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Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded EcAp MED III Project

Videoconference, 15 June 2022

Report of the Meeting

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2022

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Introduction

1. The Second Steering Committee Meeting of the Project “*Support to Efficient Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach-based Integrated Monitoring and Assessment of the Mediterranean Sea and Coasts and to delivery of data-based 2023 Quality Status Report in synergy with the EU MSFD*” (EcAp-MED III) took place via videoconference on 15 June 2022, at the invitation of the United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP). The EcAp MED III Project is funded by the European Union (EU) Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) in the framework of the Programmed GPGC Strategic Programme Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Commission (EC) and UNEP.
2. The overall aims EcAp MED III Project are: to further assist the Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties to implement the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), adopted in 2016, as part of the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap; and to contribute to the preparation and delivery of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR), in line with the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap milestones at national, sub-regional and regional level.
3. The Steering Committee Meeting was attended by the following Members: one representative of the European Commission – DG ENV C.2; the Chair of the EcAp Coordination Group; and from UNEP/MAP Secretariat’s side, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator (Chair of this meeting), the EcAp/QSR Head of Unit, the EcAp MED III Project Officer and two Finance Assistants. The full list of participants is attached as Annex 1 to the present report.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting, Adoption of the Agenda and Introduction of the Members

4. The Meeting was opened on Wednesday, 15 June 2022 at 10:00 (Eastern European Time), by its Chair, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator.
5. The Chair welcomed the participants and emphasised the importance of this EU-funded Project for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast. She thanked the European Commission for the continuous support and contribution provided to the implementation of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) on the ground, and to the scientific and technical work to develop the methodologies for integrated assessment of Good Environmental Status, which are essential to support the preparation of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR). She also acknowledged the efforts of INFO/RAC, PAP/RAC, Plan Bleu, and SPA/RAC, as key partners of EcAp MED III.
6. After recalling the internal rules of the Meeting, each Member briefly introduced her/himself during a round of presentations.
7. The Chair highlighted how, despite difficulties at national level and challenges posed *inter alia* by the remaining consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of EcAp MED III has made good progress since its first Steering Committee Meeting. She underlined how a well-coordinated mechanism was set up and tight links were established and nourished with the other EU-funded projects, especially with IMAP-MPA and Marine Litter MED II, for a coordinated and effective implementation of IMAP in the beneficiary countries, and for the development of methodologies to support GES assessment, which are contributing to the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR. Some success stories were put forward, such as the activities related to coast and hydrography and Non-Indigenous Species (NIS), that are about to be fully achieved. The work on NIS could potentially be used by all Contracting Parties, including EU Member States for their MSFD assessment. The collaboration with the scientific community for the QSR – mentioned as a positive sign of sustainability – the progress on assessment criteria, and the work of the respective CORMON were also highlighted. The Chair expressed her regret for the limited progress to conclude legal agreements despite all the efforts made and her personal involvement. She

also touched upon the slow recruitment process, explaining the difficulties to recruit the Project Officer, now expected for September/October 2022 and underlining that the Assistant (G5) position to support EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II projects should be filled by the end of the year. Finally, the Chair proposed to organise another Steering Committee in six months, i.e. towards the end of 2022, potentially in person and with an extended participation of the relevant stakeholders.

8. The EC Representative, from DG ENV, thanked UNEP/MAP for organising and hosting the Meeting and welcomed the participants. She stressed the importance of EcAp MED III because of the links to the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and to achieve the Good Environmental Status in the Mediterranean. She took note of the main issues pointed out by the Coordinator and the request for Project extension, to be discussed in a thorough and transparent manner during the meeting.

9. The Chair of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group (EcAp CG) welcomed the Meeting and joined the EC Representative in highlighting the importance of EcAp MED III to contribute to the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach and the achievement of GES in the Mediterranean. The value of sharing knowledge and strengthening existing cooperation and networks among Mediterranean stakeholders was also underlined.

10. The Steering Committee reviewed and adopted the provisional Agenda, which appears as Annex 2 to the present report.

11. The meeting was conducted in English.

Agenda item 2: Progress on EcAp MED III Project Implementation

12. As an introduction, Members were invited to watch a short video clip produced by UNEP/MAP to present the three EU-funded projects, namely EcAp MED III, IMAP-MPA and Marine Litter MED II. The video is available [online](#)¹. The Project Officer also repeated the objectives of EcAp MED III.

13. By going through the Progress Report (UNEP/MED WG.525/2) at length, the Secretariat informed the participants on the status of progress of the activities of the EcAp MED III Project since its first Steering Committee meeting in spring 2021, as well as on the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR.

