EP

United Nations
Environment
Programme

UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.9
19 May 2005

ENGLISH

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Seventh Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs

Seville, 31 May - 3 June 2005

Information note on the harmonisation of the inventory system using SDF with Natura 2000, Emrald and Medwet

UNEP
RAC/SPA - Tunis, 2005

Introduction

In 2003, the contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted the recommendation II.B.1 to provide assistance to the countries for the use of the Standard Data-Entry Form for national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest (SDF).

This study represents a preliminary analysis of the differences and similarities between the SDF and the data-entry forms and information systems for NATURA2000, Emerald and Medwet, with a view to propose possible harmonisation's or streamlining actions.

It should also be clear that the different initiatives are depending from different legal instruments and administrative levels. From strong EU directives to recommendations under conventions to the free inventory work under MedWet.

Nevertheless, many countries are dealing with those four initiatives at the same time and smaller and/or larger differences are sometimes hampering an integrated approach.

The main purpose of this study is a field by field analysis to identify the differences and similarities at technical level but also at the level of the standards used for reference lists.

This first report highlights the main subjects identified. The details for all fields will follow in a full report later on.

The practical work is based on the Standard Data-Entry Forms and explanatory notes on the one hand and the latest versions of the information systems available within each of the initiatives on the other hand:

- UNEP-MAP-SDF: preliminary software as delivered by RAC/SPA (onugreg.exe), creating different separate tables per subject in foxpro dbf-tables

- NATURA2000: software version 2.0 creating one MSAccess database per country with different relational tables (cntryXX.mdb)

- Emerald: software version 2.0 creating one MSAccess database per country with different relational tables (cntryXX.mdb)

- Medwet Database: software version 3.0.0 as received from RAC/SPA creating one MSAccess database with different relational tables (wetsites.mdb)

A comparison for each information category in the different initiatives on a field by field basis will be given in a separate table.

General points

Over the last decades, many national and international initiatives have been instituted as a reaction to the continuing biodiversity loss. All of them are in need for reliable information to be able to implement the specific criteria on the one hand and to evaluate their success on the other hand. Whereas in the beginning those initiatives were more or less working independently, at present the need for streamlining of information gathering procedures and subsequent data flows is generally recognised and accepted.

More and more countries are (slowly) building up national Biodiversity Information Systems, integrating information needs from national and international obligations. This may also include creating interfaces between the different standards used, rather than making them equal. All these aspects will be taken in to account in the following pages.

As a consequence, helping the countries in using the SDF, may also include defining interfaces between national information systems and interfaces between data standards or reference lists used in different parts of the region.

At Pan-European scale the most important key institution for information streamlining is the European Environment Agency (EEA: http://www.eea.eu.int).

With reference to site inventories in general, the most important process for streamlining of information is the Common Database on Designated Areas (CDDA). This is a common initiative since 1996 of the Council of Europe, the UNEP-WCMC and the European Union (through the EEA) to gather information on nationally, internationally and European Union designated areas, with a view of avoiding duplication of efforts and streamlining of information flows. The principle of “collecting once, used by many” is fully applied within the CDDA.

At European level, data are gathered through the EIONET (European Information and Observation Network: http://www.eionet.eu.int) on a yearly basis for nationally designated areas.

Results are transmitted to UNEP-WCMC to become part of the Worlds Database on Protected Areas.

At the same time the EEA is developing the European Nature Information System (EUNIS: http://eunis.eea.eu.int) putting together information on Habitats, Species and Sites at Pan-European level. From a Mediterranean perspective, 16 out of 21 countries are directly or indirectly involved in this work. Some of the 5 others are contracting party or observers to the Bern Convention and are likely to develop the Emerald network in the (near) future.

Suggestion:
Investigate and/or strengthen the collaboration on information streamlining on sites through the CDDA process in collaboration with EEA and UNEP-WCMC

An other issue to be highlighted at general level is the term of “Biogeographical Regions”. For both, Natura2000 and Emerald, site evaluation is performed within each of the identified Biogeographical Regions.

