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Agenda item 3: Progress on EcAp MED III Project Implementation

Progress Report on Project Implementation

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1. Introduction

1. 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)*” is funded by the European Union (EU) – Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) in the framework of the ENRTP Strategic Cooperation Agreements (SCAS) and the GPGC Strategic Programme Cooperation Agreements (PCAS) between the European Commission (EC) and UN Environment.
2. The Project is coordinated and implemented by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat with MAP Regional Activity Centres, in line with their respective mandates and areas of expertise. It was approved by the EC on 28/07/2020 and covers a period of 36 months from 01/09/2020 to 31/08/2023, with an overall budget of USD 2,494,790. The beneficiary countries for the national activities are: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.
3. The overall aims of the 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.
4. This Progress Report summarizes the status of progress of the activities of the EcAp MED III Project since its start, covering the period from September 2020 to March 2021.

2. Activity Progress during the Period September 2020 – March 2021

5. In this Section, the two Outcomes of the Project are presented, together with the respective indicators (with target and baseline). Moreover, the following Tables present an update on the progress of each Activity for each Output of the Project during the period September 2020 – March 2021, with an indication of the contribution towards the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR.

<p>Outcome 1: Effective ‘On the ground’ national IMAP implementation with beneficiary countries providing quality assured data for the development of a quality-assured, region-wide and data-based (Evidence-based) 2023 MED QSR</p>
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<p>INDICATORS (with target and baseline)</p>

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| <p>1.1 Number of countries with operational national IMAPs [Target: additional 7, baseline: 7]
 1.2 Number of IMAP Common Indicators (CIs) monitored and quality assured reported per beneficiary country [Target: 12, baseline: 7]
 1.3 Number of stakeholders/institutions or coordinating bodies involved in national IMAP implementation per beneficiary country [target: at least three, baseline: 1]
 1.4 Number of Common Indicators (CIs) covered by a quality assured reporting system in place through IMAP Info System [Target: at least 17, baseline: 11]
 1.5 Number of sets of data on IMAP CIs reported to IMAP Info System by the end of the Project [target: minimum 3 new datasets for EO5, EO9 and EO10 CI, minimum 1 new dataset for EO1, EO2, EO7, EO8, baseline: number of datasets as described in the 2017 MED QSR]
 1.6 Number of baseline sub-regional and regional assessment [target: 1 for NIS and 1 for CI15, baseline: 0]
 1.7 Number of CI national assessment factsheets per beneficiary country [target: at least 8, baseline: existing guidance factsheets and information in 2017 MED QSR]
 1.8 IMAP Info System operational with a functional data policy in place [target: Info System fully operational for at least 17 CI, baseline: Pilot Info System covering 11 CI]</p> |
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Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
<p>Output 1.1: <i>National and Joint Monitoring carried out of selected Common Indicator(s) (CIs) in beneficiary countries based on national IMAP</i></p>	<p>March/April 2021</p> <p>1.1.1 Design concrete monitoring plans for each beneficiary country for Pollution, Marine Litter and Biodiversity</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>Pollution and Marine Litter: During the period December 2020-February 2021, an analysis was undertaken of the national IMAP-based monitoring programmes of the beneficiary countries. The most important findings were submitted to the CORMON Pollution Meeting (26-28 April 2021). Considering the situation induced by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken at national, regional and international levels to contain its spread, including full/partial national lockdowns, border closures and travel restrictions, the Secretariat is currently undertaking steps to build the Legal Instruments with four Contracting Parties.</p> <p>Biodiversity: The design of the monitoring plans on Biodiversity is ongoing for Tunisia and Libya. Preliminary meetings were organized with national institutions (i.e., Ministry of Local Affairs and Environment, APAL in Tunisia and EGA in Libya) to ensure a successful coordination and implementation of the respective national IMAP. Gaps identified in the 2017 MED QSR were discussed to try to overcome them during this phase of IMAP implementation. A bilateral meeting with ACCOBAMS was organized (teleconference, 16 October 2020) to discuss the lessons learnt and difficulties faced during the implementation of the regional survey on marine mammals (ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative, ASI) elaborated in June and July 2018.</p>
	<p>March/April 2021</p> <p>1.1.2 Prepare and support implementation of field survey programmes for each beneficiary country for Pollution, Marine Litter and Biodiversity</p>	
	<p>December 2020-February 2021</p> <p>1.1.3 Organize national and sub-regional validation meetings/workshops and provide technical support through thematic regional consultancies</p>	<p>Activity not started yet at national level</p> <p>The basis to start producing national assessment factsheets has been laid down with the work currently being performed for proposing assessment scales at the most adequate level per Common Indicator (CI), assessment criteria, and upgraded approach for assessment criteria for a number of CIs. The thematic CORMON meetings of Spring 2021 are expected to provide progress on these issues.</p>
<p>Contribution of Output 1.1 to 2023 MED QSR:</p>		

