on training of scientific personnel while many laboratories made an effort to acquire the necessary equipment. When a sufficient number of laboratories were able to undertake the recommended biomonitoring techniques, a pilot biomonitoring programme was undertaken during 1996 the results of which will be discussed by the Meeting.

9. It is expected that, on the basis of the experience gained so far, the Meeting would agree on a battery of techniques and the species recommended for use. The Meeting should in fact prepare a programme for the development of biomonitoring which should also contain quality assurance activities and an assistance component to enable all countries to participate in the programme when it is launched on a Mediterranean wide scale.

Agenda item 5. Review of the results of the 1996 pilot biomonitoring programme including evaluation of techniques

10. Document UNEP(OCA)/MED WG. 132/3 was presented by Mr A. Viarengo who was also the author as the technical coordinator of the pilot biomonitoring programme. After presenting the basic concepts of the programme and the techniques and species used, he concluded that he was optimistic as most of the laboratories involved were able to identify correctly the deleterious effects of pollution on molluscs and fish sampled from different sites situated on a gradient of pollution. Another important point was that most of the research teams involved in the programme utilised as a common base the set of biomarkers suggested for the programme and used in the training courses. Moreover, the laboratories improved the programme by using additional stress indices.

Results indicated that EROD activity in molluscs is not as powerful as in fish and therefore in the future it should only be used on fish liver.

11. Individual laboratories were then allowed to present their results. The Spanish data were presented by Ms A. Torreblanca (University of Valencia) and Ms C. Porte (C.I.D., Barcelona). The techniques of acetylcholinesterase, metallothioneins, cytochrome P-450 and stress proteins were used on samples collected from Barcelona,
Ebro delta, Albroaia, Cullera and Denia. The results of EROD activity in *Mullus barbatus* were much better than those for *Serranus cabrilla*.

12. The Monaco programme included metallothioneins, EROD, lysosomal membrane stability (as determined by glutathion and neutral red assay) and stress-on-stress. The results were presented by Mr P. Rolland who discussed the issue of caging indicating the advantages and disadvantages. The species used were *Dicentraulus labrax* and *Mytilus galloprovincialis*. This programme also formed part of the work carried out in the framework of the RAMOGE Agreement.

13. The Maltese data presented by Mr V. Axiak concern EROD in *Serranus cabrilla* sampled from two sites but no significant differences were established. Metallothioneins was measured in *Patella rustica*. Another biomarker was used by the laboratory which is specific for TBT. This is imposex used on *Murex trunculus*. The results were encouraging for this specific contaminant.

14. The Israeli pilot programme was executed by two laboratories (University of Tel Aviv and IOLR, Haifa). EROD and CYP1A1 were measured by Mr A. Yawetz in *Lithoglyphus mormyrus* and lysosomal membrane stability in *Patella coerulea* collected from Haifa bay. The anticipated reference site of Shikmona was found to be more polluted than the station at the mouth of Kishon river. Preliminary results concerning the utilisation of the DNA alkaline unwinding technique were also presented.

Metallothionein and P-450 1A1 m-RNA results were presented by Mr M. Tom who in parallel with results concerning a field study he presented experimental data in order to achieve a better understanding of the induction mechanisms.

15. Mr A. Viarengo presented the Italian results stressing the importance of using general stress indices like lysosomal membrane stability. The technique "stress-on-stress" was easy to use and did not require any sophisticated equipment. Data have also been presented showing that lytofuscin and lysosomal lipid accumulation represent two powerful general stress indices.

16. In the discussions that followed, participants stressed the need to use a battery of tests. However, even though many believed that there should be flexibility in choosing the techniques and the species, it was agreed that at least there should be consensus on a core of techniques. This core of techniques should include the four already recommended for use ie two general stress indices (lysosomal membrane stability and DNA alteration) and two specific stress indices (metallothioneins and EROD). Additional biomarkers could be added to satisfy special interests or requirements, among these being acetylcholinesterase activity, imposex, P-450 1A1 m-RNA, CYP1A1 protein, lipofuscin and lipid lysosomal accumulation. The technique stress-on-stress was also proposed as it was easy to use by all laboratories utilising mussels.