The present map is a Pan-European map, but some African countries are also contracting parties of the Bern Convention and as such are developing also the Emerald Network (Senegal and Burkina Faso). For this reason, the development of an African Biogeographical Regions Map is under consideration of the Emerald expert group.

Although for the UNEP-MAP national inventories, such a second phase of data integration and evaluation it is not foreseen it might be useful to at least follow the discussions and the eventual creation of such Biogeographical Regions Map at African scale, with a view of strengthening collaboration.

Suggestion: Investigate and discuss the consideration of implementing the aspects of Biogeographical Regions within the Mediterranean area in close collaboration with the Bern Convention

Detailed analysis (per information section)

The sections below are describing the more important issues identified per section.

1. Site identification

No comments

2. Site location

2 smaller comments related to “Marine surface area” and the introduction of the term “Depth”.

- UNEP-MAP SDF is the only from the four which has introduced the field Marine Area at the level of “Site Location”. For the others this information needs to be extracted from other data fields such as the habitat description or administrative regions fields. This is not really hampering streamlining, it should only be clear.

- The term “Depth” was introduced in a separate set of fields for the SDF whereas the other initiatives are describing the depth in the “altitude” field by using negative values. Using a separate field for depth can be useful if parts of one area, disconnected from the coastline are to be described (e.g. in this case a site would have a depth from –9 to –2 m and a coastal area from 1 to 10 m). This way of description is not possible for the other initiatives: they would have to indicate that the site is from –9 to 10m. This is probably not really a problem.

Administrative Region coding system:

The NUTS – coding system for administrative regions is developed by Eurostat. All four initiatives have adopted this system in a way to describe the administrative location of the described sites. At present, the level of implementation the coding system is different.

Natura2000: OK for 25 member countries
Emerald: draft Pan-European version of Eurostat was introduced in the software but is in need for an urgent update
MedWet: NUTS codes for 5 countries were added to the software. It is unclear which version of the coding system was used.
UNEP-MAP-SDF: NUTS coding system was adopted in the SDF for countries were it exists. No coding system yet for the others.

The present version includes all 25 member countries of the EU, but a Pan-European version is under development, which would include 16 out of 21 countries under the Barcelona Convention.

Suggestion:
Investigate the possibilities of extending the NUTS coding system to cover the whole Mediterranean area in collaboration with Eurostat and EEA.
Alternatively, countries with missing NUTS codes could create their own code list using the same principles

3. Ecological information

3.1 General site characteristics

No comments

3.2 Habitats

History

To be able to fully understand the situation with regard to site habitat description, we need to say a few words on how habitat classification system(s) have developed in the past and how they were used for the creation of lists of habitats of conservation interest.

The first attempt to create a European classification system was the CORINE Habitat Classification system established under the CORINE Biotopes project. This classification was concentrating on the terrestrial environment. This system was the basis for annex I of the Habitats Directive but subsequently modified with an own coding system to become the final version of annex I.
Later on, the CORINE system moved in to the Pan-European Palaearctic Habitat Classification (http://www.kbinirsnb.be/cb/databases/cb_db_physispal_eng.htm), which was used for the selection of habitats of conservation interest under the Bern Convention (resolution n° 4)

Notifying the lack of Marine habitats in the above system, the meeting of experts on Marine Habitat Types under the Barcelona Convention was using the Classification of Benthic Marine Habitat Types for the Mediterranean Region, to identify the habitat classes of conservation interest, as laid down in appendix C of the SDF. (website: ?)

Meanwhile, the EEA developed the EUNIS habitat classification, which is an agreed classification concentrating on the higher levels in the classification and keeping the links with other systems such as the Palaearctic classification, the Nordic classification and even a number of national classification systems. A full description and querying system is available at http://eunis.eea.eu.int .

Present situation

Three from the four initiatives described are depending from a separate list of habitats of conservation interest which is guiding the selection of sites:

- Natura2000: Habitats Directive annex I; based on earlier version of CORINE but finally using a modified description and coding system
- Emerald: Resolution n° 4; based on Palaearctic Habitat classification
- UNEP-MAP SDF: appendix F of the SDF; based on the Classification of Benthic Marine Habitat Types for the Mediterranean Region

For MedWet no such selective habitat list exist but it is using two classification system for describing the habitats of the site: the former CORINE classification and the Ramsar Convention list of wetland types.