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
<p><u>The first actions towards the design of monitoring plans conducted for Pollution and Marine Litter, and Biodiversity clusters, have been performed. The finalization of monitoring plans and the implementation of field survey programmes, expected in 2021-2022, will allow to collect data sets as indicated in the QSR Table of Content. These new sets of data will be used to prepare the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR in time for April 2022.</u></p>		
<p>Output 1.2: Joint monitoring pilots designed and implemented (NIS);</p>	<p>February/March 2022</p> <p>1.2.1 Implement Joint Monitoring and Assessment programme on NIS at national and sub-regional level and reporting of results through IMAP Info System</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The implementation of the Joint Monitoring and Assessment programme on Non-indigenous Species (NIS) on the field will start as soon as the Legal Instruments with SPA/RAC and with the national Implementing Partners in the respective beneficiary countries will be finalized.</p>
	<p>December 2022, March/April 2023</p> <p>1.2.2 Support a baseline national, sub regional and regional assessment for NIS</p>	<p>The elaboration of the Baseline assessment of NIS is ongoing. National lists of NIS recorded in national waters were received from Contracting Parties and are under revision. Discussion and coordination of SPA/RAC with colleagues of the European Commission – Joint Research Centre (JRC) is ongoing to ensure synergy with the MSFD and follow a common approach, and avoid duplication of reporting for the EU Mediterranean Contracting Parties. The draft baseline assessment of NIS will be discussed with the members of the informal Online Working Group (OWG) on NIS (20 April 2021, the), and will be presented to the CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (June 2021).</p>
	<p>December 2022, March/April 2023</p> <p>1.2.3 Develop national and sub-regional assessment factsheets</p>	<p>The development of national and sub-regional assessment factsheets is expected to start in May/June 2022.</p>
<p><u>Contribution of Output 1.2 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The elaboration of the list of NIS recorded in national waters is the first step for the implementation of the Joint Monitoring and Assessment Programme. Its implementation in collaboration with GFCM will allow the collection of data on NIS that will be used for the development of national and sub-regional assessment factsheets, upon which the chapter on EO 2 (Non-Indigenous Species) of the 2023 MED QSR will be prepared. At first, a baseline assessment will be undertaken based on existing data, subject to update pending the new data deriving from the implementation of joint monitoring programmes.</u></p>		

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
<p>Output 1.3: <i>Undertake baseline sub-regional assessments for CI 15 and support implementation of monitoring CI 16 in at least one area per beneficiary country.</i></p>	<p>Start of the Project-December 2022</p> <p>1.3.1 Provide technical support to data monitoring and processing for CI 16 including reporting in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia:</p> <p>August 2021 National meetings conducted to support the monitoring country teams in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia monitoring, including data collection and processing for CI 16</p> <p>August 2022 Report quality-assured data on CI 16 of 6 countries to IMAP Info System</p>	<p>Activity not started yet</p> <p>The activities related to CI 16 will start upon the approval of the Legal Instrument between the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and the implementing partner PAP/RAC, which is expected to be finalized by the end of April 2021.</p>
	<p>February/March 2022, December 2022</p> <p>1.3.2 Develop methodology and conduct baseline assessment for CI 15 in all eligible countries</p>	<p>Activity not started yet</p> <p>The work on the methodology for baseline sub-regional assessment of CI 15 will start as soon as the Legal Instrument with PAP/RAC is finalized (expected by the end of April 2021); the first draft is planned to be presented for review at the thematic CORMON Coast and Hydrography meeting, which will be held in October/November 2021 (date tbc).</p>
	<p>March/April 2023</p> <p>1.3.3 Prepare a report on lessons learned to be discussed at sub-regional/CORMON meetings</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: September 2022</p> <p>This report will be prepared based on the experience of implementation of the activities performed for CI 15 and 16, and will be discussed at a dedicated sub-regional meeting in March/April 2023.</p>

Contribution of Output 1.3 to 2023 MED QSR:

The results of the baseline sub-regional assessment of CI 15, whose methodology is planned to be developed in the next reporting period, will be included in the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR (integrated assessment of EO 7, Hydrography). Moreover, the data that will be collected for CI 16 in the six beneficiary countries for August 2022, will be included in the second draft of the 2023 MED QSR (integrated assessment of EO 8, Coastal ecosystems and landscapes).

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
<p>Output 1.4: IMAP Info System expanded to include all mandatory CI of IMAP, fully operational enabling the Contracting Parties to report their monitoring data in 2020, 2021 and 2022.</p>	<p>June 2021</p> <p>1.4.1 Upgrade hardware and software (HW & SW) platform</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The update and upgrade of the IMAP Info System is proceeding as per original workplan. Technical support has been provided to upgrade the hardware and software platform of the IMAP Info System, to accommodate the DSs and DDs that are being developed for the additional CIs, and to support the implementation of data flows for all the remaining CIs.</p>
	<p>March/April 2021, June 2021</p> <p>1.4.2 Develop Data Standards (DSs) and Data Dictionaries (DDs) for CORMON review and approval, and implement data flows (EO3 not included)</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>Pollution: A first draft of DSs and DDs has been developed for CIs 18 and 20 on the basis of the Monitoring Guidelines/Protocols for Reporting Monitoring Data for CIs 13, 14, 17, 18 and 20 (UNEP/MED WG.492/8); it will be discussed at the CORMON Pollution meeting, April 2021.</p> <p>Biodiversity: DSs and DDs for CIs 3 & 4 for marine mammals and marine turtles have been presented by INFO/RAC for review at the Integrated CORMON meetings (December 2020). They have been further elaborated based on the feedback received, and based on the outcomes of a meeting with ACCOBAMS and SPA/RAC to discuss the harmonization of DSs with the ACCOBAMS Survey Initiative.</p> <p>A revised version of DSs and DDs for CI 3 & 4 for marine mammals, marine turtles, and a first version for CI 3, 4 & 5 for sea birds and monk seals will be presented for approval at the next CORMON Biodiversity Meeting in June 2021.</p> <p>Coast & Hydrography: A first draft proposal for DSs and DDs for the Candidate CI 25 (land cover change) is in preparation for the submission to the next Coast & Hydrography CORMON Meeting (October/November 2021, tbc).</p>
	<p>June 2022</p> <p>1.4.3 Assess the capacity, compatibility and interoperability with IMAP Info System of National information systems</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The assessment of the capacity, compatibility and interoperability with IMAP Info System of national information systems has started. Useful elements have been collected during</p>