17. In discussing the choice of species, participants proposed a number of species with which they had some experience. It was also pointed out that there is no single species that can be found in all regions of the Mediterranean. However, it was
agreed, that for comparison purposes an effort should be made to utilise common species. *Mytilus galloprovincialis* was present in all the areas except the Eastern Mediterranean while *Mullus barbatus* could be found almost everywhere and this fish had an advantage over others as it was the major species in the chemical monitoring programme. The results for EROD induction have proved to be very satisfactory. Finally, the Meeting agreed on the table shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biomarker</th>
<th>Recommended species</th>
<th>Tissue used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific stress</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EROD</td>
<td><em>Mullus barbatus</em> (Dicentrarchus labrax for caging) but if not available <em>Mugil sp.</em></td>
<td>Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metallothioneins</td>
<td><em>Mullus barbatus</em> (Dicentrarchus labrax for caging) but if not available <em>Mugil sp.</em></td>
<td>Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mytilus sp.</em> but if not available <em>Patella sp.</em></td>
<td>Digestive gland (for molluscs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hepatopancreas (for limpets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General stress</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lysosomal membrane stability</td>
<td><em>Mullus barbatus</em> (Dicentrarchus labrax for caging) but if not available <em>Mugil sp.</em></td>
<td>Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hepatopancreas (for limpets)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNA alteration</td>
<td><em>Mullus barbatus</em> (Dicentrarchus labrax for caging) but if not available <em>Mugil sp.</em></td>
<td>Liver</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hepatopancreas (for limpets)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
18. It was pointed out by one delegation that the induction of EROD activity using CYP1A1 protein or mRNA provides essential information and therefore this technique could be introduced by participating laboratories in the future.

19. The Monaco delegation provided detailed information on the advantages and disadvantages of caging. Caging can be used instead of sampling free-living organisms; it can also be used as a complementary technique. The laboratories in Monaco are at the disposal of the participants for any additional information on the subject.

Agenda item 6. Data quality assurance

20. Mr Viarengo presented the results of the intercomparison exercises for which he was responsible. The results were considered satisfactory and it was agreed that an effort should be made to organise intercalibration exercises for all four recommended techniques on an annual basis.

21. Another issue related to the quality of data is that of the proper training of the personnel utilising the biomonitoring techniques. The needs of training should be assessed especially as regards the level and the duration. The representative of the Secretariat pointed out that long-term training could not be provided through MED POL and that other programmes should be found, such as bilateral governmental support schemes.

22. Mr G.P. Gabrielides informed the Meeting that a letter was addressed to all MED POL National Coordinators requesting them to designate the laboratories in their countries which would participate in each type of monitoring including biomonitoring in the framework of MED POL Phase III. As soon as this information is received the Secretariat will organise consultancy missions to these laboratories to investigate their capabilities and assess their needs in as far as equipment and training are concerned. On the basis of the reports of the missions a programme for capacity building will be prepared and presented to the Governments or to any funding Organisations. He also stressed that as this is a cooperative programme he would expect advanced laboratories to assist laboratories in less developed countries to upgrade their technical capabilities so that they could fully participate in the programme.

23. In response to the above, the representative of Monaco informed the Meeting that within the framework of the RAMOGE programme on the monitoring of the marine environment using biological effects techniques, video tapes will be prepared for the analytical procedures for each of the proposed biomarkers and the cassettes would be made available to all interested laboratories. She also mentioned that during the next meeting of the RAMOGE commission it will be proposed to promote the organisation of training courses within the North-South concept of cooperation.

24. The delegate from Tunisia invited the Secretariat to organise a Training course at the University of Sousse, Chotte Mariam. She mentioned that this laboratory
could be the Focal Point for training scientists from the South on biomonitoring techniques.

25. The representative of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics, Mr C. Galdies informed the Meeting that they have a long experience in organising training courses and that they would be willing to undertake the logistics for the organisation of any training courses or intercomparison exercises on biomonitoring techniques which the Secretariat would decide to have.

Agenda item 7. Review of manual on biomonitoring techniques

26. Mr G.P. Gabriellides presented document UNEP(OCA)/MED WG.132/6 which is the draft manual on the recommended biological effects techniques. He explained that the manual was prepared at the request of the new comers into the programme to assist them in their effort to implement biomonitoring techniques in their laboratories. Even though the first draft was prepared by Mr C. Galdies the document was distributed to all the scientists participating in the programme for comments all of which were incorporated. The document is presented to the Meeting for final comments.

