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Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment  
and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 3-4 April 2024

**Agenda Item 3: Progress Report for October 2023 -February 2024**

**Progress Report by the Secretariat on the Activities Carried Out for the Period October 2023 – February 2024**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>I</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>Main Activities/Outputs per PoW theme linked to specific outcome</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Programme 1. Towards a pollution and litter free Mediterranean Sea and Coast embracing circular economy</i>	1
	<i>Programme 2. Towards Healthy Mediterranean Ecosystems and Enhanced Biodiversity</i>	3
	<i>Programme 3. Towards a Climate Resilient Mediterranean</i>	5
	<i>Programme 4. Towards the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources including circular and blue economy</i>	6
	<i>Programme 5: Governance</i>	8
	<i>Programme 6: Towards Monitoring, Assessment, Knowledge and Vision of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast for Informed Decision-Making</i>	12
	<i>Programme 7: For informed and consistent advocacy, awareness, education and communication</i>	16

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABNJ	Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
ACCOBAMS	Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area
ActionMed	Action Plans for Integrated Regional Monitoring Programmes, Coordinated Programmes of Measures and Addressing Data and Knowledge Gaps in Mediterranean Sea
BACs	Background Assessment Concentrations
BAT	Best Available Techniques
BBNJ	Biological diversity of areas Beyond National Jurisdiction
BC	Background Concentrations
BCRS	Barcelona Convention Reporting System
BD	Biodiversity focal area strategy (GEF)
BP	Blue Plan
BWM	Ballast Water Management
BWM Convention	International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004
CAMP(s)	Coastal Area Management Programme(s)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDRE	Centre of Documentation, Research and Experimentation on Accidental Water Pollution
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGI SCP	Cyprus, Greece, and Israel joint Sub-regional Marine Pollution Contingency Plan
CIESM	Mediterranean Science Commission (Commission Internationale pour l'Exploration Scientifique de la Méditerranée)
ClimVar & ICZM	Integration of climate variability and change into national strategies for the implementation of the ICZM Protocol in the Mediterranean
CME	Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement
CMR	Carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to reproduction
CNRS-L	National Council for Scientific Research - Lebanon
COP	Conference of Parties
CORMON	Correspondence Group on Monitoring
CPs	Contracting Parties
CS	Civil Society
CU	Coordinating Unit
CVC	Climate Variability and Change
CW	Chemicals and Waste (GEF)
DeFishGear	Derelict fishing Gear Management System in the Adriatic Region
DG MARE	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (EC)
DOALOS	Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea
EACs	Environmental Assessment Concentrations
EASIN	European Alien Species Information Network
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECA	Emission Control Area
EcAp	Ecosystem Approach

EcAp MED II	Mediterranean Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach, in coherence with the European Union (EU) Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)
EcAp-MED I	Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) in the Mediterranean by the Contracting parties in the context of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols
ECP	Executive Coordination Panel
EDC	Ethylene dichloride
EEA	European Environment Agency
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIA Directive	Environmental Impact Assessment Directive
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMODnet	European Marine Observation and Data Network
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
ENI	European Neighborhood Instrument
ENI SEIS II East	implementing the Shared Environmental Information System principles and practices in the Eastern Partnership countries
ENPI	European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument
ENP-South	European Neighborhood Policy-South
EO	Ecological Objectives
ESM	Environmentally Sound Management
ETC/BD	European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FEBEA	European Federation of Ethical and Alternative Banks
FEDERCHIMICA	Federazione Nazionale dell'Industria Chimica
FEMISE	Forum Euroméditerranéen des Instituts de Sciences Économiques (the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Institutes of Economic Sciences)
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GES	Good Environmental Status
GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
GIIN	Green Impact Investing Network Initiative
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GloBallast	Global Ballast Water Management Project
H2020	Horizon 2020 Programme (EU)
HCMR	Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
HELCOM	Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission
HELMEPA	Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association
HNS	Hazardous and Noxious Substances
HW	Hazardous Wastes
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
IMAP	Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
INFO/RAC	Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication
InfoMAP	UNEP/MAP Mediterranean knowledge platform
InforMEA	United Nations Information Portal on Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Interreg MED	Transnational European Cooperation Programme for the Mediterranean Area
IOGP	International Association of Oil and Gas Producers
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (2014-2020)
ISPRA	Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (Italy)
ITCP	Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUCN-Med	International Union for Conservation of Nature Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation
IUCN-ROWA	International Union for Conservation of Nature Regional Office for West Asia
IW	International Waters (GEF)
IWRS	Institute of Water of the Republic of Slovenia
JRC	Joint Research Centre
LBS	Land Based Sources
MAMIAS	Marine Mediterranean Invasive Alien Species
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MAP II	Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean (MAP Phase II)
MaPAMed	Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean
MARPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships
MAU	Mediterranean Assistance Unit
MAVA	MAVA Fondation pour la nature
MBP	Mediterranean Biodiversity Platform
MCSD	Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development
MEA(s)	Multilateral Environmental Agreement(s)
MEA-IKM	Multilateral Environmental Agreement Information and Knowledge Management Initiative
MED POL	Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean
MEDACES	Mediterranean database on cetaceans stranding
MEDASSET	Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles
MEDCIS	Support Mediterranean Member States towards coherent and Coordinated Implementation of the second phase of the MSFD
MedECC	Network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change
MEDITS	Mediterranean International Trawl Survey
Medkeyhabitats	Mapping of key marine habitats in the Mediterranean and promoting their conservation through the establishment of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)
MedPAN	Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean
MedPartnership	Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem
MedProgramme	GEF Mediterranean Sea Programme: Enhancing Environmental Security
MedSOS	MEDITERRANEAN SOS Network
MENELAS	Mediterranean Network of Law Enforcement Officials relating to MARPOL within the framework of the Barcelona Convention
MEPC	IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee
MIO-ECSDE	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development
MOIG	Mediterranean Oil Industry Group
MONGOOS	Mediterranean Operational Network for the Global Ocean Observing System
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA(s)	Marine Protected Area(s)