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
		an Informal Consultation on IMAP implementation, 2023 MED QSR and MSFD Article 8 implementation with the Contracting Parties that are Member States of the EU (March 2021), and through the training/assistance meetings and the activities of continuous support on data reporting (Activity 1.4.5).
	<p>April/December 2022</p> <p>1.4.4 Define and implement QA/QC procedures</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: October 2021</p> <p>INFO/RAC will start to implement QA/QC procedures in IMAP/Info System for IMAP Pollution Cluster in October 2021 as foreseen in the Project timeline. This activity will be carried out on the basis of previous work on standardized protocols (UNEP, 2019a) and QA/QC schemes (UNEP, 2019d), and of the technical documents prepared by MEDPOL for the CORMON Pollution Meeting, April 2021 (UNEP/MED 492/7, UNEP/MED 492/8, UNEP/MED WG.492/Inf.14).</p>
	<p>2021, 2022, 2023</p> <p>1.4.5 Provide dedicated support to beneficiary countries to use IMAP Info System</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>INFO/RAC, in close cooperation with CU and the other MAP Components, has provided continuous technical support to Contracting Parties (CPs) to facilitate understanding, access, and use of the IMAP Pilot Info System functions, and technical assistance in monitoring data reporting. Support was provided to the majority of CPs via email and videoconference, to help them in the process of filling-in of DSs and of data submission to the IMAP Info System. Next meetings with Israel and Morocco are planned in April-May 2021, aiming to covering all CPs by the end of July 2021.</p>
	<p>March/April 2021, June 2021</p> <p>1.4.6 Implement IMAP data policy</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>New elements of the IMAP Data Policy have been presented at the Integrated CORMONs Meeting, December 2020, and welcomed without further changes requested. These elements will be integrated into the IMAP Data Policy built until now.</p> <p>A revised and integrated version will be finalized for CORMON and EcAp</p>

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
		Coordination Group review in September 2021.
<p><u>Contribution of Output 1.4 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The work in the present reporting period focused on actions towards the upgrade and delivery of a fully operational IMAP Info System, to allow the hosting of the new data submitted by Contracting Parties (including the seven beneficiary countries of the Project) in 2021 for the Common Indicators already included in the IMAP Info System and for all other Common Indicators by June 2022 at the latest. This would allow that by September 2022 all new datasets coming from the implementation of IMAP at national and subregional levels where appropriate would be available in the IMAP Info System to support the elaboration of the second draft of the 2023 MED QSR (December 2022), in line with the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap Implementation Plan. The intention is to accelerate this process to the extent possible taking also into consideration that the timeline and frequency for reporting is not the same for each Common Indicator of IMAP.</u></p>		

Outcome 2: Regional scale progress and consensus for the monitoring and assessment as well as the reporting processes at national, sub-regional and regional levels

INDICATORS (with target and baseline)

- 2.1 Availability of analysis and proposal of updated scales of monitoring and assessment [target: analysis available, baseline: information provided in CI guidance factsheets]
- 2.2 Number of CIs with updated/new assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values [target: at least 10, baseline: existing Pollution/Marine litter assessment criteria]
- 2.3 Number of regional expert meetings and CORMONS [target: at least one sub-regional meeting, one CORMON per cluster per year and 2 integrated CORMONS, baseline: 7 CORMONS organized between 2017-2019]
- 2.4 Number of local, national and regional experts/actors mobilized/involved [target: at least 130, baseline: 130 experts involved in EcAp MED II and 2017 MED QSR]
- 2.5 Availability of communication and visibility strategy for 2023 MED QSR [target: 1 strategy, baseline: 0]
- 2.6 Number of national SPI pilot networks established [target: 2, baseline: 0]
- 2.7 Number of SPI workshops organized [target: 1 regional back-to-back with CORMON and 2 national, baseline: 5 SPI workshops under EcAp MED II project]
- 2.8 Availability of 2023 MED QSR [target: 2023 MED QSR published, baseline: 2017 MED QSR]

Output	Planned Activities 2020-2021 and Timeline	Progress Report
<p><i>Output 2.1.1: Analysis for each IMAP cluster on knowledge gaps, with a focus on the scales of assessment/reporting prepared/agreed and scales of monitoring for all</i></p>	<p>December 2020, March/April 2021</p> <p>2.1.1.1 Undertake in-depth analysis of knowledge gaps related to scales of assessment for all mandatory CI as applicable</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The work on scales of assessment started based on the existing, practical proposal to define 4 sub-regions and to adopt a nested approach for each CI. More details for each IMAP Cluster are provided below:</p> <p>Pollution and Marine Litter: A proposal for elaboration of the scales of assessment from scales of monitoring has been submitted for</p>
	<p>March/April 2021, April 2022</p>	