14. Regarding Outcome 1 (Effective on-the-ground national IMAP implementation), the Secretariat presented the current progress for each Output (available in the Project Report), which is summarised below:

- The national monitoring carried out for common indicators (CIs) in beneficiary countries (Output 1.1) is ongoing. The number of CIs selected increased, so have the number of datasets uploaded in the Info System.
- On Non-Indigenous Species (NIS) (Output 1.2) – led by SPA/RAC – monitoring activities are progressing well, baseline and related documents were endorsed by the CORMON biodiversity meeting in March 2022.
- The activities for CI 15 and 16 on coast and hydrography (Output 1.3) – led by PAP/RAC – are about to be completed. It was confirmed that these will be brought into the 2023 MED QSR.
- The IMAP Info System was upgraded by INFO/RAC (Output 1.4) and is being expanded. Data Dictionaries and Standards (DDs and DSs) are being developed. Assistance and bilateral tailor-made trainings to national partners are taking place on a regular basis.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBL4Q4hrwvo>

15. Regarding Outcome 2 (Regional scale progress and consensus for the monitoring and assessment as well as reporting processes), the Secretariat presented the current progress for each Output (available in the Project Report), which is summarised below:

- The analysis on knowledge gaps (Output 2.1.1) is ongoing at a different pace for each cluster. The most recent updates on pollution and marine litter were presented by MEDPOL in May 2022 at the related CORMON meeting. Conclusions will be shared with the participants.
- Assessment criteria/thresholds/and baseline values for the 10 IMAP CIs included in the current Info System are not all updated yet. Work will continue in the second semester, including on fisheries where SPA/RAC will work with GFCM.
- 7 CORMON meetings were conducted successfully in 2021 and the first months of 2022 on the different clusters as planned (Output 2.1.4).
- The actions to strengthen the Science-Policy networks (Output 2.2.2) were delayed due to Covid-19 but are now at full speed under the supervision of Plan Bleu. Deskwork is ongoing before the organisation of a workshop in Morocco.

16. Finally, the Secretariat reported progress on Project Management, underlining the following achievements and challenges:

- The consequences of Covid-19 continued to affect the Project, for instance with no possibility to organise physical meetings, work with local partners and conduct data collection and other fieldwork for months.
- The Project Officer stressed that coherence and synergies with IMAP-MPA, ML MED II and UNEP/MAP Programme of Work continued to be a strong added value of the Project.
- On human resources, UNV specialists were recruited as Project Officer and Finance Assistant, and their contracts extended respectively to July and October 2022 to cover the gap until the onboarding of the P3 Officer and G5 Assistant, expected in September/October for the former and by December 2022 for the latter.
- The budget execution is following the Project implementation. The cumulative commitments as of April 2022 amount to \$1.3 million out of the \$2.2 million from DG ENV, i.e., a rate of 59%. A transfer to UNEP/MAP Mediterranean Trust Fund of USD 910,750 has been made in May to roll out the actions for the full year 2022. More information is available in the 2021 Annual Financial Report, which will be shared again with the participants.
- The main challenge of the Project lies in the conclusion of legal agreements – or SSFAs – with national agencies in the beneficiary countries. A SSFA with Israel and the National Park Authority (INPA) was signed in May 2022 on the biodiversity cluster. Administrative and technical issues are being faced with the pending ones. This affects the activities which should be carried out directly by national stakeholders and explains the delays encountered so far. Recent progress can be noted, and preliminary agreements have been reached. A detailed state of play will be shared with the participants.
- Regarding communication and visibility, in addition to the work carried out around COP 22, a video (displayed during the meeting) and a complementary brochure have been produced in 2022. Both are available on the UNEP/MAP website, were disseminated, and will be used in the upcoming regional meetings whenever relevant.

17. The Secretariat took the opportunity to update the Steering Committee Members on the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR and the 9th Meeting of the EcAp Coordination Group on 5 July 2022. The EcAp/QSR Head of Unit emphasised that:

- The MAP Components are working on their contributions to the 2023 MED QSR. A detailed report per CI and EO on the current state of progress and the anticipated content of the QSR 2023 – assessment criteria, baselines, threshold values, assessment methods & scales, data availability, and integration possibilities – has been prepared for consideration by the 9th EcAp Coordination Group.
- Participants to the 2022 CORMON on biodiversity supported the more elaborated 2023 MED QSR structure and outline content template for CIs and Eos provided by the Secretariat that built on the

previously endorsed methodology, structure, and content of the QSR. This will be presented to the 9th EcAp CG. The CORMON Biodiversity meeting (March 2022) also reviewed an update of progress in the QSR Roadmap.