MSFD	Marine Strategy Framework Directive
MSFD TG ML	MSFD Technical Group on Marine Litter
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning / Maritime Spatial Planning
MSSD	Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development
MTF	Mediterranean Trust Fund (MAP)
MTS	UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategy 2016-2021
NAP(s)	National Action Plan(s)
NCPs	National Contingency Plans
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
NIS	Non-Indigenous Species
NO <sub>x</sub>	Nitrogen Oxides
NSN	North Sea Network of Investigators and Prosecutors
OFOG	Barcelona Convention Offshore Oil and Gas Group
OSPAR Convention	Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
PAM	Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean
PAP/RAC	Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre
PBT	Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxic
PCB	Polychlorinated biphenyl
PCU	Project Coordination Unit
PEGASO	People for Ecosystem-based Governance in Assessing Sustainable development of Ocean and coast (Project)
PIF	Project Implementation Form
PoM	Programmes of Measures
POSOW	Preparedness for Oil-polluted Shoreline clean-up and Oiled Wildlife interventions
PoW	Programme of Work
PRPI	Pollution Reduction and Prevention Investment
PRTR	Pollutant Release and Transfer Register
QSR	Quality Status Report
RAC(s)	Regional Activity Centre(s)
RCCAF	Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework
RCO	Regional Coordinating Organization
RCREEE	Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency
REMPEC	Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea
RMS	Resource Mobilization Strategy
SAP-MED	Strategic Action Programme to Address Pollution from Land-Based Activities in the Mediterranean
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund (GEF)
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDG 14	Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Spatial Data Infrastructure
SDSN-MED	Mediterranean Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SEIS	Shared Environmental Information System
SIMWESTMED	Supporting Implementation of MSP in the Western Mediterranean region
SOI	Sustainable Ocean Initiative
SO <sub>x</sub>	Sulphur Oxides
SPA(s)	Specially Protected Areas

SPAMI(s)	Specially Protected Area(s) of Mediterranean Importance
SPI	Science Policy Interface
SSSUP	Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies of Pisa
SUPrEME	Supporting MSP in the Eastern Mediterranean
SWEEP-Net	Regional Solid Waste Exchange of Information and Expertise Network
SWIM	Sustainable Water Integrated Management
SWITCH-Med	Switching to more sustainable consumption and production in the Mediterranean
TUBITAK	Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye
TUDAV	Turkish Marine Research Foundation
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UfMS	Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP/GPA	UNEP Global Programme of Action
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VPvB	Very Persistent and very Bioaccumulative
WebGIS	Web Geographic Information Systems
WFD	Water Framework Directive (EU)
WWF-MedPO	WWF – Mediterranean Programme Office

## I. Introduction

1. This progress report highlights activities delivered in the period between October 2023 and February 2024 by the Coordinating Unit and the MAP Components. Information is aggregated at strategic outcome level per each of the Programmes of the UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2027. The Reports by the Secretariat on Specific Issues and on Financial and Administrative Issues are prepared as separate documents, namely UNEP/MED BUR.95/6 and UNEP/MED BUR.95/5 respectively. The complementing “Progress Report by the Secretariat on the Implementation of COP 23 Decisions”, is presented as document UNEP/MED BUR.95/4.