<i>CIs agreed/progressed</i>	2.1.1.2 Propose updated/new scales of monitoring and assessment for all mandatory Common Indicators as applicable	<p>discussion at CORMON Pollution meeting (April 2021; UNEP/MED WG.492/13 and UNEP/MED WG.492/Inf.9), related to CIs 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, and Candidate CI 24. To this respect, a detailed assessment of the best available knowledge and practices related to both monitoring strategies and GES assessment, along with setting and application of the assessment criteria, within MSFD implementation, has been undertaken by MEDPOL (UNEP/MED WG.492/9 and UNEP/MED WG.492/Inf.13). The findings from this analysis guided the setting of the integration rules for monitoring efforts within IMAP and integration-aggregation rules in order to support upcoming GES assessment for IMAP Ecological Objectives (EOs) 5, 9 and 10.</p> <p>Biodiversity: the development of scales of assessment for the CIs related to Biodiversity is ongoing. Draft documents on scales of assessment of CIs 3, 4, and 5 related to marine turtles and marine mammals is being discussed with the members of the informal Online Working Groups (OWGs; 19 March 2021 and 7 April 2021, respectively). A draft document on scales of assessment for CI 6 (NIS) is being revised by SPA/RAC. The updated document will be shared and discussed with the members of the informal OWG (20 April 2021, the). Documents on benthic habitats and sea birds are ongoing. All the technical documents covering the scales of assessment will be presented at the Biodiversity CORMON meeting in June 2021.</p>
	September 2022	Activity not started yet
	2.1.1.3 Prepare GIS atlas for scales of monitoring and scales of assessment to be integrated into IMAP Pilot Info System	
	April 2022, March/April 2023	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The methodology for preparation of integrated scales of assessment for IMAP Pollution Cluster, by considering also EO1, has been prepared by MEDPOL. However, its detailing and application faced challenges that MEDPOL is looking to resolve during 2021.</p>
December 2020, March/April 2021	Activity not started yet	

	2.1.1.5 Undertake a desk review of available data sources, best practices and methodologies in the Mediterranean and under MSFD for the monitoring and assessment of seafloor damage	This activity will start as soon as the Legal Instrument with SPA/RAC is finalized and funds are transferred.
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.1.1 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The analysis of knowledge gaps and the definition of the scales of monitoring and assessment for all IMAP Common Indicators, also in relation to the national parts of the assessment subdivisions, is ongoing. It is expected to be discussed at the 2021 CORMONs. The work will continue in the next reporting period. We will undertake some testing of the methodologies hopefully to be agreed by the 2021 CORMONs. Hopefully it will be progress and the scales of assessment defined/agreed in 2021/early 2022 will be used to prepare the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR (April 2022).</u></p>		
<p><i>Output 2.1.2: Assessment criteria/thresholds/baseline values proposed/updated for the 10 CIs included in the current IMAP Pilot Info System as well as one candidate indicator (Noise)</i></p>	<p>November 2020, March/April 2021, April 2022, March/April 2023</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Update/upgrade and develop assessment criteria using trend and threshold approach as appropriate for 10 CI already included in the IMAP Info System (CI 1, 2, 6, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23)</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>Marine Litter: A proposal for updated Baseline Values (BV) and proposal for Threshold Values (TV) for CI 22 (beach macro-litter), was presented and reviewed at the Integrated CORMON meetings (December 2020). It was further revised by the informal OWG on Marine Litter, and approved at the CORMON Marine Litter meeting, 30 March 2021, for its submission to the MEDPOL Focal Points meeting, 26-27 May 2021. The collection of national monitoring data has been also undertaken from MEDPOL in order to upgrade/set BVs and TVs for CI 23 (seafloor macro-litter). Along with the requests of monitoring data shared with national authorities, exchanges with partners have been initiated, including the use of datasets from MEDITS.</p> <p>Pollution: the upcoming CORMON Pollution meeting (April 2021) will discuss the documents prepared by MEDPOL on Adjusted Background (Assessment) Concentrations (BC/BAC) for CI 17 and Upgraded Approach for Environmental Assessment Criteria (EAC) for CIs 17, 18 and 20, along with Application of the Assessment Criteria Methodology for IMAP CI 13 (UNEP/MED 492/11, UNEP/MED 492/12). This work will support the aggregated application of the assessment criteria within GES assessment for 2023 MED QSR at all relevant levels, in line with IMAP requirements.</p> <p><u>Biodiversity: Draft documents on thresholds and baseline values of CIs 3,4 and 5 related to marine turtles and marine mammals have been discussed</u></p>

		<p><u>with the members of the informal Online Working Groups (19 March 2021 and 7 April 2021, respectively). A draft document on thresholds for CI 6 on NIS was revised by SPA/RAC for discussion with the members of the informal OWG on NIS (20 April 2021). Documents on benthic habitats and sea birds are ongoing.</u></p> <p>Coast & Hydrography: ToRs were prepared, and the procurement procedure has been undertaken in March-April 2021 to select an expert for the development of assessment criteria and of the related Guiding document for CI 16.</p>
	<p>April 2022, December 2022</p> <p>2.1.2.2 Develop guiding documents for the application of assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values for all IMAP clusters at the national level</p>	<p>Activity not started yet</p> <p>The development of guiding documents will start based on the first discussions of the documents prepared on the assessment criteria, TVs and BVs at the thematic CORMON meetings, Spring 2021.</p>
	<p>September 2022</p> <p>2.1.2.3 Test integrated assessment approaches/methodologies, including approaches to interrelate pressures/impacts/state of the marine environment</p>	<p>Activity not started yet</p> <p>The testing will start at the end of 2021, as soon as the integrated assessment approaches/methodologies will be finalized.</p>
	<p>March/April 2023</p> <p>2.1.2.4 Adjust and further develop IMAP methodology on integrated assessments</p>	<p>Activity not started yet</p> <p>The IMAP methodology on integrated assessment will be adjusted based on the results of the test exercise (Activity 2.1.2.3).</p>
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.1.2 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The current development of assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values for IMAP CIs through the work done by the Integrated and thematic CORMONs (December 2020, Spring 2021), lays solid foundations for their application during 2021 and 2022. This will be instrumental to prepare the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR for April 2022 using thresholds approach to the extent possible for a considerable number of Common Indicators. To this aim the current 2021 CORMON meetings will play an instrumental role in reaching consensus on the Secretariat respective proposals.</u></p>		
<p>Output 2.1.3 Regular regional/sub-</p>	<p>March/April 2021</p>	<p>Activity planned</p>