27. The delegate from Monaco recommended that the following should also be included in the Manual, (a) a section on evaluation and interpretation of the data which should take into account biological and seasonal variations, (b) a table showing the recommended techniques and the suitable species, (c) a list of the laboratories participating in the programme, (d) more information on the collection and treatment of the animals.

28. It was agreed that all those participants wishing to submit detailed comments should do so by the end of October 1997.

Agenda item 8. Recommendations for future action

29. The representative of the European Community took the floor and expressed his views on the outcome of the meeting suggesting that there should be a distinction of the recommendations which should be addressed to scientists and those to be addressed to policy makers such as the Meeting of the Contracting Parties. The policy makers must be convinced that a programme will provide results useful for decision making and for practical action.

30. As far as funding of the programme is concerned he said that concerning possible E.U. funding DG XI does not have money for this type of activity but other sources of the E.U. could be available, for instance within DG XII. The Euro-Mediterranean partnership programme provides 90% of the funds for bilateral cooperation while 10% is for regional cooperation.
Recommendations to participating laboratories

31. Any biomonitoring programme should include a battery of tests. The core techniques recommended and supported are: EROD, metallothioneins, DNA alteration and lysosomal membrane stability. In addition, participating scientists are free to add to the programme any other techniques which they consider relevant, such as acetylcholinesterase activity, imposex, P-450 1A1 m-RNA, CYP1A1 protein, lipofuscin and lipid lysosomal accumulation.

32. Participating laboratories should make an effort to utilise the same species for reasons of comparison. Fish and molluscs should be used. *Mullus barbatus* is the recommended fish but if not available *Mugil sp.* can be used. *Mytilus galloprovincialis* is the recommended mollusc but if not available *Patella sp.* can be used. The recommended species for caging are *Dicentrarchus labrax* and *Mytilus galloprovincialis*. See Table in paragraph 17.

33. Participating laboratories must also record basic environmental parameters such as the temperature in sea water at the time of sampling; also the sampling point should be clearly indicated. Other information which should be recorded are the size the number and the sex of the animals utilised.

34. Participating laboratories should use a standard procedure for the transport of the animals to the laboratory and for organ extraction. In addition, sample storage procedures should be similar.

35. The participation of laboratories in intercalibration exercises should be obligatory.

36. Whenever possible, fish and molluscs should be collected from the same site and at the same time to allow a correct interpretation of the battery of stress indices employed. Moreover, whenever possible, the same individuals should be used for the battery of biomarkers.

37. Caging can be used in addition or in substitution to the collection of free living animals. In this case the species recommended are: *Dicentrarchus labrax* (fish) and *Mytilus galloprovincialis*.

38. Sampling should not take place during the reproductive stage of a particular species.

39. Data analysis should be standardised as much as possible.

Recommendations to policy makers

40. In view of the fact that biomonitoring provides fundamental data useful for risk assessment and for an early warning system which will enable a timely formulation of governmental strategies to prevent irreversible alterations in Mediterranean coastal
ecosystems and human health, it is recommended that every support should be given to the programme. As a fundamental first step laboratories in the less developed countries should be assisted to be adequately equipped and the necessary training provided to enable their full participation in the programme.

Other recommendations

41. MED POL National Coordinators should designate as soon as possible the laboratories which will participate in the biomonitoring programme.

42. The Secretariat should investigate other sources of funding, in particular E.U.

Agenda item 9. Any other matter

43. No other matter was raised by the participants.

Agenda item 10. Adoption of the report of the Meeting

44. The English version of the draft Report of the Meeting was unanimously adopted by the participants. The French version will be circulated for comments.

Agenda item 11. Closure of the Meeting

45. Mr Gabrielides expressed the deep satisfaction of the Secretariat for the results of the meeting hoping that this programme would be promoted by all governments concerned. He added though that he did not expect substantial MTF funding and that other sources of funding should be sought. He finally thanked the participants for their active participation, the bureau of the meeting for the excellent work they have done and the IcoD for hosting the meeting.