## II. Main Activities/Outputs per Programme of Work (PoW) theme linked to specific outcome

### **Programme 1. Towards a pollution and litter free Mediterranean Sea and Coast embracing circular economy**

#### **Outcome 1.1. Strategies and Action Plans addressing marine litter and plastics developed and implemented through comprehensive, coherent and collaborative approaches**

2. Under this outcome, several activities related to the implementation of the updated Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management were concluded in Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco and Tunisia, with the support of the EU-funded Marine Litter MED II Project and the Cooperation Agreement with MASE. These activities, include the execution of Adopt-a-beach and Fishing-for-Litter pilots, as well as pilots in ports and marinas, all coordinated by MED POL. The final meeting of the EU-funded ML MED II project was co-organized with EcAp MED III project, during which all beneficiary countries presented the results from the implementation of activities.
3. The capitalisation process for BeMed (Beyond Plastic Med) supported actions in islands was conducted by SCP/RAC (MedWaves). The work of the capitalisation process of the Beyond Plastic Med Initiative continued through the collaboration with SMILO through the revision of the documents that will frame the second phase.
4. Progress in the reduction and prevention of use of single use plastic (SUPs) items has been pursued in Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Lebanon. This was made possible through the technical assistance provided through the EU-funded projects Marine Litter Med II and the Cooperation Agreement with MASE. In particular, and based on the roadmap to implement extended producer responsibility (EPR) to beverage PET bottles in Morocco, under the WES project a tailored workshop to strengthen the capacity and knowledge of municipalities was delivered in December 2023. Similarly in Lebanon, a workshop on EPR scheme was delivered under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment and following up on the operationalisation plan of the voluntary agreement between the Ministry of Environment and the private sector to reduce or eliminate the use of SUP items by the interested Food and Beverage Businesses. An existing tool to assess SUPs consumption in HORECA businesses the HAPI CHECK (including plastic bags but also tackling other key food and beverage items) was adapted to the Lebanese context. This same tool had been adapted to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro.
5. The work on the implementation of green public procurement continued in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Slovenia and SCP/RAC (MedWaves), through the Cooperation Agreement with MASE, provided to 3 Municipalities tailored support to reduce and prevent the use of the SUPs through the strategic use of environmental (green) criteria and technical specifications in the procurement procedures for catering services, vending machine, and the organisation/licencing of large public events.

#### **Outcome 1.2. A holistic and efficient response to land and sea-based pollution, as a part of overall Ecosystem Approach policy for the Mediterranean, (chemicals, contaminants, eutrophication, noise, oil and emerging pollution) for a sustainable Mediterranean coastal and marine ecosystem is implemented**

6. Within the framework of the Sub-regional Marine Oil Pollution Contingency Plan between Cyprus, Greece and Israel (SCP CGI), REMPEC provided consultancy support for a Joint Spill Response Exercise (CypEx2024) to be conducted in Cyprus, in December 2024. The phase 1: ‘design and preparatory actions’ of the Exercise and a first draft Guidance document aiming at facilitating the organisation of Joint Spill Response Exercises within the Sub-regional Contingency Plans in the Mediterranean were endorsed by the Meeting of the competent authorities of the three countries, REMPEC and EMSA (online on 22 November 2023).
7. REMPEC also supported the development of the Adriatic Marine Pollution Incident Contingency Plan (Adriatic CP) between Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, and Slovenia. The final version was endorsed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the competent national authorities of these countries (Rome, Italy, 24-26 October 2023) that also requested the support of REMPEC to the Draft plan through a tabletop Exercise. An information document containing the basic information on the ADRIEX 2024 exercise, including the provisional timetable of the Exercise, was disseminated on 14 February 2024 to the countries to be prepared for the Exercise (AdriEx 2024) in Bar, Montenegro from 5 to 7 March 2024.
8. The common marine oil pollution detection/investigation report endorsed by the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Focal Points of REMPEC (Kappara, Malta, 13-15 June 23) was successfully tested during the 2023 coordinated aerial