<p><i>regional expert group meetings, i.e., expert group per sub-region per topic established and operational to address monitoring and assessment scales, monitoring protocols and assessment criteria</i></p>	<p>2.1.3.1 Support organization of regional/sub-regional expert group meetings to share experience between countries</p>	<p>Once the monitoring plans will be finalized and the field survey programmes will start to be implemented in the beneficiary countries, regular regional and sub-regional expert group meetings/workshops will take place, so that the national teams established will have the opportunity to learn from the sharing of experiences, as well as to connect national-level expertise and progress with regional processes, also through the CORMON meetings (Activity 2.1.4.1).</p>
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.1.3 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>These meetings will be held in 2021-2022; they will connect experts at national level in the seven beneficiary countries, to allow for an exchange of lessons learnt, and support the process of development of monitoring and assessment scales, monitoring protocols and assessment criteria, upon which the 2023 MED QSR will be prepared.</u></p>		
<p><i>Output 2.1.4: Support to CORMON meetings per cluster ensuring strong participation and inputs to its work from expert networks established at sub regional level for the beneficiary countries</i></p>	<p>November 2020, March/April 2021,</p> <p>2.1.4.1, 2.1.4.2 Support organization of CORMONs (for all three clusters as well as integrated CORMON), with participation of experts from country and sub-regional teams</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The Integrated CORMON meetings were organized in December 2020 via videoconference, with the aim to: take stock of the status of implementation of the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap and review the elements for the development and structure of the 2023 MED QSR; provide information on, and launch, the new EU-funded projects supporting IMAP implementation (i.e. EcAp MED III, Marine Litter MED II, and IMAP MPA); address cross-cutting issues related to IMAP implementation and share related best practices; and recommend ways and means to strengthen the Science-Policy Interface (SPI) in the Mediterranean in support of IMAP implementation.</p> <p>Based on the feedback received by the participants on the work and technical documents presented, work started immediately after the meeting to further revise and prepare them for the thematic CORMON meetings (Spring 2021), in order to further advance the work under the respective IMAP Clusters.</p> <p>The CORMON Marine Litter meeting was held on 30 March 2021 via videoconference, with the following aims:</p> <p>a) To review the regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24;</p> <p>b) To address the interrelation of pressures impacts of marine litter and the status of marine ecosystem components; and</p>

		<p>c) To analyze the potential complementarities and synergies between IMAP and the European Commission new GES Decision (2017/848/EU) for marine litter.</p> <p>The CORMON Pollution meeting will be held on 26-28 April 2021, via videoconference, with the aim to review and approve the monitoring guidelines for CI 18, the monitoring guidelines/protocols for Quality Assurance and Reporting of Monitoring Data for CI 13, 14, 17, 18 and 20; the state of play of inter-laboratory testing and good laboratory practice related to CI 5 and 9; the integration and aggregation rules for EO5, 9, and 10; and the assessment criteria for contaminants and nutrients.</p> <p>The CORMON Biodiversity meeting will be held on 10-11 June 2021, via videoconference, with the aim to review and agree on the monitoring protocols of benthic habitats, discuss the scale of monitoring, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values of the CIs on Biodiversity as well as the comparison analysis between the IMAP and the new EU GES Decision.</p> <p>Finally, the CORMON Coast & Hydrography meeting will be held on October/November 2021 (tbc), with the aim to present the Assessment criteria and the Guiding document for the application of the assessment criteria for CI 16, and the methodology for baseline sub-regional assessment of CI 15.</p>
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.1.4 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The organization of the integrated and thematic CORMON meetings (December 2020) was fundamental to: (i) ensure the involvement of all relevant experts from Contracting Parties (including the seven beneficiary countries of the Project) into the necessary preliminary steps for the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR, including the review the status of implementation of the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap and the elements for the development and structure of the 2023 MED QSR; and to (ii) discuss technical aspects related to scales of assessment, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values, which will be further developed and applied to prepare the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR for April 2022.</u></p>		
<p><i>Output 2.2.1: Establish and implement a communication and visibility strategy for the MED 2023 QSR; Outreach to key partners is</i></p>	<p>November 2020, September 2021/September 2023</p> <p>2.2.1.1 Develop and implement a communication and visibility strategy/plan for 2023 MED QSR</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The First elements of the 2023 Communication and Visibility Strategy have been prepared by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat in March 2021, in line with the “Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions – 2018”; they will be further reviewed internally at Secretariat level and with the contribution of the</p>

