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Athens, Greece, 25-29 May 2015

**Agenda item 10: Marine and Coastal Protected Areas, including in the open seas and deep seas****10.2. Regional Working Programme for the Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Sea including the High Seas****10.2.1. Activities for the identification and creation of SPAMIs in the open seas, including the deep seas****Progress Report of the “Joint Management Action of EC with UNEP/MAP for identifying and creating Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) in the open seas, including the deep seas” (MedOpenSeas Project)**

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## 1. Project context and mandate

Despite its high biodiversity value the deep sea continues to be one of the least protected regions, not least in the Mediterranean. Areas beyond national jurisdiction currently make up the largest part of the Mediterranean 2.5 million km<sup>2</sup>, including areas of relatively high productivity. The MedOpenSeas project has since 2008 contributed to promote the establishment of a representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) embracing the open sea, including areas beyond national jurisdiction, as mandated by several international decisions including the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and the Aichi Targets (CBD X/2, 2010).

The overall project aim is to facilitate the establishment of SPAMIs embracing the open seas, including the deep seas, in the Mediterranean, providing scientific ecological information compilation, spatial mapping, legal analyses and stakeholder coordination and negotiation. The Barcelona Convention and its Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD) provide a suitable legal and institutional framework for the development of MPAs in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction or in areas where the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction have not yet been defined in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as in national waters, and thus the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) has been implementing the project since the beginning. The project has been financially supported by the European Commission, and has developed the current third phase, integrated within the EcAP project.

Political support for the project has been documented by a number of decisions, such as the 2008 Almeria Environmental Ministerial Declaration and the 2009 Marrakesh Ministerial Declaration. In addition, Contracting Parties have throughout the process stated their interest in actively participating in the MedOpenSeas project in order to develop sites within or close to their national waters as Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs).

However, given the challenge of establishing protected areas in the global commons of the High Seas, strengthened political support is needed. To date only one SPAMI covers offshore habitat in the Mediterranean: the Pelagos Sanctuary (France, Italy, Monaco), which was established in 2001.

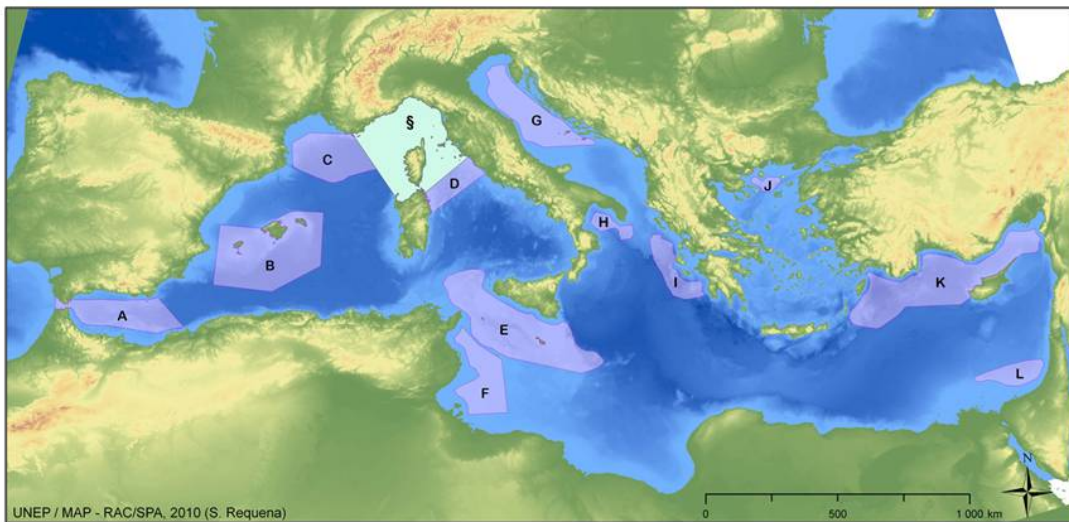
## 2. Overview of the first (2008-2009) and second project phase (2010-2011)

The first phase of the project, completed in late 2009, led to the identification of twelve priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep seas (see Figure 1). These priority areas were potential candidates for SPAMI listing and/or inclusion in other frameworks, such as Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In order to spatially plan and identify the priority sites a number of studies on vulnerable ecosystems for fisheries, birds and other species were compiled, as well as a Global Information

System developed to facilitate the analysis (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA 2010a,b and c<sup>1</sup>). Geological features (e.g. seamounts, canyons) and oceanographic features (e.g. fronts, currents) were also taken into account. For a full overview of the scientific process employed for priority site development, see UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA 2010d<sup>2</sup>.



## Priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep seas, likely to contain sites that could be candidates for the SPAMI List



UNEP / MAP - RAC/SPA, 2010 (S. Requena)  
A: Alborán Seamounts; B: Southern Balearic; C: Gulf of Lions shelf and slope; D: Central Tyrrhenian; E: Northern Strait of Sicily (including Adventure and nearby banks); F: Southern Strait of Sicily; G: Northern and Central Adriatic; H: Santa Maria di Leuca; I: Northeastern Ionian; J: Thracian Sea; K: Northeastern Levantine Sea and Rhodes Gyre; L: Nile Delta Region (S: Pelagos Sanctuary declared as SPAMI in 2001)

**Figure 1** Map of the twelve priority sites identified during the first MedOpenSeas project phase.

Furthermore, the international legal instruments relevant to the conservation of marine biodiversity and the practicalities of their implementation were evaluated during the first project phase to guide the institutional development of SPAMIS in areas beyond national jurisdiction (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA 2010e3).

<sup>1</sup> UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2010a. Fisheries conservation and vulnerable ecosystems in the Mediterranean open seas, including the deep seas. By de Juan, S. and Lleonart, J. Ed. RAC/SPA, Tunis: 103pp.

UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2010b. Report presenting a georeferenced compilation on bird important areas in the Mediterranean open seas. By Requena, S. and Carboneras, C. Ed. RAC/SPA, Tunis: 39pp.

UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2010c. Technical report on the geographical information system developed for Mediterranean open seas. By Requena, S. Ed. RAC/SPA, Tunis: 50pp.

<sup>2</sup> UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2010d. Overview of scientific findings and criteria relevant to identifying SPAMIs in the Mediterranean open seas, including the deep sea. By Notarbartolo di Sciarra, G. and Agardy, T. Ed. RAC/SPA, Tunis: 71pp.