surveillance operation for illicit ship pollution discharges in the Mediterranean (OSCAR-MED 2023) organised within the framework of the RAMOGE Agreement (Genoa, Italy, 21-23 November 2023) which REMPEC attended as an observer. Bilateral discussions with the Secretariat of the RAMOGE Agreement were held in the margins of OSCAR-MED 2023 to explore the possibility to hold the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Mediterranean Network of Law Enforcement Officials relating to MARPOL within the framework of the Barcelona Convention (MENELAS) in parallel with OSCAR-MED 2024 in October 2024 with a view to facilitating participation to coordinated aerial surveillance operations for illicit ship pollution discharges.

9. Plan Bleu/RAC established a State of Play of Desalination under the WESR Med observatory through the publication of a series of 13 maps on desalination in the Mediterranean based on the updated DesalData database from Global Water Intelligence and the publication of a briefing note “*Desalination in the Mediterranean: Initiating Measures to Mitigate Environmental Risks and Impacts*” accompanied by a synthesis document in an 8-pages format document. Plan Bleu/RAC also finalized its collaborations with the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) on preparatory activities for a decision support tool for sustainable desalination investments.

**Outcome 1.3. Systemic approaches for Circular Economy, eco-innovation as well as Sustainable Consumption and Production incorporated into key sectors of activity which are main sources of pollution**

10. Implementation of the Switchers Support Programme is underway by SCP/RAC (MedWaves) with the aim of developing and supporting sustainable business development in the Mediterranean countries. The Switchers Support National Partnerships (SSNPs) are established in eight (8) Southern Mediterranean countries bringing together 100+ private and public Business Support Organizations (BSOs) supporting the creation of sustainable businesses. On 17 October 2023 a Regional Exchange of Experiences of Business Support Organizations representing the Switchers Support National Partnerships in 7 countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon) has been organized in Tunisia. The event has allowed to exchange experiences, assess the goals and achievement of the National Partnerships and discuss strategies to ensure their continuity and enhance regional collaboration. 25 representatives of BSOs attended the event (4 of them online). The Switchers Toolbox continues to make available for entrepreneurs, businesses, experts and BSOs sustainable business development tools and methodologies and counts with 6,500+ green entrepreneurs, 390+ experts and +200 BSOs as registered users. From 2022, in collaboration with local BSOs, SCP/RAC (MedWaves) has reached 1,400 Green Entrepreneurs trained for Sustainable Business Development (51% women) and 150 Green Start-ups being incubated (51% represented by women) in 10 countries.

11. The Switchers Support Programme has been increased with two new services with the aim of fostering market deals along specific value chains. The Open Innovation Platform and methodology has enabled BSO and innovation enablers to launch business development challenges in the sector of Textiles and Fashion. More than 30 challenges have been launched and 14 of them successfully matched with solutions offered by entrepreneurs and start-ups. Solutions have been supported with technical support and received an innovation vouchers of 20,000 €. The next phase will enable innovation challenges in the sectors of sustainable tourism and food processing. Access to market services has been also enhanced via the Switchers Products Platform; a web-based tool displaying green products and services, coupled with a direct and digital marketing strategy. The Switchers Community’s member have been supported to upload their products and services and to establish contacts with retailers and corporate buyers. 80 products are being currently showcased and six Switchers are receiving marketing support.

12. A public-private fund facility will be launched in mid-2024 in cooperation with SEFEA Impact, an Italian fund manager which will increase funding operation and investments of the SwitchersFund, created within the framework of the Switchers Support Programme. The fund’s governance setting, and business plan have been finalized, and external financial institutions are engaged to support the first investment round of the fund.

**Outcome 1.4. One Health approach developed and implemented, linking human and ecosystems health with pollution reduction and prevention, taking into account lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic**

13. A concept note on research work was successfully submitted by Plan Bleu/RAC for funding provided by Région Sud (France) in collaboration with University of Côte d’Azur, Laboratory Ecology and Conservation Science for Sustainable Seas (ECOSEAS). Research work on HABs and impacts on seafood products started in October 2023 for 3 years. The work is supporting the LBS Protocol implementation on pathogenic micro-organisms.