<i>undertaken and relevant meetings held</i>		competent RACs. The final draft will be submitted for approval to the 8 th EcAp Coordination Group meeting in September 2021.
	April 2022, March/April 2023, August 2023 2.2.1.2 Develop and implement a collaboration mechanism and Partnership Plan for the 2023 MED QSR	Initiated; progress ongoing A first approach paper is under preparation. The collaboration mechanism and partnership plan will be further developed and implemented based on the outcomes of a planned meeting with Partners in May 2021 (see Output 2.2.3), aimed to identify the data that scientific projects and institutions can provide to support the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR.
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.2.1 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>The 2023 MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy is a fundamental means to ensure visibility and outreach of the whole process of preparation and delivery of the 2023 MED QSR; its development is fully in line with the timelines indicated in the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap and Implementation Plan. In relation to Partners, the preliminary work done aimed to identify and engage Partners to provide additional data to integrate primary data sources by Contracting Parties for the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR.</u></p>		
<i>Output 2.2.2: Strengthen SPI networks of scientists and policy makers for the IMAP and its implementation; Design and implement 1-2 pilots at country level</i>	June 2021 2.2.2.1 Identify relevant existing frameworks, processes and institutions at national level	Initiated; progress ongoing At the Integrated CORMONs Meetings in December 2020, an agenda item was dedicated to the Science-Policy Interface (SPI), where Plan Bleu presented the work done in the context of the EU-funded Project EcAp MED II to structure, strengthen, and sustain an SPI to support IMAP at both regional and local levels, as basis of identification of relevant existing frameworks, processes and institutions at national level. Moreover, the first strategic orientations for the contribution of UNEP/MAP to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development were presented, with SPI as a central pillar of IMAP implementation.
	April 2022, March/April 2023, August 2023 2.2.2.2 Provide inputs to CORMONs and EcAp CG meetings on issues related to regional/sub-regional topic-specific SPI work	
	June 2021 2.2.2.3 Develop ToRs and set up 2 national SPI pilots in 2 beneficiary countries	Initiated; progress ongoing Work started for the identification of the pilots and the countries where they will be implemented. Potential countries include Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. However, given the fact that the budget is very limited, it is important that the pilots are well designed and implemented effectively. The work will start upon final selection of the 2 SPI pilots and the signature of the Legal Instrument with Plan Bleu.

	<p>April 2022, September 2022</p> <p>2.2.2.4 Organize national thematic events/workshops in line with the respective country priorities and needs</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: April 2022</p> <p>The national thematic events/workshops will be held in 2022, as per original workplan.</p>
	<p>April 2022, March/April 2023</p> <p>2.2.2.5 Undertake a desk review of existing literature with the view to identify and propose an emerging list of priority contaminants in the Mediterranean, to be also supported by the results and data coming from implementation of monitoring programmes on the ground</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: March 2022</p> <p>This activity will start in 2022, based on the data and results coming from the implementation of the monitoring programmes on the ground (see Output 1.1).</p>

Contribution of Output 2.2.2 to 2023 MED QSR:

The first steps in the design and implementation of SPI pilots, and the inputs provided to CORMONs on SPI lessons and needs, contributed to the actions towards the development of a strong SPI at regional and national level, to support IMAP implementation. This activity as such may not have a strong contribution to the 2023 MED QSR preparation due to its limited size and geographical scope. However, in the long term the intention is to promote sustainable collaborating networks of different stakeholders from scientific community and policy makers for IMAP implementation, which is indispensable for its successful implementation after the project cycle.

<p><i>Output 2.2.3: Develop and implement a time-line for regional data sharing between partners</i></p>	<p>March/April 2021, August 2021-August 2023</p> <p>2.2.3.1 Map sources of data and partners to address 2023 MED QSR data gaps, and establish mechanisms and a timeline for data sharing, technical advice and peer review</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>A preliminary mapping of data sources and partners, to address 2023 MED QSR data gaps, has been performed by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat; this exercise includes a clear identification of the scientific projects, partners, and institutions and their potential contribution as data sources for specific EOs or CIs.</p> <p>Based on this mapping, the Secretariat plans to organize a meeting with the identified Partners in May 2021, with the aim to clarify their contribution to 2023 MED QSR and set a workplan for data sharing, to integrate the data to be submitted by Contracting Parties.</p>
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Contribution of Output 2.2.3 to 2023 MED QSR:

<p><u>The activities implemented to identify data gaps, sources, and partners, are preliminary to further action in 2021-2022, to engage partners and ensure the timely provision of additional data to support the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR in the next reporting period, which will integrate the data that are expected to be provided by the Contracting Parties (including the beneficiary countries of the Project).</u></p>		
<p>Output 2.2.4: Develop and Publish 2023 MED QSR in 2 languages; make it available online and present at COP 23</p>	<p>November 2020 - March/April 2021</p> <p>2.2.4.1 Define the methodology, outline, structure and contents of 2023 MED QSR</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The methodology, outline, structure and contents of the 2023 MED QSR were presented at the Integrated CORMON meetings (December 2020), and at an Informal Consultation with Contracting Parties that are Member States of the EU (11 March 2021). In both occasions, the proposed methodology, outline, and structure was welcomed with no further changes requested.</p> <p>A further version of the methodology, outline, structure and contents of the 2023 MED QSR will be prepared for the EcAp Coordination Group meeting in September 2021.</p>
	<p>2.2.4.2 Collect, analyse data, prepare thematic assessment products and 2023 MED QSR including maps and graphics:</p> <p>April 2022: 1st draft of 2023 MED QSR</p> <p>March/April 2023: Final draft of 2023 MED QSR</p>	<p>Initiated; progress ongoing</p> <p>The collection and analysis of data, the preparation of thematic assessment products and the 2023 MED QSR will start in September 2021, as per original workplan.</p> <p>CPs have started the submission of available monitoring data generated prior to 2020 and new monitoring data generated in 2020, according to the formal letter on data reporting sent by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat on the 2nd of June 2020. To date, several Contracting Parties have been uploading their datasets into the IMAP Info Systems, under the guidance and technical support of INFO/RAC. As of April 2021, at least 1 set of data was submitted for all CIs by the majority of CPs, apart from CI 2 (Biodiversity) and CI 16 (physical disturbance to coastline), with a varied picture across CIs and countries.</p>
	<p>March/April 2023</p> <p>2.2.4.3 Establish a web-based platform to host the contents of the 2023 MED QSR online, including procurement, design, content management and maintenance</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: March/April 2022</p> <p>This activity will be performed in 2022, with the aim to have the web platform established once the final draft of the 2023 MED QSR will be ready (March/April 2023).</p>