<sup>3</sup> UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2010e. International legal instruments applied to the conservation of marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean region and actors responsible for their implementation and enforcement. By Ben Salem, M. Ed. RAC/SPA, Tunis: 35pp.

A Steering Committee to guide the MedOpenSeas project and review outputs of the first phase was established in 2009 with more than ten regional and international organizations participating. For a full list of committee members, see UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.359/Inf.5.

The aim of the project's second phase, completed in December 2011, was to start supporting neighbouring Parties of some amongst the above-mentioned priority areas in evaluating and potentially presenting joint proposals for these sites as candidate(s) for inclusion in the SPAMI List, in accordance with the provisions of Article 9 of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. The RAC/SPA has been facilitating this preparatory work, including stakeholder negotiations.

The programme of work of the second phase included the establishment of ad hoc working groups, composed of technical representatives from the countries bordering the Alboran Sea (Algeria, Morocco, Spain) and Gulf of Lions (France, Spain) priority areas. For the Gulf of Lions a number of scientific documents on fisheries, cetaceans, seabirds and habitat ecology were compiled and published, after review and agreement of designated experts by the concerned countries, to facilitate with them the preparation of presentation reports for the establishment of SPAMIs within this area (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.382/Inf.6 - 9). For Alboran Sea, a similar set of documents was started and advanced. For a full report on the second phase, see UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.371/4.

### 3. Activities of the third phase (2012-2015)

#### Work on three priority areas

The current third phase focused under the same schedule on three priority areas (see Figure 1, Table 1, 2 and 3): Adriatic Sea, Alboran Sea and the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau areas. The process in the Alboran Sea benefited from initial preparatory work and a country designated experts meeting in 2011 conducted during the second project phase (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.371/4). In parallel, the work already undertaken for supporting preparation of SPAMIs proposals in the Gulf of Lions during the second project phase delivered the core ecological and legal documentation for consideration by that area countries, specifically France and Spain, and RAC/SPA kept open to any further request.

Table 1 List of neighbouring countries for the priority sites targeted by the third project phase.

Priority areas addressed during 3rd phase	Neighbouring countries
Adriatic Sea	Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia
Alboran Sea	Algeria, Morocco and Spain
Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau	Italy, Libya, Malta and Tunisia

Similar thematic reports as for the Gulf of Lions (see UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.382/Inf.6 – 9), including fisheries (bycatch of e.g. turtles, sharks), cetaceans and seabirds were prepared by consultants engaged by RAC/SPA for the three areas namely the Adriatic Sea, the Alboran Sea and the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau. The thematic reports were complemented by a report focused on marine ecology, including spatial mapping on benthos, geology and oceanography (see table 2.)

Table 2. Ecology and Thematic Reports for the three priority areas in the third project phase

UNEP code	Title
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.11	Adriatic Sea: Important areas for conservation of cetaceans, sea turtles and giant devil rays
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.12	Adriatic Sea: Status and conservation of Seabirds
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.13	Adriatic Sea: Status and conservation of Fisheries
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.14	Adriatic Sea: Ecology (report)
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.15	Mer d'Alboran : Statut des Cétacés
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.16	Status and conservation of seabirds in the Alboran Sea, with particular attention to the Open Seas
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.17	Alboran Sea: Status of open seas fisheries
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.18	Alboran Sea: Ecology and human activities (draft report)
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.19	Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau: Status and conservation of Cetaceans
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.20	Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau: Satellite telemetry applied to fin whales in the Mediterranean Sea
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.21	Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau: Status and conservation of Seabirds
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.22	Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau: Status and conservation of Fisheries
UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.23	Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau: Topography, circulation and their effects on biological component

The available scientific data of the ecosystems and biodiversity in the Alboran were presented, reviewed and discussed during a consultation meeting for the neighbouring countries of the Alboran Sea (Algeria, Morocco and Spain) in November 2013. The aim of the consultation meeting was to continue efforts to identify sites deserving to be protected in the Alboran open seas, including the deep seas. They added specific knowledge to contribute to a final comprehensive ecological report that will serve as a base for decision-makers. The meeting was in close collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature through its Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN-Med) and held at their premises in Malaga, Spain.

RAC-SPA presented international legal instruments that are relevant for development of SPAMIs in areas beyond national jurisdiction and distributed the printed version of document “Note on the establishment of Marine Protected Areas beyond national jurisdiction or in areas where the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction have not yet been defined in the Mediterranean Sea” (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA. 2011). In addition, an online GIS tool called SeaSketch was introduced to promote active participation by stakeholders.

The final general discussion highlighted the future process to identify sites that deserve to be managed in terms of conservation and sustainable use of resources in the open seas, including the deep seas. A timeline for this process was discussed upon and the working group of the neighbouring countries would review the technical documents prepared, as a mean to assist them to propose a preliminary site or list of potential sites that can be listed as SPAMIs. The countries would review the list and include it to a joint statement of willing to create SPAMIs embracing the open seas in the Alboran Sea that would be presented and approved by an Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. The next step would continue toward a Declaration of SPAMIs in the Alboran Sea through national consultation meetings and between the three countries and preparation of draft management plans for future SPAMIs. In the final step, additional international consultations with organizations (GFCM, CBD, ACCOBAMS etc.) would be undertaken. The ultimate goal would be to present a final SPAMI presentation report to the COP21 in 2019 for their adoption.



Facilitation meetings were also organized as part of the third project phase for the Adriatic Sea and the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau priority areas and their groups of neighbouring countries (Table 1) on September 2014 and April 2015. For all priority sites thematic reports, containing compiled and new scientific data, have been elaborated (specifically thematic reports on Cetaceans, Seabirds and Fisheries, with emphasis in elasmobranchs) and also ecosystem information.