14. With the adoption the amendments to Annex VI to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) concerning the Mediterranean Sea Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides and Particulate Matter (Med SO<sub>x</sub> ECA) at the 79<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Maritime Organization (IMO)’s Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 79) (London, UK, 12-16 December 2022) which will take effect from 1 May 2025, efforts are being made on ratification and effective implementation of MARPOL Annex VI. Follow-up on the draft national reports on the assessment of the needs was undertaken by REMPEC further to submission to the Contracting Parties that had not yet ratified MARPOL Annex VI. This work was based on

the subsequent consultations undertaken by REMPEC with Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon and Libya, with a view to finalising these reports, including the respective work plans and timetables related to their ratification and effective implementation of MARPOL Annex VI and Med SOX ECA.

15. The MAP Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) Emission Control Area (ECA) Technical Committee of Experts was established by REMPEC and the Committee started its work. This committee is mandated to develop and validate the Terms of Reference for a detailed Technical and Feasibility Study to assess the relevant existing and on-going studies, as well as to examine the possible designation of the Mediterranean Sea Emission Control Area for Nitrogen Oxides (Med NO<sub>x</sub> ECA), including health and socio-economic impacts on the individual Contracting Parties.

## **Programme 2. Towards Healthy Mediterranean Ecosystems and Enhanced Biodiversity**

### **Outcome 2.1. Ecosystem resilience improved through restoration of those with best regeneration potential**

16. The UNEP Ecosystems Division in consultation with Secretariat funded a preliminary study to define the terms of reference for a regional project on restoration and sustainable management of the Mediterranean Forests (Mediterranean Forest Initiative). Plan Bleu/RAC prepared the concept note, which is currently under presentation to UNEP leadership, before defining a strategy of submission to potential donors. The work is ongoing and there is a proposal to consider a flagship initiative under the revised MSSD to the attention of the MCSD Steering Committee.

17. In the framework of the Horizon 2020 WaterLANDS project, the report on governance systems for successful ecological restoration of wetlands was submitted for approval by the European Commission (EC) and presented at COP23 during a side event. Best practices will contribute to regional biodiversity conservation goals and climate agendas.

18. Plan Bleu/RAC is partner of the consortium which was awarded an EuroMed follow-up project entitled Dialogue4Nature. This will allow to continue developing activities to promote ecosystem restoration and nature-based solutions (see project fiche, in document UNEP/MED BUR.95/Inf.5).

### **Outcome 2.2. Comprehensive, coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed MPAs and OECMs in place, expanded, effective and sustainable**

19. A study aiming at assessing the objectives and complementarities among different area-based conservation measures and developing recommendations for new designations to enhance their connectivity and effectiveness was launched in October 2023 by SPA/RAC. A workshop on OECMs was organised in December 2023, with the participation of the SPA/BD National Focal Points, the AGEM members and relevant partners and stakeholders, in Tunis and online. Based on the OECM workshop discussions, the study was finalised in December 2023 and will be launched soon.

20. Under the same EU-funded IMAP-MPA project, SPA/RAC has supported the relevant national authorities of Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia in developing and/or updating, endorsing and implementing the management plans of Rachgoun Island future MPA (Algeria), Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (Lebanon), Shash MPA (Libya), Jbel Moussa future MPA (Morocco) and Kerkennah Islands future MCPA (Tunisia). This support included several types of activities covering local stakeholders' engagement, improving effective management, surveillance, monitoring, ensuring sustainable financing, communication, awareness-raising, capacity-building, networking and exchange of experience and best practices.

21. Under the GEF Child Project 3.1 in Libya, the draft law on protected areas elaborated in collaboration between SPA/RAC and the Ministry of Environment that was endorsed by the national stakeholders and adapted and tailored by the legislative department of the Ministry of Environment, to the appropriate format in December 2022, has been submitted in November 2023 to the parliament for adoption.

22. COP23 adopted a slightly reviewed version of the the Format for the periodic review of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (i.e. scoring under sections 4.1 and 4.2) and requested the Secretariat (SPA/RAC) to reflect it accordingly in the online Evaluation System of the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance. The online Format will be used to evaluate the 25 SPAMIs in 2024 and 2025.

23. Within the framework of the EU-funded ENSERES project, SPA/RAC awarded six sub-grants to involve local civil society organisations (CSOs) in the management and sustainable development in and around SPAMIs, through the implementation of on-field activities in four SPAMIs in the Tyre Coast SPAMI (Lebanon) and two in the Kneiss Islands SPAMI (Tunisia). SPA/RAC is also coordinating activities to scale-up good practices and enable networking among SPAMI managers, particularly through a dedicated twinning programme.