	<p>August 2023</p> <p>2.2.4.4 Review, revise and finalize 2023 MED QSR publication and present it at COP23 in two languages (including editing, layout, translation and printing)</p>	<p>Activity not started yet; expected start: September 2022</p> <p>This activity includes editing, layout, translation, and printing; it will start in September 2022, with the aim to finalize the 2023 MED QSR in August 2023.</p>
<p><u>Contribution of Output 2.2.4 to 2023 MED QSR:</u></p> <p><u>A detailed outline and structure of the 2023 MED QSR has been submitted to the Integrated CORMON meeting (December 2020). It will be further elaborated in the next reporting period. More in general, the preparation and delivery of the first draft of the 2023 MED QSR will be based upon the work that will be performed under all the Activities of the project, including the collection and submission of data from the beneficiary countries (Outputs 1.1., 1.2, and 1.3), and the finalization of the scales of assessment, assessment criteria, thresholds and baseline values, and methodologies for integrated assessment (Outputs 1.3, 2.1.1, 2.1.2). The whole process will be inclusive and participatory, through periodic meetings at regional and sub-regional levels (Outputs 2.1.3 and 2.1.4) and by developing a SPI (Output 2.2.2), and its outreach and visibility will be ensured (Output 2.2.1). This outline will be also submitted to the EcAp Coordination group meeting in September 2021 for their consideration and approval.</u></p>		

3. Progress Report on Project Management

6. Progress in the first months of implementation has been mainly focused on the operationalization of the Project and the undertaking of administrative and regulatory steps required to launch the implementation of activities on the ground. In this respect, the budget of the Project was prepared and released in the UN financial system (UMOJA) in early December 2020 in collaboration with the UNEP Project Management Unit (PMU). According to the General Conditions and SOP No 5 of the ENRTP-GPGC Framework, unspent funds from 2020 were rolled over to 2021 and the respectively revised budget will be shared with the EC Task Manager for information purposes.

7. In terms of reporting, the UNEP PMU has successfully submitted the first Annual Project Progress Report of the Project, covering the period September-December 2020.

8. The process for the recruitment of a P3 Project Manager for EcAp MED III has faced delays and is currently ongoing despite Secretariat request since November 2020 immediately upon Project budget availability. The post was recently classified; the recruitment is expected to be completed by Summer 2021. In case of possible delays in the recruitment of the Project Manager, the UNEP/MAP Secretariat is considering the possibility to recruit a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) in its place to ensure a smooth implementation of the Project. The process of the recruitment of the QSR Programme Officer is expected to be finalized in June/July 2021.

9. The preparation of the Legal Instruments for the activities to be executed by the MAP Components that are implementing partners as per the Project Document, namely the INFO/RAC, SPA/RAC, PAP/RAC, and Plan Bleu, is close to finalization. Due to the COVID-19 situation, full/partial telecommuting arrangements of the UNEP (including UNEP/MAP) staff are currently in place; these have negatively affected the operationalization of the budget in the Umoja system in coordination with UNEP HQs, which in turn has delayed the start of elaboration of; the Legal Instruments with MAP components. These have now been uploaded in the UNEP Partners Portal, and are expected to be signed by both parties by the end of April 2021. -In the absence of the Project Manager and QSR Programme

Management officer, whose recruitment as indicated above are still ongoing, the Secretariat has recruited an Individual Contractor since October 2020 working in close collaboration with a UNV expert to speed up the process for the preparation of the legal instruments and other related aspects of project management. The Umoja does not allow adequate access to non-UNEP staff members and this was another difficulty faced during this period.

10. The Legal Instruments with the national Implementing Partners in the seven beneficiary countries are expected to be operational by May 2021 when national activities implementation can start. A first identification of the activities to be implemented at national level and their timeline of implementation has been performed, and is currently being reviewed at internal (UNEP/MAP CU) level. While developing the national support package, close consultations are being undertaken with two other EU-funded projects, IMAP-MPA and Marine Litter MED II, in order to maximize complementarities as appropriate. To this respect, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all national administrations of the EcAp MED III beneficiary countries have been mostly under full/partial telecommuting arrangements; this has delayed to some extent the implementation of the national activities under the EU-funded Project IMAP-MPA, upon which EcAp MED III-related national activities will be based, as well as the first phase of negotiations of the legal agreements with the beneficiary countries.

11. The UNEP/MAP EcAp Task Force, created as a communication and coordination channel with aim to enhance the implementation of the IMAP in the work of the UNEP/MAP system, supported and reviewed the implementation of EcAp MED III through regular monthly meetings held via videoconference, where the progress in the implementation of the Project was reviewed and specific indications and recommendations were made to ensure full technical relevance and quality of Project products.

4. Synergies and Collaborations with other EU-funded Projects

12. Synergies and collaborations in terms of work, activities, and specific coordination efforts are envisaged, as per the Project Document, in relation to the following EU-funded projects: IMAP-MPA, Marine Litter MED II, and MED REGION.

13. The aim of the EU-funded Project IMAP-MPA is to consolidate, integrate and strengthen the ecosystem approach (EcAp) for Marine Protected Area (MPA) management and their sustainable development in the Mediterranean. More in detail, IMAP-MPA focuses on testing the implementation of integrated monitoring in specific pilot areas in beneficiary countries, already identified under EcAp MED II and III Projects. The results of this pilot implementation in terms of monitoring and assessment will be taken into account by EcAp MED III in the planned development of monitoring of other representative areas, and development of integrated assessment methods. The close synergy and collaboration among IMAP-MPA and EcAp MED III was explicitly elaborated and explained during the Integrated Meetings of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on IMAP Implementation (CORMONs) (Videoconference, 1-3 December 2020) during which the IMAP-MPA Project was presented in detail. The current delays being experienced in the implementation of national activities in the context of IMAP-MPA, affected the start of national activities in the context of EcAp MED III.