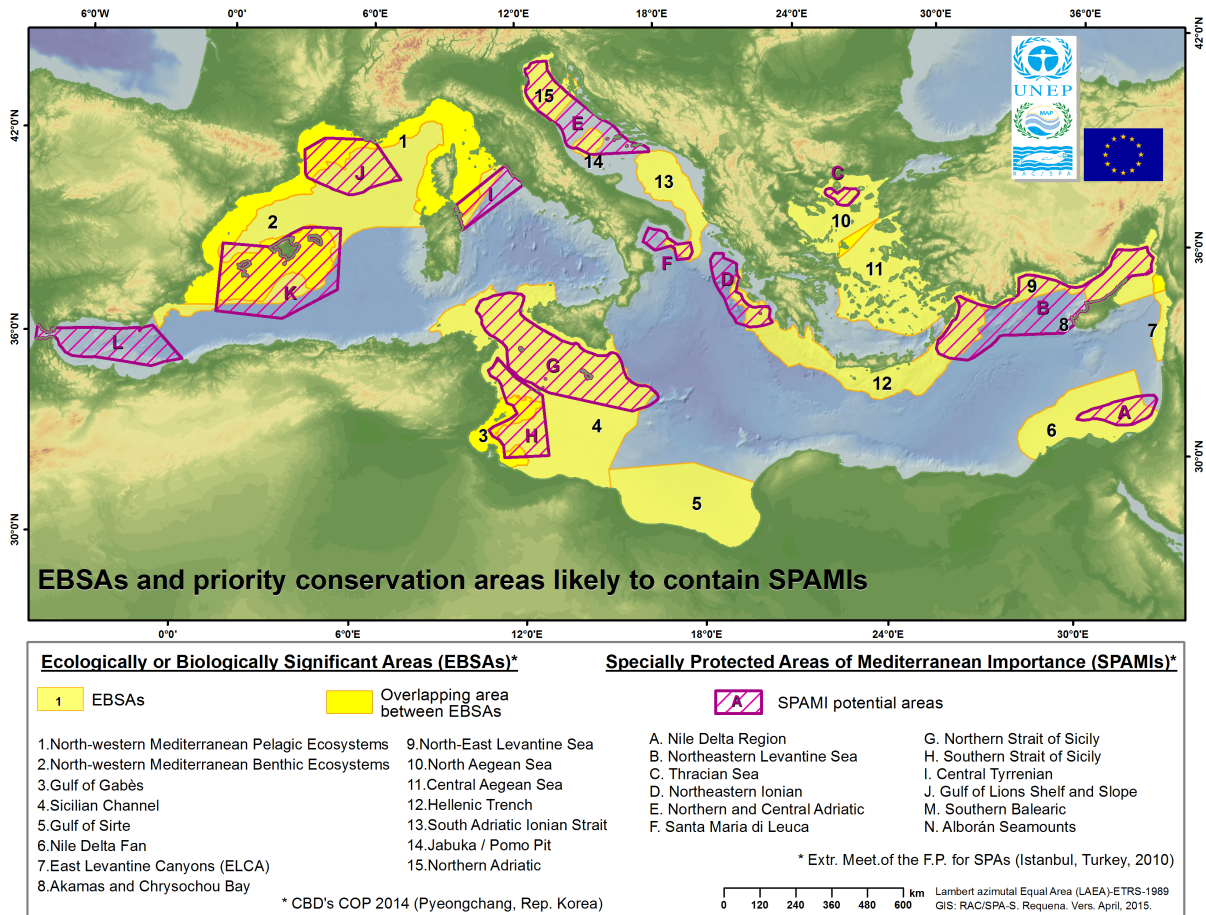
The first round of consultation meetings between the neighbouring countries of the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau (Italy, Libya, Malta and Tunisia) and the Adriatic Sea (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia) were held the 23-24 and 25-26 September 2014 respectively, in Gammarth, Tunisia. Libya was unable to participate due to the unstable situation in the country and was officially excused. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro were absent and were also officially excused, absent countries keep their willing to follow the process and were kept included in the rounds of documents check and reviews, since the above-mentioned sets of reports form the foundation to guide the preparation of SPAMI proposals on specific sites for SPAMI listing and stakeholder negotiations.

The results of these meetings were two draft roadmaps, for each respective area, aimed to be revisited in the second round of meetings, indicating the way forward in the process to identify, establish and declare SPAMIs in the open seas. For each priority area, the thematic reports on the status of conservation of seabirds, fisheries and cetaceans together with a general ecology report were presented, discussed and reviewed by the countries. The thematic reports were finalized after inputs insertions with all the concerned countries

The second round of consultation meetings for the Adriatic Sea and the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau were respectively held on 13-14 April 2015, Sciacca and 22-23 April 2015 Trieste, in Italy, following the kind offer, and including economic contribution, by Italy. Only the report of Trieste meeting is attached in Annex 1, not being the final agreed version of Sciacca meeting ready at the time of the 12 SPA FP meeting.

The representatives of the countries attending the meetings presented their activities at the national level, concerning marine protected areas in particular and on their general approaches on the improvement of the scientific knowledge on ecological, socio-economical aspects of the marine environment and on their plans for the future. They presented recent interesting results in term of changes in the legal and institutional mechanisms, declaration of marine protected areas and Natura 2000 sites, research on biodiversity, including benthic and pelagic organisms, ecosystems, natural processes, specific natural features and on human activities in the areas, including maritime traffic, soil and subsoil exploration, fisheries. All these data will be useful for the compilation of further key information supporting the marine spatial management of those areas. Representatives of countries added additional information on the institutional, legal and governance levels.

An interesting and useful point remarked is that there is a convergence between the areas proposed initially for consideration as SPAMI and those adopted by CBD, most of the differences being related to the new information brought by the Mediterranean experts.



**Figure 2** Map of the twelve priority sites identified during the first MedOpenSeas project phase (Extraordinary SPA FP, Istanbul, June 2010) overlapped on the EBSAs included in the CBD adoption (CBD COP12 Pyeongchang, October 2014).

Basic willing retrieved by RAC/SPA is to pursue facilitating the future preparation of presentation reports jointly elaborated by concerned countries for sites in these areas, notably within EBSAs, which have already a global recognition. Those areas could be object of efficient and realistic area based management measures for the protection and sustainable use of those areas, or parts of them, including MPAs, which might be listed as SPAMI. There was a clear commitment on further involvement of the countries themselves in the elaboration of tailored projects to support those tasks.

### Geographic Information System (GIS)

RAC/SPA has been compiling and reviewing georeferenced data in organised layers since the start of MedOpenSeas. The information had been provided by RAC/SPA's consultants and experts. Some other sources are scientific articles published in peer reviewed journals and EU and non EU repositories: EIONET, EMODnet, the European Atlas of the Seas, VLIZ, FAO, OceanColor, or UNEP/GRID-Arendal. The information acquired is processed and geospatially refined and is subjected to a protocol to determine its quality and suitability for the process. The datasets so produced have a metadata file following the EC INSPIRE Directive (Directive 2007/2/EC). The final set will be delivered in ESRI format (shapefiles) and Google Earth (kmz).