24. Twinning between the Tyre Coast SPAMI (Lebanon) and Medes Islands SPAMI (Spain) and between the Kneiss Islands SPAMI (Tunisia) and Parc Marin de la Côte Bleue SPAMI (France) were implemented; Four visits to the concerned SPAMIs have been organized to exchange best practices among managers and with local stakeholders and two actions plans were developed: Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable Fisheries Management within and around Kneiss Islands SPAMI (Tunisia) and Strategy and Action Plan for Sustainable

Tourism in Tyre Coast SPAMI (Lebanon).

**Outcome 2.3. Mediterranean endangered and threatened species and key habitats in favourable status of conservation**

25. SPA/RAC started implementation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project “*Fisheries and Ecosystem Based Management for the Blue Economy of the Mediterranean (FishEBM MED)*” as part of the MedProgramme led by the Coordinating Unit during the period 2023-2025. The main objective of the project is to reverse the over-exploitation of select commercial living marine resources in the Mediterranean by enhancing the capacity of Mediterranean countries to manage fisheries. The project will be implemented by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), UNEP/MAP and SPA/RAC, with oversight from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNEP as the GEF Implementing Agencies. The second steering committee meeting took place on 19 February 2024 in Antalya, Türkiye.

26. The conclusions and recommendations of the multidisciplinary group of experts established through the designation by the Contracting Parties of national experts with experience in phytoplankton, zooplankton and oceanography (Hydrology, Chlorophyll-a, etc.) were adopted by the COP23 and in particular the list of Reference of Pelagic Habitat Types in the Mediterranean Sea so that it can be used, where necessary, as a basis for identifying reference pelagic habitats to be monitored and assessed at the national level under the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria.

27. Furthermore, support is being provided to the Institute of Marine Biology and the Environmental Protection Agency of Montenegro to contribute to the implementation of IMAP through the execution of the national monitoring programme in MPAs including the site concerned by the Medkeyhabitats I project (Platamuni MPA and Ratac). The final report including all georeferenced collected data is finalised and data uploaded to the IMAP info System.

28. Due to the mass mortality event and the alarming situation of *Pinna nobilis* populations, a restoration programme was adopted by COP23. Furthermore, to encourage and reward contributions to the work of applying the Action Plans, the Contracting Parties may at their ordinary meetings grant the title of “Action Plan Partner” to any organization (governmental, NGO, economic, etc.) that has to credit concrete actions likely to help the conservation and the protection of the species/group of species in question. To this end, Conditions and Criteria for the award of the Regional Action Plans Partner title were adopted by COP 23.

**Outcome 2.4. Non-indigenous species introductions minimized and introduction pathways under control**

29. The updating of the Regional Action Plan on non-indigenous species (NIS) and species introduction was adopted by COP23. The updating took into consideration the Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022-2027).

30. The updating of Guidelines for controlling the vectors of introduction into the Mediterranean of NIS and invasive marine species and Guide for risk analysis assessing the impacts of the introduction of NIS considering the Mediterranean BWM are finalised, and should be disseminated through SPA/RAC website and social media.

31. The elaboration of a draft sub-regional Action Plan on non-indigenous species and species introduction for the Aegean-Levantine Basin is finalised. The Sub-regional Action is based on the national Action Plans to coordinate and step up the efforts made by the countries of the sub-region to prevent and control the introduction of alien species, the Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022-2027) and the sub-regional monitoring plan on NIS/Fisheries. A meeting with the Focal Points’ concerned countries, GFCM Secretariat and IUCN Med is foreseen by the end of February 2024 to discuss and validate the proposal of the sub regional Action Plan.

32. MAMIAS web application is planned to be deployed on the SPA/RAC production server during March 2024 in order to be tested with selected user before its official release and use during planned national training on data collection on NIS within the new GEF FISHEBM Med project. Furthermore, a study of buffer fish is implemented by the Arab Federation for Wildlife Protection (AFWP) in the Mediterranean coast of Egypt.

33. SPA/RAC organised a training session on 6-7 February 2024 at the premises of Ispra - Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale, in Rome, Italy, on the use of its main data platforms: the Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI), Mediterranean Biodiversity platform (MBP), and the Mediterranean Marine Invasive Alien Species Platform (MAMIAS). The training is organized within the Bilateral agreement between the Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica (MASE) and UNEP/MAP, and in collaboration with INFO/RAC. The training focused on the processes of data collection, analysis, workflow, and dissemination of crucial information related to marine biodiversity and invasive species in the Mediterranean region through the use of SPA/RAC data platforms. Participants attending the training comes from Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia.