46. The Chairman, after the usual exchange of courtesies, closed the meeting at 15.00 hrs of 1st October 1997.
ANNEX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS

ALBANIA
ALBANIE

Mr Artan Trebicka
Tirana University
Faculty of Natural Sciences
Section of Biochemistry
Tirana
Albania

Tel: 355-42-30498
Fax: 355-42-65229
E-mail: arttre@fshn.tirana.al

ALGERIA
ALGERIE

M. Ali Bakalem
Institut des Sciences de la Mer et
d'Aménagement du Littoral (ISMAL)
B. P. 54, Plage Ouest
Sidi-Fredj 42321
Gouvernorat du Grand Alger
Alger
Algérie

Tel: 213-2-391914/391913
Fax: 213-2-393538

M. Benyahia Boudjellal
Institut des Sciences de la Mer et
d'Aménagement du Littoral (ISMAL)
B. P. 54, Plage Ouest
Sidi-Fredj 42321
Gouvernorat du Grand Alger
Alger
Algérie

Tel: 213-2-391914/391913
Fax: 213-2-393538
CYPRUS
CHYRPE
Ms Marina Argyrou
Fisheries Department
Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment
13 Aeolou Str.
1416 Nicosia
Cyprus

Tel: 357-2-303478
Fax: 357-2-365955

EGYPT
EGYPTÉ
Mr Ali Ibrahim El-Beltagy
Chairman, Shore Processes Laboratory
National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries
Kayette-Bey
Alexandria
Egypt

Tel: 20-3-4801189
Fax: 20-3-4801189
E-mail: tsm@idsc.gov.eg

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY
COMMUNAUTE EUROPEENNE
Mr Tanino Dicorso
Administrateur Principal
Direction générale de l'environnement sécurité nucléaire et protection civile
Commission Européenne
200 rue de la Loi
1049 Bruxelles
Belgium

Tel: 32-2-2969147/2969509
Fax: 32-2-2994123
Mr Thierry Burgeot  
IFREMER  
Laboratoire polluants chimiques  
B.P. 21105  
44311 Nantes cedex 03  
France

Tel: 33-2-40374051  
Fax: 33-2-40374075  
E-mail: TBurgeot@ifremer.fr

Mr Vassilis K. Dimitriadis  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Faculty of Sciences  
School of Biology  
Department of Genetics, Development & Molecular Biology  
540 06 Thessaloniki  
Greece

Tel: 30-31-998351  
Fax: 30-31-998298  
E-mail: vdimitr@bio.auth.gr

Mr Vassilis Roussis  
University of Athens  
School of Pharmacy  
Laboratory of Pharmacognosy  
Panepistimiopolis  
157 71 Athens  
Greece

Tel: 30-1-7284592  
Fax: 30-1-7284592  
E-mail: vroussis@atlas.uoa.gr
ISRAEL

Mr Aminadav Yawetz
Institute for Nature Conservation
Research
Faculty for Life Sciences
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv 69978
Israel

Tel: 972-3-6408004
Fax: 972-3-6407304
E-mail: amidav@post.tau.ac.il

Mr Moshe Tom
Department of Marine Biology
The National Institute of Oceanography
Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research Ltd.
Tel Shikmona
P.O. Box 8030
Haifa 31080
Israel

Tel: 972-4-8515202
Fax: 972-4-8511911
E-mail: tom@ocean.org.il

ITALY

Mr Aldo Viarengo
Istituto di Fisiologia Generale
Università di Genova
Corso Europa (Palazzo delle Scienze)
Genova 16132
Italy

Tel: 39-10-3538269
Fax: 39-10-3538267
E-mail: aldo@igecuniv.csita.unige.it
LEBANON

Ms Olfat Hamdan
Ministry of Environment
P.O. Box 70-1091
Antelias
Beirut
Lebanon

Tel: 961-1-521030/6, 961-3-627767
Fax: 961-1-521037/8
E-mail: o.hamdan@moe.gov.lb

LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA
JAMAHIRIYA ARABE LIBYENNE

Mr Yousef Aripe Dougha
Technical Centre for Environment Protection
P.O. Box 80725
Tripoli
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Tel: 218-21-4445795/4446868
Fax: 218-21-3338098

MALTA

Mr Victor Axiak
Marine Ecotoxicology Laboratory
Department of Biology
University of Malta
Tal-Qroqq
Msida
Malta

Tel: 356-342488
Fax: 356-3121110
E-mail: musbieha@maltanet.net

Ms Prassed Vella
Environment Protection Department
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Environment
Pollution Control Coordinating Unit
Starkey Annex
Vittoriosa
Malta