All the georeferenced information (vectors and rasters) was organised in blocks, including Bathymetry: Isolines, DEM and shaded model of the project areas). Geomorphological features: a total

of 8 layers (Harris, P. T., et al. 2014). Administrative boundaries: 4 layers. Benthos: 21 layers. Seabirds: 2 layers. Sea turtles: 2 layers. Activities: 5 layers. Protected areas: 7 layers. Productivity: 4 layers. SST: 2 layers. The participants in to all sessions were kindly asked to contribute and enrich this geodatabase with the incorporation of the results of ongoing research projects and other information available in their countries. Final goal is to achieve a comprehensive GIS allowing to compile at RAC/SPA information useful to the Parties for the future management of the Mediterranean open Seas, including deep seas.

### **Common strategy among RAC/SPA, GFCM, ACCOBAMS and IUCN-Med, with collaboration of MedPAN**

The development of MPAs embracing the High Seas is a challenging task, thus close collaboration between key organisations with a mandate to preserve biodiversity and manage marine resources is a core need. Also within the framework of the project, but with extended beneficial results expected beyond the project itself, the delineation of a joint strategy to coordinate spatial conservation efforts among the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), IUCN and RAC/SPA, with the contribution of MedPAN is currently ongoing (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/17 Draft elements for a Common strategy among RAC/SPA, GFCM, ACCOBAMS and IUCN-Med, with collaboration of MedPAN), benefitting from preliminary discussions and long-term bilateral collaborations among the above bodies.

### **Best practices and case studies related to the management of large marine transboundary areas: options for the preparation of joint proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with Article 9 of the SPA/BD Protocol**

The development of a study on the identification of good practices useful for elaborating, adopting and implementing management plans in the case of those joint SPAMIs embracing the open seas is being undertaken, in line with the approach to facilitate the preparation of joint proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with Article 9 of the SPA/BD Protocol.

The aim of this study is to support the Contracting Parties to get clearer ideas on the kind of existing structures and governance bodies of trans-boundary managed areas, and on their functioning related to the elaboration, adoption and implementation of their management plan. The study expects to be a practical tool to facilitate the elaboration, adoption and implementation of management plans for future such areas in the Mediterranean.

The study analyses best practices and case studies related to the management of wide trans-boundary areas, straddle marine resources as well as marine protected areas comprising notably large extensions of ocean. It gives particular attention to the institutional aspects related to the elaboration and implementation of the management plans in the Parties that have demonstrated their willingness to participate in the establishment or currently involved in the running of joint SPAMIs.

Likewise particular attention will be given to management schemes involving transboundary sectors. Special attention will be given to experience that could be retrieved from other Regional Seas Conventions.

The outline of this document is presented in annex 2.

#### **4. Related outcome: Project contribution to the definition of Mediterranean EBSAs**

The results of the scientific work compiled through MedOpenSeas fed directly into a number of international policy debates, most notably on Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Across the world's ocean basins EBSAs are currently being identified, with the Mediterranean fully engaged in the process not least thanks to the outputs of the MedOpenSeas project, which contributed with key scientific information to a regional workshop organized for the Mediterranean region in Malaga, Spain (April 2014), in order to finalize the first global description of areas that meet the criteria for ecologically or biologically significant marine areas. That rendered as a final result the listing of 15 Mediterranean EBSAs in the CBD EBSAs repository (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.408/Inf.10 Ecologically or Biologically Significant marine Areas (EBSAs) defined in the Mediterranean in cooperation with the CBD)

#### **5. Difficulties encountered and future challenges**

The workload required to successfully implement the MedOpenSeas project is sizeable and has thus during the first and second project phases benefitted from a backstopping officer project post to support the RAC/SPA team in Tunis. The third phase did not have an equivalent post warranted. Within the framework of a collaboration with the UNEP Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Associate Scientific and Technical Officer of the CMS provided valuable technical input and support to the third phase of the MedOpenSeas project, thanks to a stay at RAC/SPA premises. The officer reported on duty in December 2012 in Tunis at the RAC/SPA offices and continued to contribute to the MedOpenSeas project until September 2013 before returning to UNEP CMS headquarters in Bonn, Germany; afterwards, the project was supported by two consecutive consultants. There is a clear need for human means reinforcing at RAC/SPA whenever new projects and activities are taken onboard, being funding for just the activity segment not enough to allow a fluent implementation.

Since the start of the third phase RAC/SPA developed an online workspace for the MedOpenSeas project using the SeaSketch MPA spatial mapping tool. All RAC/SPA Focal Points, MAP Focal Points and a number of selected experts were invited to join, use and review this online workspace in February 2013. Available GIS layers for the priority sites can be viewed by all stakeholders and draft

areas sketched online, which is particularly useful when working from distance. However the tool did not get much attention along these years by the countries' experts and remained basically not used.

Current work charge of officers within the different environmental agencies of the Countries seem to make difficult to get their strong time involvement on further activities along the year. Countries' experts welcomed much better the use of GIS layers displayed during the meetings and open to debate on site.

The project lacked of means to organize and manage rounds of national meetings within concerned countries allowing exchanges among officers of different agencies and ministers, so as to coordinate views, data collection on thematic topics not always available at the level of ministries in charge of environment, such as diverse impacts, etc. Such planning was in the initial project draft, but the means available reconducted efforts into a final project acceptance focused on the activities finally done. Many participant countries have seen this lack as a weakness in order to progress in the general goals, and agreed that future projects need such segments.

At the RAC/SPA consultation meetings for the priority areas of Alboran, Sicily channel/Tunisian plateau and the Adriatic Sea it was evident that country designated experts hesitated to commit to future activities if there was no external funding available.

Many country-designated experts went back to the initial objectives of the MedOpenSea project, concerning the declaration of area-based management for conservation and sustainable use of nature resources in areas embracing the high sea. The discussions considered the different existing instruments for the implementation of effective measures in the high sea, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for the maritime traffic, GFCM for fisheries or for the European Commission (EC) the Directives or Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and that the declaration of a SPAMI was not opening options for effective measures while coming alone (current focus of the finishing project), but more when used with the other instruments. This weakness should be addressed in any future project.

The experts also considered the need to have much more information on threats and impacts by human activities. That data compilation was not included in the means available in the current project, so such data retrieval was based in possibilities provided by the contribution of RAC/SPA experts but without further involvement of tailored means and relevant bodies. RAC/SPA remarked also the need of strong involvement by Parties for the collection of such data at national level.

As the Aichi target was to declare and manage efficiently 10% of the marine area in the Mediterranean, the declaration of SPAMI alone was not a sufficient option, but had to be considered in the framework of the identification of efficient and realistic area based management measures for the protection and sustainable use of those areas, or parts of them, including MPAs which might be listed as SPAMI.