- During this biennium an independent evaluation of the implementation of the EcAp Roadmap 2008-2021 - not specifically QSR-related - will take place. This will lead to a proposal for a renewed EcAp for consideration by CORMONs, MAP Component Focal Points and the EcAp Coordination Group in 2023.
- A SIDA-funded project managed by UNEP is testing an application of the Nested Environmental status Assessment Tool (NEAT) in the Adriatic and testing methods for assessment in areas with insufficient data.

18. The presentation of the Secretariat was followed by a discussion of the Members on the state of project implementation, during which they gave strategic comments and suggestions.

19. The EC Representative thanked UNEP/MAP for the comprehensive and detailed presentation. She welcomed the progress of the Project activities and reiterated the need for harmonisation with the MSFD. Nevertheless, she asked for clarifications and expressed some concerns, in particular in relation to the non-signing of legal agreements with Beneficiary Countries. The Secretariat shared the view of the EC on HR aspects, reassuring the Representative of all efforts made by UNEP/MAP, which considers that in-house reallocation will be sufficient to cover the summer period and that other alternatives are being explored until the Project Officer enters into function in October 2022 (tbc). The EC Representative requested further information on the reasons behind the lack of improvement with legal agreements. The Project Officer gave an overview per country, with specific issues of technical, administrative and/or political nature. The EC Representative asked to receive detailed indications of issues at stake and what can be achieved with and without legal agreements in place until August 2023 and what is currently done or can be done to encourage BCs to sign those agreements as soon as possible. She also underlined that this information is necessary before being able to consider the request for a Project extension, and should be presented and discussed in a follow-up meeting to be held at the beginning of July. The possibility to ask the relevant EU Delegations to intervene was raised, in particular for Algeria and Egypt.

20. The Chair of the EcAp Coordination Group noted the great progress made in data reporting since the last QSR and the need to have more integrated and coherent information systems in the future around the Mediterranean. Her queries on the EcAp governance mechanism, online working groups and agenda of other relevant meetings were answered by the Secretariat. Eventually she stressed that it was key to harmonise the work of the different stakeholders and experts, such as JRC and the EU high-level expert group to address NIS which should be linked to the experts involved within the Barcelona Convention.

21. The Project Report was adopted, and the Secretariat committed to share additional supporting documents. The final conclusions and recommendations concerning this agenda item are presented in Annex 3 to this report.

Agenda Item 3: 2022-2023 Workplan

22. The Secretariat started this agenda item by briefly presenting the Updated Workplan for 2022-2023 (UNEP/MED WG.525/3), highlighting that the proposed changes in the timeline of implementation are mainly targeting the activities at national level and Outcome 2. It can be explained by the late/pending conclusion of agreements with national agencies as well as the still lasting consequences of Covid-19, mentioned under agenda item 2. These issues are not specific to EcAp MED III and are faced by other projects.

23. The Secretariat stressed that the initial delays and proposed changes in the Workplan will not jeopardise the 2023 MED QSR and will not impact its effective and timely preparation.

24. The EC Representative welcomed the Updated Workplan for 2022-2023, acknowledging that it is in line with the Progress Report presented previously and reflects the current constraints being faced in the implementation of the Project, which were already discussed under agenda item 2. Nevertheless, the EC Representative expressed her concerns again related to the implementing of national activities - due to the lack of SSFAs in place - so as to ensure a successful Project and 2023 MED QSR.

25. Finally, the Secretariat sought the opinion of the Steering Committee Members on the possibility of a no-cost extension, which would take the form of a Project amendment with an extra six months, i.e., until February 2024 included. This additional time would allow to better cope with the delays of some activities and to successfully conclude the Project. The Secretariat does not foresee any negative impacts on such extension with adapted activities that will neither modify the objectives of the Project nor its total amount. The activities which would benefit from this extension were highlighted in blue in the Workplan. The new Project's duration would also cover COP 23, a good occasion to contribute to this significant event and showcase the results of EcAp MED III.

26. The EC Representative expressed that although she was in favour of this justified extension, she asked for more information on how it could cover the beneficiary countries, with and without legal agreements in place (what can be achieved outside these legal agreements during the extended period?). The Project Officer gave a first explanation on what falls under the remit of the agreements; answered the question of the Chair of the EcAp GC on the usefulness of a second testing by PAP/RAC on the guiding document elaborated for CI 16 and the fact that there will be no consequences for the delivery of the QSR 2023. It was agreed that more substantive discussions were needed and that a first meeting could take place in July 2022 to provide and discuss further the information on SSFAs (and how this situation impacts on project delivery), and the scope of a possible project extension.