Tel: 356-673085, 676357/8
Fax: 356-660108
Ms Lisa Pace  
Biology Department  
University of Malta  
Tal-Qroqq  
Msida  
Malta  
Tel: 356-342488  
Fax: 356-312110  
E-mail: lpac@cis.un.edu.mt

Ms Paula Bonnici  
Biology Department  
University of Malta  
Tal-Qroqq  
Msida  
Malta  
Tel: 356-342488  
Fax: 356-312110

Mrs Marie-Christine Van Klaveren  
Chef de Division  
Service de l'environnement  
Département des travaux publics et des affaires sociales  
3 avenue de Fontvieille  
MC-98000 Monaco  
Principauté de Monaco  
Tel: 377-93158963  
Fax: 377-92052891  
E-mail: pvk@mcn.mc

Mr Patrick Rolland  
Service de l'environnement  
Département des travaux publics et des affaires sociales  
3 avenue de Fontvieille  
MC-98000 Monaco  
Principauté de Monaco  
Tel: 377-93158963  
Fax: 377-92052891
MOROCCO
MAROC

Mrs Sabah Rahal
Laboratoire National de l’Environnement
Avenue Roosevelt
Ex résidence de l’Ambassade de France
Rabat
Maroc

Tel: 212-7-768214/762007
Fax: 212-7-762309

SLOVENIA
SLOVENIE

Ms Patricija Mozetič
Marine Biological Station Piran
National Institute of Biology
University of Ljubljana
Fornace 41
6330 Piran
Slovenia

Tel: 386-66-746368
Fax: 386-66-746367
E-mail: patricija.mozetic@uni-lj.si

SPAIN
ESPAGNE

Ms Cinta Porte
Departament de Quimica Ambiental
Centre d’Investigació i Desenvolupament- C.S.I.C.
C/Jordi Girona 18
08034 Barcelona
Spain

Tel: 34-3-4006175
Fax: 34-3-2045904
E-mail: cpvqam@cid.csic.es
Ms Amparo Torreblanca
Universitat de Valencia
Departament de Biologia Animal
Dr Moliner, 50
46100 Burjassot - Valencia
Spain
Tel: 34-6-3983103
Fax: 34-6-3983099
E-mail: Amparo.Torreblanca@uv.es

Ms Manuela Martinez
Universitat de Valencia
Departament de Biologia Animal
Dr Moliner, 50
46100 Burjassot - Valencia
Spain
Tel: 34-6-3983103
Fax: 34-6-3983099
E-mail: Manuela.Martinez-lopez@uv.es

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
REPUBLIQUE ARABE DE SYRIE
Mr Abdullatif Youssef
Director
Marine Research Centre
Tishreen University
P.O. Box 2242
Lattakia
Syrian Arab Republic
Tel: 963-41-428658
Fax: 963-41-418504

TUNISIA
TUNISIE
Ms Amel Chaffai
Institut Préparatoire aux Etudes d'Ingénieurs de Sfax (IPEIS)
Département de Biologie
B.P. 805
Route Menzel Chaker Km 1
3000 Sfax
Tunisie
Tel: 216-4-241403, poste 428
Fax: 216-4-614109
Mr Tuncay Demir  
Department of Prevention and Control of Environmental Pollution  
Ministry of Environment  
Eskisehir Yolu, 8 km  
06100 Ankara  
Turkey  
Tel: 90-312-2879963-5413  
Fax: 90-312-2855875

SECRETARIAT:

Mr Gabriel P. Gabrielides  
Senior Programme Officer  
Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan  
P.O. Box 18019  
48, Vas. Konstantinou Avenue  
116 10 Athens  
Greece  
Tel: 30-1-7253190/5  
Fax: 30-1-7253196/7  
Email: gpgmedu@compulink.gr

LOCAL ORGANISER:

Mr Charles Galdies  
Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Insular Coastal Dynamics  
Foundation for International Studies  
St. Paul's Street  
Valletta VLT 07  
Malta  
Tel: 356-240746  
Fax: 356-245764  
E-mail: charles@maltanet.net
ANNEX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Election of officers
3. Adoption of the Agenda and organisation of work
4. Background and scope
5. Review of the results of the 1996 pilot biomonitoring programme including evaluation of techniques
6. Data quality assurance
7. Review of manual on biomonitoring techniques
8. Recommendations for future action
9. Any other matter
10. Adoption of the report of the Meeting
11. Closure of the Meeting