Therefore, a new phase on this topic through a new project after the prompt finalisation of the present one has to consider a new approach, with an effective and full involvement of relevant countries, including the focusing of future work within the newly defined EBSAs, as area choices more updated (2014) than the priority conservation areas (2010) (fig 2), having regard that both of them had benefited from inputs by country designated experts of the Barcelona Convention and have contributed to progress on promoting the focusing of attention by Parties on areas beyond national jurisdiction and areas where the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction have not yet been defined in the Mediterranean Sea.

The future of establishing SPAMIs in the Mediterranean, in particular in the priority areas of the Alboran Sea, the Adriatic Sea and the Sicily Channel/Tunisian Plateau, will require a close follow-up after this project ends. Engaged countries should ideally proceed with selecting final SPAMI sites and to prepare presentation documents to be adopted at Contracting Parties meetings. This will require continued facilitation and future funding, so the strong need for the elaboration of a tailored project, with strong countries involvement, including a steering committee with countries representatives becomes apparent, as expressed by several country experts involved to date.

## **Annex 1**

**2nd consultation meeting on the development of SPAMIs for the  
neighbouring countries of the Adriatic open seas  
(Trieste, Italy 22-23 April 2015)**







**United Nations Environment Programme**

**MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN**

**UNEP**

**Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas**



## **Meeting Report**

# **Second Consultation Meeting on the development of SPAMIs for the neighbouring countries of the Adriatic open seas**

***Trieste, Italy, 22-23 April 2015***



## **Second Consultation Meeting on the development of SPAMIs for the neighbouring countries of the Adriatic Sea**

### **Agenda item 1           Opening of the meeting and recall of project objectives**

#### **a. Opening of the meeting**

The second meeting of neighbouring countries was held at the Hotel Excelsior in Trieste, Italy, on 22 and 23 April 2015. Representatives from Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia were attending the meeting. The meeting was also attended by observers as agreed with the country representatives.

The experts from the countries and of the NGOs participating in the meeting introduced themselves shortly at the beginning of the meeting.

UNEP/MAP-RAC/SPA was organizing the meeting, with the financial support of EC and Italy, IUCN Med bringing technical support, as well as RAC/SPA consultants having prepared the draft documents and GIS.

The representative of Italy was proposed as Chairman of the meeting and accepted. The representative of Slovenia was proposed as Vice-chairman of the meeting and accepted. IUCN representative was designated as rapporteur.

The Chairman gave the floor to the host country and the Director of the RAC/SPA for opening the meeting.

For Italy, the host country, the Director General for Protection of Nature and the Sea, Mrs Maria Carmela Giarratano, raised the importance of SPAMI and their strong commitment for the identification and declaration of sites, in particular in the Adriatic Sea. She welcomed all the experts and thanked the RAC/SPA for the organisation of the meeting.

The Director of RAC/SPA, Mr Khalil Attia, thanked the national and local authorities for their hospitality and welcomed all the delegations and participants. He stressed the importance of such a meeting for the conservation of the Mediterranean Sea, and in particular the open sea, and for the development of cooperation between countries.

All the countries delegations, NGOs and experts participating to the meeting thanked Italy for hosting the meeting, the RAC/SPA for the invitation and the organization of the reunion, indicating their interest in the SPAMI process. The list of participants is attached as Annex 2 to this report.

Then, the Chairman requested the participants to provide any comments on the agenda before its adoption. Two items were discussed and slightly modified: Agenda Item 6 should also consider the different processes, in particular EBSA and SPAMI. For Item 7, concerning the overview of the marine ecology report it was proposed to add the inclusion of the other reports. The agenda as modified was adopted (Annex 1).

## **b. Recall of project objectives**

The project was then presented by the RAC/SPA, providing information:

- on the background, the current third phase of MedOpenSeas focuses on the spatial planning and evaluation of three priority areas: Adriatic Sea, Alboran Sea and the Sicily channel / Tunisian plateau area, as well as other regional transversal activities.
- on the various objectives and actions embraced by the third project phase, as well as of the other initiatives under development, such as the EBSAs process developed by the CBD in the Mediterranean region.
- on the present meeting agenda and the expected results at the end of the meeting involving the representatives of the neighbouring countries of the Adriatic for the preparation of the proposed process of setting up a multilateral working group and the definition of a provisional road map for reaching the overall objectives.

Some discussion took place. Points were related to the difference between SPAMIs, EBSAs, other designations, PSSA, in the high seas. This point was proposed to be discussed under the agenda items 5 and 6.

### **Agenda item 2: Presentation of the “MedOpenSeas” project progress**

Work started with a RAC/SPA presentation which briefly resume the aims of the project, the methodology of the work suggested, the aims of the meeting and the anticipated results.

The first phase of the project, completed in late 2009, led to the identification of twelve priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep sea, which were agreed upon by the Extraordinary Meeting of the Focal Points for SPAs (Istanbul, Turkey, 1st June 2010). These priority areas, including those in the Adriatic Sea, could become totally or partly candidates for SPAMI listing according to the decisions of the concerned riparian countries.

The aim of the project’s second phase, completed in early 2012, was to start supporting neighbouring Parties of some of the priority areas in evaluating and potentially presenting these sites, or part of them, as candidate(s) for inclusion in the SPAMI List, in accordance with the provisions of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. The RAC/SPA has been facilitating this preparatory work, including country-designated experts’ exchanges for the Alboran Sea and Gulf of Lion, then for the Sicily Channel and the Adriatic Sea. The programme of work of the second phase included definitions for the establishment of ad-hoc working groups, composed of representatives from the countries bordering the areas. Operational criteria were developed to select sites embracing the open seas, applicable and in line with the different approaches (SPAMIs, EBSAs, FRAs or others).

In 2014, the 12th meeting of the Contracting Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Pyongchang, Republic of Korea (COP12, October, 2014) adopted a decision on Ecologically or Biologically Significant marine Areas (EBSAs) that includes an

Annex of EBSAs that have been included in the EBSAs Repository, established by the CBD. In this Annex, three EBSAs related on the Adriatic Sea were included, namely: A, B and C .

On this topic, RAC/SPA presented some element on the project's approach for the Adriatic Sea, with a view to facilitate the future preparation of a presentation report jointly by concerned countries for the site(s) in this area that could be object of efficient and realistic area based management measures for the protection and sustainable use of those areas, or parts of them, including MPAs which might be listed as SPAMI.