3.3 Species: fauna and flora

Three from the four initiatives described are depending from a separate list of species of conservation interest which is guiding the selection of sites:

- Natura2000: Habitats Directive annex II; Birds Directive annex I
- Emerald: Resolution n° 6
- UNEP-MAP SDF: appendix C of the SDF

For the three initiatives, the same Species codes are used which are also the codes present in EUNIS.

For MedWet no such selective species list exist but any species of conservation interest can be entered in the system. Species are coded according to another system.

Whereas for Natura2000 and Emerald species are listed per major group (birds, mammals, etc…), in the UNEP-MAP SDF all species are put together but split in to Marine and Coastal Fauna and Flora. From a relational data base point of view this is actually easier to manage. On the other hand, for non-specialists, not knowing all scientific species names it is sometimes easier to read the list if the names are grouped per major group. For compatibility between systems it is much more important to use the same coding system which is the case for the SDF in relation to Natura2000, Emerald and EUNIS.

What is a bit more difficult to manage, is the smaller and/or larger differences in criteria used and population data entered in the data bases for different initiatives.
Each network has it's own obligations and principles according to the objectives identified. Therefor it would be hardly possible to standardise criteria a cross initiatives. What would be very useful on the other hand is a clear overview of criteria used and population data entered per major group of species. This can not be the responsibility for one of the initiatives and collaboration needs to be fostered. The EEA might be a partner for this issue.

Suggestion: Investigate the possibilities of creating a clear overview of criteria used and population data needs for each of the initiatives by fostering collaboration with EEA and/or UNEP-WCMC

4. Site description

No comments

5. Site protection status and relation with other sites

This is to be considered as one of the more important group of fields as it indicates the level of protection of the area and the relationships with other legal instruments at national and international level.
All four initiatives are using the same coding system for designation (or protection) types which was developed through Natura2000, Emerald and now regularly updated through the CDDA process. Unfortunately, the different initiatives are using the coding system at various levels of completeness or update. The overview below illustrates this variety.

NATURA2000

15 countries: 1992 and 1995: not yet updated in the reference list according to the latest version of CDDA

10 countries: 2004

Emerald

+- 50 countries: last update in 2003 when the latest version of the software was established

UNEP-MAP SDF

21 countries (+ EU): coding system accepted for the SDF but not yet implemented

MedWet

countries: coding system used in the software but only the codes from 1992 for 5 countries are added to the system (ES, FR, GR, IT, PT)

Suggestion:
Discuss and investigate the implementation of this coding system in collaboration with the EEA and UNEP-WCMC through the CDDA process. Two groups of countries might implement it through different administrative ways, but at the end getting the same result:

- North and north-east Mediterranean: updating process already underway through EIONET of the EEA (including all western balkan countries, Turkey, Cyprus and Malta). For this group an agreement on the use of the existing coding system should be sufficient together with possible comments in the field of marine and coastal protection types.
- South and South-eastern Mediterranean countries: through the updating process of the World Data Base on Protected Areas managed by UNEP-WCMC, in close collaboration with the CDDA of the EEA. Some of these countries are quit likely to develop the emerald network in the (near) future and will have to establish such a coding system also in this framework.

6. Human activities in and around the site

All four initiatives are using the same reference list for human activities and impacts related to sites. MedWet has added a few additional codes to this list and has performed a split between activities and the impact of those activities.

Although no concrete suggested were made until now, several persons have suggested that this reference list is in need of a revision. If such a need can be proven, it can only be done in close collaboration with other users of this reference list.

7. Map of the site

No comments, except the fact that it could be interesting to elaborate a standard list of projections used by different countries for their national mapping programs as it was done for natura2000 and Emerald using the initiative of Eurostat. (only for missing countries in the list)

8. Slides

No comments