14. During the Integrated CORMONs Meetings (December 2020), the ENRTP-GPGC-funded Project Marine Litter MED II was also launched. The two Projects EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II have a strong complementarity, whereby Marine Litter MED II will contribute to enhancing national capacities on monitoring and assessing CCI 24 (litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms) and in addressing pressures/sources and impacts, and to assessing knowledge and data gaps for the riverine inputs of marine litter in the Mediterranean and the main uses and sources of microplastics in the region. As such, the achievements of ML MED II will contribute to the development of the assessment of marine litter-related Common Indicators, which will be part of the 2023 MED QSR. To this respect, at the thematic CORMON held on 30 March 2021, the Regional Operational Strategy for Monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 was presented for review and endorsement, whose aim is to provide practical guidelines to the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to support them in designing and

developing monitoring programmes to collect standardized data on marine litter ingested by sea turtles, and to assess how Good Environmental Status (GES) can be achieved.

15. Finally, synergies and collaborations have been established with the EU-funded Project MED REGION, whose work aims at addressing critical aspects of IMAP implementation, which are directly related to the activities scheduled in EcAp MED III towards: the completion of gaps in monitoring data in the Mediterranean; the support to the development and operational implementation of (sub)regional indicators, lists of elements, threshold values; and towards the support to the development of effective regional measures, with a special focus on biodiversity. For this reason, the Coordinator of the MED REGION Project was invited to present the main outcomes of the Project at the Integrated CORMON meetings in December 2020 under agenda item 8 “Any other matters”.

5. Gender aspects

16. Gender balance and equity are among the Project’s core values, and pertinent provisions and are taken into account in Project’s activities. Gender equality and women's empowerment are also recognized as a cross-cutting priority across all aspects of UNEP's work, including for UNEP/MAP. The Secretariat, through its core work but also through projects’ implementation, promotes women and men's participation in all environmental protection and sustainable development activities.

17. The invitation letter of the Integrated CORMON meetings (December 2020) encouraged Contracting Parties to nominate their representatives so as to contribute to the UNEP/MAP Secretariat’s efforts towards a gender-balanced participation.

18. Moreover, the election of the officers (i.e., Chair and Vice-Chairs of the plenary session, as well as of the parallel thematic sessions) at the Integrated CORMON meetings, following the rules of procedure for Meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI), was performed ensuring a gender-balanced participation.

19. Provisions for gender balanced participation will be also included in the calls for the recruitment of regional experts/consultants, and in this regard a balanced ratio between male and female experts should be expected.

20. The Secretariat is exploring ways and means to streamline gender parity and gender dimension in the Project activities from the substantive point of view based on best practices from other projects and at UNEP level.

6. Communication

21. Since the launch of EcAp MED III, the following communication, visibility and outreach activities have been undertaken:

- A news item has been published on the Integrated CORMON meeting in the UNEP/MAP website, highlighting the launch of EcAp MED III an explicitly mentioning its funding by the European Union (EU): <https://www.unenvironment.org/unepmap/news/news/regional-meeting-focuses-enhanced-monitoring-achieve-good-environmental-status>
- A page of the UNEP/MAP website was prepared and published, describing the main objectives and outcomes of the Project, including an explicit reference to its funding by the EU: <https://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/projects/ECAP-MED-III>
- The preparation of a brochure of the Project has started; contents are currently under internal review, and its finalization has been included in the Secretariat’s procurement planning;
- The first elements of the 2023 MED QSR Communication and Visibility Strategy have been drafted by the Secretariat; they are currently under internal review, with the aim to finalize them for approval at the EcAp Coordination Group meeting in September 2021;

- An official letter was sent by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat on 8 April 2021 to the MAP Focal Points, informing them about the launch of EcAp MED III and of the other ENRTP-GPGC-funded Project Marine Litter MED II.

Annex I: Mandate of the Project Steering Committee As laid down in the EcAp MED III Project Document

~~The Project Steering Committee (PSC) will have overall responsibility for project activities. It will provide strategic guidance and oversight and approve the work plans and budgets.~~

~~The members of the PSC will include a representative of European Union — the Head of Unit ENV C.2 and the Project Coordinator on the Commission side; the chair of EcAp Coordination Group; and from UNEP/MAP Secretariat's side, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator (Chairperson) and the QSR Programme Officer. The Project Manager will serve as Secretary of the Steering Committee.~~

~~The PSC will meet annually. Additional meetings based on the requirements of the Project may be convened exceptionally. The meetings will be convened by the Chairperson. For emergency issues the PSC may conduct its business electronically. The agenda and supporting documentation will be prepared and disseminated by the UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit (Project Manager). PSC members may make requests for items to be included on the agenda. A quorum of the PSC will consist of all the committee members.~~

~~The primary responsibilities of the PSC will be to:~~

- ~~● Oversee the project execution;~~
- ~~● Provide overall strategic guidance and ensure coordination among all the project's components as well as of the activities implemented at national level;~~
- ~~● Provide overall supervision for project implementation;~~
- ~~● Oversee the implementation of the project Communication Plan;~~
- ~~● Review and endorse the Annual Work Plan and Budget; ensure their conformity with the requirements of the Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme (GPGC) and with the current project description; ensure the quality of project documents to receive funding from the GPGC;~~
- ~~● Ensure that appropriate consultative processes take place with key stakeholders at the regional level in order to avoid duplication or overlap between the Fund and other funding mechanisms;~~
- ~~● Approve the reporting mechanism for the project.~~