### **Agenda item 3: Presentations of representative of NGOs on related activities in the area**

Representatives of NGOs working in the region and participating in the meeting were invited to present their activities and main results in the area. WWF Italy presented different projects of interest, in particular the project MedTrends, providing numerous mapped information on the on-going human activities in the Adriatic. IUCN presented briefly an activity developed on behalf of RAC/SPA on the assessment and review of the legal and institutional framework concerning MPAs in four countries of the Adriatic: Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, some to be published soon following the agreement of those countries after having revised them.

### **Agenda item 4: National presentations on MPAs development in the Adriatic Sea**

The representatives of the countries attending the meeting were invited to present their activities at the national level, concerning marine protected areas in particular and on their general approaches on the improvement of the scientific knowledge on ecological, socio-economical aspects of the marine environment and on their plans for the future. Successively, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia presented activities, recent interesting results in term of changes in the legal and institutional mechanisms, declaration of marine protected areas and Natura 2000 sites, research on biodiversity, including benthic and pelagic organisms, ecosystems, natural processes, specific natural features and on human activities in the area, including maritime traffic, soil and subsoil exploration, fisheries. All these data will be useful for the compilation of further key information supporting the marine spatial management of those areas. Representatives of countries added additional information on the institutional, legal and governance levels.

The participants exchanged for some time on the different aspects of the lectures and proposed to come back on some points during Agenda items 9 and 10.

### **Agenda item 5           Presentation of the EBSAs accepted for the CBD repository in October 2014 at the Meeting of the COP12 of the CBD in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea**

In line with the inclusion of the Adriatic within the initial identification of twelve conservation priority areas in the Mediterranean by the Barcelona Convention, the Adriatic Sea has also been defined as encompassing three Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs) by experts at the "Mediterranean regional workshop to facilitate the description of EBSAs" held in April 2014 in Malaga, Spain. At the meeting of the scientific

body (SBSTTA) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in June 2014 (Montreal, Canada), the areas proposed in the Adriatic Sea were included in the repository's list of EBSAs that was adopted at the meeting of the Contracting Parties of the CBD held in October, 2014 in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea. There is a convergence between the areas proposed initially for consideration as SPAMI and those adopted by CBD, most of the differences being related to the new information brought by the Mediterranean experts.

#### **Agenda item 6            EBSAs and Priority Conservation Areas: Links for the Adriatic Sea**

Questions were raised by the participants on the importance of the above decision and on the difference between the EBSA process and the SPAMI process. RAC/SPA indicated that the EBSA process was mainly the identification of sites of ecological or biological importance to be considered for further research and eventually develop management measures while the SPAMI process, including the Priority Conservation Areas was more based on the existing knowledge in order to identify the exact areas to be protected or more strictly managed for their long term conservation and sustainable use. In addition the SPAMI process is more looking to a joint responsibility through shared protected area management between neighbour countries at the regional or sub-regional level.

The experts, following an intervention of the Italian representatives, went back to the initial objectives of the MedOpenSea project, concerning the declaration of area based management for conservation and sustainable use of nature resources in areas embracing the high sea, in this case of the Adriatic. The discussion was considering the different existing instruments for the implementation of effective measures in the high sea, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for the maritime traffic, GFCM for fisheries or for the European Commission (EC) the Directives or Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and that the declaration of a SPAMI was not opening options for effective measures while coming alone, but more when used with the other instruments. As the Aichi target was to declare and manage efficiently 10% of the marine area in the Mediterranean, the declaration of SPAMI alone was not a sufficient option, but had to be considered in the framework of the identification of efficient and realistic area based management measures for the protection and sustainable use of those areas, or parts of them, including MPAs which might be listed as SPAMI.

Therefore, a new phase on this topic through a new project after the prompt finalisation of the present one has to consider a new approach, with an effective and full involvement of relevant countries, including the focusing of future work within the newly defined EBSAs, as area choices more updated (2014) than the priority conservation areas (2010), having regard that both of them had benefited from inputs by country designated experts of the Barcelona Convention.

Based on this, the experts of the countries decided to review the draft common statement (Item 9) in order to be able to consider such new approach.

#### **Agenda item 7: Overview of marine ecology report and inclusion of elements of the sectorial reports**

The RAC/SPA consultant in charge of the preparation of the ecological report presented numerous elements on the geomorphological, hydrological and biological importance of the area, pointing out as well features of interest concerning the benthic and the pelagic domains, the importance of currents and structures and the positioning of ecosystems, nurseries, breeding and feeding sites, as well as migratory patterns.

The participants pointed out that the ecological report needed to be reinforced by extracting the main conclusions of the three other reports (on birds, cetaceans and fisheries) and that based on this synthesis, the standing need to identify and better define priority options for conservation areas, as it was the main objective of the project. It was proposed that RAC/SPA should send to the participants ecological report (version with track changes) so that participants know what has been changed and as well to give possible proposals for additional updates.

The participants indicated that there are biological and environmental data available for the above-mentioned areas, based on long-term research and exploration efforts made by several countries, but that ongoing programmes will assist to improve our understanding of the biodiversity in the region, not only on seabirds, fisheries and marine mammals, but on the ecological processes in the coastal and deep sea areas regulating the positioning of this species, now and in changing conditions. In addition, data quality has to be verified before being used for decision making.

It was raised that all the efforts for developing and compiling existing GIS layer and their metadata was important and needed to remain available for the riparian countries of the Adriatic. The need to continue collecting and centralising spatial data scattered across different national research institutes was raised and RAC/SPA indicated that all the data collected during the project will be made available on their website and download will be available for the countries.

### **Agenda item 8: Working session on spatial mapping of potential open sea SPAMI sites in the Adriatic Sea**

As seen during Item 7, RAC/SPA has been compiling and reviewing available data arrived even just before the meeting starting.

In this session the layers compiled for the worthy areas to be preserved in the Adriatic Sea and to facilitate the spatial planning were presented. The information had been provided by RAC/SPA's consultants and experts. Some other sources are scientific articles published in peer reviewed journals and EU and non EU repositories: EIONET, EMODnet, the European Atlas of the Seas, VLIZ, FAO, OceanColor, or UNEP/GRID-Arendal. The information acquired is processed and geospatially refined and is subjected to a protocol to determine its quality and suitability for the process. The datasets so produced have a metadata file following the EC INSPIRE Directive (Directive 2007/2/EC). The final set will be delivered in ESRI format (shapefiles) and Google Earth (kmz).