27. The final conclusions and recommendations on this agenda item are presented in Annex 3 to this report.

Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business

28. The question of an additional Steering Committee meeting was raised under this agenda item. It was proposed by UNEP/MAP Coordinator to organise another meeting in six-month time, i.e., towards the end of 2022 in order to follow up on progress on the ground and conclude the process of the Project extension. Both the Chair of the EcAp CG and the EC Representative agreed, and the EC offered to organise this third meeting in person in Brussels.

29. It was also the opportunity for all participants to stress the need to enforce better regional coherence and cooperation at technical level.

Agenda Item 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

30. Together with the EC Representative and the Chair of the EcAp GC, the Project Officer presented verbally the main conclusions and recommendations of the Steering Committee Meeting. The approved conclusions are presented in Annex 3 to the present report.

Agenda Item 6: Closure of the Meeting

31. Following customary courtesy exchanges and concluding remarks by the EcAp/QSR Head of Unit, the Meeting was declared closed at 12:45 (Eastern European Time) on 15 June 2022.

Annex 1: List of participants

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|---|---|
| <p>UNEP/MAP</p> | <p>Tatjana Hema Coordinator tatjana.hema@un.org</p> <p>Joanne Foden EcAp/QSR Head of Unit joanne.foden@un.org</p> <p>Lucas Spieser EcAp MED III Project Officer lucas.spieser@un.org</p> <p>Stellah Lubanga Finance and Admin Assistant stellah.lubanga@un.org</p> <p>Anara Eginbaeva Finance and Admin Assistant anara.eginbaeva@un.org</p> |
| <p>EC - DG ENV</p> | <p>Anna Bobo Remijn Policy Officer, Unit C.2 anna.bobo-remijn@ec.europa.eu</p> |
| <p>ECOSYSTEM APPROACH COORDINATION GROUP</p> | <p>Laure Du Commun Chargée de mission, Ministère de la Transition écologique et solidaire, France laure.ducommun@developpement-durable.gouv.fr</p> |

Annex 2: Agenda of the Meeting

Wednesday, 15 June 2022

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the Meeting, Adoption of the Agenda and Introduction of the Members

Agenda Item 2: Progress on EcAp MED III Project Implementation

Agenda item 3: 2022-2023 Workplan

Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business

Agenda Item 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Agenda Item 6: Closure of the Meeting

Annex 3: Conclusions and Recommendations of the Meeting

1. The Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded EcAp MED III Project took place via videoconference on 15 June 2022.
2. The Meeting was attended by the following Members: one representative of the European Commission – DG ENV C.2; the Chair of the EcAp Coordination Group; and from UNEP/MAP Secretariat's side, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator (Chairperson), the EcAp/QSR Head of Unit, the EcAp MED III Project Officer and two Finance Assistants.
3. Following the presentation by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat of the working documents prepared for the needs of the Meeting (UNEP/MED WG.525/2 and 525/3) and their review and discussion, the Steering Committee agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

Agenda Item 2: Progress on EcAp MED III Project Implementation

- The Steering Committee welcomed the good progress in the implementation of Project activities, despite the challenges and constraints
- The Steering Committee expressed concerns on the delays occurred in the recruitment of the ECAP MED III Project Manager
- The Steering Committee expressed concerns with the delayed conclusion of the legal agreements with national partners
- The Steering Committee requested an update over the summer 2022 on the human resources situation
- The Steering Committee requested the Secretariat to provide more information on the state of play per country and what can be achieved with/without legal agreements in place
- The Steering Committee recommended to organise a follow-up meeting, ideally in July 2022
- The Steering Committee approved the Progress Report and highlighted the importance of implementing activities in line with the spirit of the Project, which will lead to the effective and timely preparation of the 2023 MED QSR

Agenda Item 3: 2022-2023 Workplan

- The Steering Committee welcomed and reviewed the Project Updated Workplan
- The Steering Committee agreed that a six-month no-cost extension of the Project with an adaptation of some activities could be justified in order to successfully conclude its implementation, but that this request needs further discussion and consideration in view of the (lack of) SSFAs signed with the BCs.
- The Steering Committee requested to organise a follow-up meeting (*cf* item 2) prior to any revisions, which shall be made in close consultation and agreement with the European Commission