All the georeferenced information (vectors and rasters) was organised in 10 blocks, as follows. Bathymetry: Isolines, DEM and shaded model of the Adriatic Sea). Geomorphological features: a total of 8 layers (Harris, P. T., et al. 2014). Administrative boundaries: 4 layers. Benthos: 21 layers. Seabirds: 2 layers. Sea turtles: 2 layers. Activities: 5

layers. Protected areas: 7 layers. Productivity: 4 layers. SST: 2 layers. The participants in the session were kindly asked to contribute and enrich this geodatabase with the incorporation of the results of ongoing research projects and other information available.

A quick exercise performed after the presentation (using the information on biodiversity values available, the knowledge on the system functioning and the aid of the expert in ecology), delivered the following results:

The complete analysis allowing the identification of detailed areas within clear boundaries to be managed more strictly for conservation purposes was not yet realised, but could be realised in the future as specific tools have been designed for this purpose, provided that further geo-referenced data and means are made available to the RAC/SPA. The available data, though, allowed already to identify three important areas, namely a very scattered one in the North Adriatic, a more concentrated one in the Central Adriatic embracing the Pomo/Jabuka pit, and another in the south including the slope and the deep sea area of the Adriatic Sea. The three of them were much coincident with the newly defined EBSAs.

Two of the main areas seem of outstanding value for conservation in the Adriatic sea. The one in the north, with scattered values and characteristics, makes difficult to draw a limit at this phase. The area in the middle of the Adriatic roughly contains the so called Jabuka / Pomo Pit EBSA (CBD COP-12, Korea, 2014), but should be also enlarged by the east and North-North West, to reach nearby the 100 m depth isoline, pending on further research and the results provided by scientists.

After discussion on the positioning and importance of the different zones, some modifications were proposed, but the main conclusion was that the three areas were of importance, with the following analysis conclusions:

- The southern area was the less known and needed more investigation
- The northern area was well known but the identified values of the biodiversity were so far much scattered and therefore specific zones difficult to identify.
- The central area was at the same time better known and with numerous values and could be considered more rapidly for management measures in order to address the pressures and impacts of human activities
- A valuable corridor connecting the northern and the central zone could be considered or at least an extension north of the central one up to the isobaths 100m.

Nevertheless, the better knowledge on oceanographic conditions, ecological processes and the repartition of species brought by the project will facilitate the development of marine spatial planning of the Adriatic Sea and the definition of general and site specific management measures.

#### **Agenda item 9            Review of the Common statement concerning the declaration of SPAMIs in the Adriatic Sea for presentation to the Contracting Parties meeting**

During this point of the agenda, the experts representing the countries were invited, following the previous comments during the meeting, to comment on the common statement which may facilitate the future common work for area based management of the Adriatic and the eventual presentation of transboundary SPAMI proposals. After discussions, the statement prepared and agreed upon is as follow:



“We, country-designated experts from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia, riparian countries of the Adriatic Sea, Parties to the Barcelona Convention, confirm the environmental relevance of the areas considered during the Adriatic SPAMI process, already recognized by the joint UNEP/MAP-CBD workshop on EBSA held in Malaga, Spain, in April 2014 (the three Adriatic EBSAs adopted afterwards by the CBD COP 12 on October 2014). For this purpose, we stress the importance to continue cooperating for the establishment and implementation of efficient and realistic area based management measures for the protection and sustainable use of those areas, or parts of them, including MPAs which might be listed as SPAMI(s) in the Adriatic Sea.”

### **Agenda item 10 Finalisation of the roadmap and discussion**

The chairman gave the floor to the representative of Italy for summarising the elements discussed during all the previous items. After discussion and review, all the countries experts agreed upon the main elements, presented hereafter:

- All the experts representing all the countries of the Adriatic have expressed a strong commitment to the process.
- During the discussion it was evident that the most appropriate objective was to define area based management in the overall framework of EBSAs.
- The three identified EBSAs in the Adriatic were considered important but they have to be studied and analysed one by one in order to define area based management with specific measures, this including the declaration of MPAs (and as appropriate as SPAMIs)
- It was necessary to consider at the same time the importance of the sites for conservation and the existence of pressures and impacts, which are key information topics to be compiled in much detail.
- It was considered appropriate to have a different approach in the territorial waters in the marine waters currently outside national jurisdiction and on the seabed and its subsoil of the Adriatic Sea .
- For the follow up of the activities, in the event of a new project, it was necessary to fully involve relevant countries in the negotiation with the EU on the content of the project and to set-up a steering group of the project with country representatives, able to orient properly or modify the expected outputs, in addition to the existing working group with the national experts and other supporting experts.
- The minutes of the present meeting will have to be presented at the NFP of RAC/SPA, then follow the administrative channel to the COP for further consideration of its content, as appropriate.
- It was requested by the technical experts to prepare the main lines for a future project for the Adriatic Sea until now, considering the three Adriatic areas. This document will be prepared by the RAC/SPA, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the finalised one; afterwards it will be sent to the countries for comments, additions and identification of the main elements to be considered in the future (preferably a new project) before 11<sup>th</sup> May. After this, the country experts, within a short delay (one week), will submit all comments to be then summarised by RAC/SPA.
- During the NFP meeting planned in Athens end of May 2015, a specific slot in the relevant session will be defined for presenting the Adriatic process, the relevant documents for discussion and identification of the future steps for this activity.
- In order to be inclusive for the countries which have participated to similar activities up to now, i.e. the ones involved in the processes in Gulf of Lion, Alboran and Sicily

channel, the participants requested RAC/SPA to forward the present meeting report to those countries, to allow them considering their contribution to a eventual common following phase through a new project.

Based on the discussions, it was not considered necessary to review the roadmap at this stage, as it was expected that the report and the proposed options for the future will represent the framework for a new roadmap.

### **Conclusions and meeting closure**

At the end of the meeting, the Director General for Protection of Nature and the Sea of Italy, thanked all the participants for the quality of the work during the different sessions.

The meeting was closed on 23 April 2015 at 13:00

**Annex 1. Agenda.**

- Agenda item 1 Opening of the meeting and recall of project objectives
- Agenda item 2 Presentation of the “MedOpenSeas” project progress
- Agenda item 3 Presentations of host country NGOs on related activities in the area
- Agenda item 4 National presentations on MPAs development in the Adriatic Sea
- Agenda item 5 Presentation of the EBSAS accepted for the CBD repository in October 2014 at the Meeting of the COP12 of the CBD in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea
- Agenda item 6 EBSAs, Priority Conservation Areas and SPAMIs: Links for Adriatic Sea
- Agenda item 7 Overview of marine ecology report and thematic reports
- Agenda item 8 Working session on spatial mapping of potential open sea SPAMI sites in the Adriatic Sea
- Agenda item 9 Review of the Common statement concerning the declaration of SPAMIs in the Adriatic Sea for presentation to the Contracting Parties meeting
- Agenda item 10 Finalisation of the roadmap and discussion
- Agenda item 11 Meeting closure

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## **Annex 2**

**Outline of document: Best practices and case studies related to the management of large marine transboundary areas: options for the preparation of joint proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with Article 9 of the SPA/BD Protocol**



## **Outline of document**

### **Best practices and case studies related to the management of large marine transboundary areas: options for the preparation of joint proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with Article 9 of the SPA/BD Protocol**

#### Executive summary

#### Glossary of acronyms

#### Introduction

This report will start by establishing a definition for MPAs. It will explain the IUCN categories and confirm that the term 'MPA' is not popular with all stakeholders, mainly due to misconceptions about the levels of restrictions on human uses that may be imposed. The specific definition of MPA under the Barcelona Convention (SPAMIs) will be explained.

Advantages and benefits of MPAs will be suggested.

The report will set out the generally recognized boundary limitations (3nm, 12nm, 200nm, 350nm) and provide clarification on what might be considered 'deep water' and 'open ocean'. The specific case of the Mediterranean in relation to existing fishing zones and resource protection areas will be highlighted.

A brief summary of the BBNJ process is appropriate here and should inform further sections. We will explain that the current regime is not helpful or fit for purpose for creating networks of MPAs in ABNJ.

Finally, in this section we will set out the aim and objectives of the report and explain how these will be addressed within the report's structure.

### Progress in establishing MPA cover

MPAs in the High Seas will be described. Case studies will be included. These are currently limited in number. We will explain why.

The global coverage of MPAs including the recent trend to create extensive MPAs in remote national or overseas territory waters will be set out. Case studies will be included.

This actual coverage will be compared to States' obligations and duties that have informed targets and a timescale agreed by the UN. The report will comment on momentum and trajectory of progress against targets.

The EBSA process will be explained. Regional workshops convened by CBD have described areas against an agreed set of scientific criteria. Such areas may warrant additional protection measures such as MPAs. Case studies will be included.

Other complementary sectoral designations will be highlighted and case studies described.

Arguments for ecological coherence will be explained with reference to recent assessments.

The current situation in the Mediterranean supported by case studies will be explained against each of the paragraphs above, including:

- Reviewing progress in implementing 'MedOpenSeas';
- Showing the trend of coverage of offshore MPAs in the Med and showing positive case studies demonstrating benefits and showing acceptance;
- Comparing actual coverage to CP obligations and duties that have informed targets and a timescale agreed by the Barcelona Convention, including a reference to the

EcAp Process for the Med. Describing too the ACCOBAMS outcomes for cetacean conservation;

- Describing the EBSA process followed in the Med and explaining results as they currently stand;
- Including complementary sectoral designations for the Med (e.g. Fisheries Restricted Areas (GFCM) and Zones of deep-sea trawling ban (GFCM); Mediterranean SA (IMO); NATURA 2000; Ballast water exchange restrictions (IMO)).

Text will be supported by key figures

### MPA management measures

Without effective management provision there is a risk the MPAs will just be ‘paper parks’. The report will reflect this concern that has been highlighted by many commentators.

The report will explain that management should be informed by understanding of the system, its ecology and the pressures and threats of human uses on the flora and fauna present. Many marine areas are data deficient and MPAs have been established as a precautionary measure. Science needs for MPA networks will be summarized.

The report will set out a range of management options. For example, these can be voluntary or compulsory; time and space limited; directed at particular sectors; general or specific; and must relate to conservation objectives.

Management plans capture the management regime for each MPA. The report will comment on management planning and the importance of specific aspects (e.g. stakeholder engagement). Case studies will be included. The report will also review the latest attempts to evaluate whether or not MPA networks are ‘well-managed’.

The current situation in the Mediterranean supported by case studies will be explained against each of the paragraphs above including reference to the recent exercise carried out to assess the SPAMI Network as well as key trends and indicators of management (e.g. number of Med MPAs with existing Management Plans, number of Med MPAs with budget for management, MPAs with permanent staff; MPAs with monitoring plans). A cross check will be made with MedPAN publications.

### Surveillance and enforcement

Practical challenges of managing marine areas and in particular remote and/or deep areas will be articulated.

A range of surveillance approaches, including remote sensing, enabled by advances in technology will be explained, together with an indication of cost benefit. Types of monitoring systems, platforms and sensors will be reviewed. Surveillance and enforcement case studies will be included.

Opportunities for collaboration will be explored both with science initiatives and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. This will stress benefits of integrating data streams and relate to marine spatial planning requirements.

Mediterranean specific issues will be highlighted. These include positive elements advantageous to the Med (e.g. close and “small” scale sea; presence of existing governance structures (i.e RAC-SPA; GFCM); existence of Operational Monitoring Platforms (i.e SOCIB; MyOCEAN) balanced with a number of challenges including political unrest; resourcing gaps; capacity building needs; a large number of neighbouring countries and undefined boundaries (including North- South shore differences); scientific knowledge gaps; and socioeconomic issues.

### Best practices and lessons learned

The report will distill structures and governance arrangements considered essential to deliver effective results for wide transboundary areas, shared marine resources and extensive MPAs.

Particular attention will be given to institutional aspects related to elaboration, adoption and implementation of joint management plans. The report will reflect on other Regional Seas Conventions strengths and weaknesses.

An indication of risks associated with these practices will also be suggested.

The report will discuss options that may be most appropriate and pragmatic for the Mediterranean and in particular for the preparation of joint proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List in accordance with Article 9 of the SPA/BD Protocol

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The report aims to provide:

An assessment of extent and location of protected areas, including their coverage of biological and landscape diversity, with a focus on the Med:

- a. How many offshore MPAs are there in each country / Med regions, and what is their total area?
- b. How effectively do the offshore MPAs cover key ecoregions or habitats?

A synthesis of available management schemes involving transboundary sectors and the opportunities afforded by new technologies to enable surveillance of open ocean areas and multiple uses.

Recommended effective management structures and governance arrangements to support collaborative MPA initiatives.