34. Regional Harmonised Procedures for the uniform implementation of the Ballast Water Management Convention in the Mediterranean Sea, prepared by REMPEC in consultation with IMO and in cooperation with SPA/RAC, were adopted by COP23. A draft resources mobilisation strategy to implement the Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022-2027) was prepared by REMPEC and consultations

carried out with Contracting Parties. Activities related to the management of ships' biofouling in the Mediterranean within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between UNEP and the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security (MASE) were carried out by REMPEC, with the support from the Project Coordinating Unit of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-IMO GloFouling Partnerships Project. Egypt, Libya and Morocco benefited from these activities: the development of their respective national status assessment on the current status of national biofouling management was initiated in October 2023. National assessment reports were developed and approved by the respective national competent authorities in December 2023; and preparations for the organisation of a one-day national raising awareness workshop in each beneficiary country were also made.

### **Programme 3. Towards a Climate Resilient Mediterranean**

#### **Outcome 3.1. Legal, policy and institutional framework strengthened at the regional and national level to efficiently address climate change related challenges (flooding, erosion, land degradation, pollution, disasters etc.)**

35. Within GEF/SCCF project PAP/RAC has been implementing activities related to coastal adaptation to climate change in Montenegro and Morocco. Climate change issues were discussed during all the working meetings and national experts in the field continued working together with the other national team members in both countries to streamline climate change and adaptation measures into sectoral reports. The activities are being implemented in close cooperation with Plan Bleu/RAC which offers its "Climagine" participatory method to facilitate consultations with national stakeholders.

36. Within the scope of the GEF/SCCF project, GWP-Med conducted a comprehensive assessment and examination of the currently accessible tools and guidelines in the Mediterranean area for obtaining domestic and international funding for adaptation purposes. The review has been completed, and draft guidelines have been prepared. A preliminary set of criteria has been formulated to choose two countries for the purpose of developing proposals to secure international financial support specifically aimed at climate change adaptation in coastal zones.

#### **Outcome 3.2. Nature-based, technical solutions promoting prevention or reduction of the impact of climate change on coastal and marine ecosystems and increase resilience to climatic variability and change**

37. One of the issues raised during the "Climagine" workshops in Montenegro and Morocco was the need to prepare a guidance document on possible nature-based solutions for adaptation taking into account different coastal typologies. PAP/RAC has initiated this methodological work in early 2023 and presented its draft version at the Focal Points meeting, which has shown great interest for this kind of document and has recommended PAP/RAC to finalise it as soon as possible. Draft version of the document was discussed during an online meeting organised in December 2024 by PAP/RAC with Plan Bleu/RAC and SPA/RAC to see how their work and experience can be included. The document is being updated and a regional workshop to present it to national representatives has been planned for 24-25 April 2024 in Rome, Italy. First exchanges with the PAP/RAC Focal Point for Italy have been very positive and preparatory activities have started.

38. Preparation of a draft publication on coastal adaptation solutions, based in Plan Bleu/RAC's activities in Morocco, Montenegro and France. Joint presentation with Ocean Climate and GREC-Sud on CASAadapt project to local civil servants took place in Hyères, France, on 20 November 2023.

#### **Outcome 3.3. Better understanding and knowledge of climate change and its impacts on environment and development**

39. MedECC Secretariat continues coordinating work for the elaboration of the three Special Reports: 1) Climate and environmental coastal risks, 2) Climate-water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus, and 3) Environmental change, conflicts and human migration.

40. The draft of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) of the MedECC Special Report on climate and environmental coastal risks after was subject to a plenary discussion with the decision-makers and key stakeholders, including, MAP Focal Points, Plan Bleu Focal Points, the Members of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD), and MAP Partners as well as the members, observers and partners of UfM Climate Change Expert Group (UfM CCEG), UfM Working Group on Environment and Climate Change (WG ENV-CC) members. The plenary discussion on SPM of the MedECC Special Report on climate and environmental coastal risks took place on 6 November 2023 (virtual), involving MAP and Plan Bleu Focal Points and MCSD Steering Committee Members, UfM CCEG and UfM WG ENV-CC members. The feedback was incorporated for final version, which was submitted to COP23: the SPM was approved by the Contracting Parties during COP23.

41. The draft SPM of the Special Report on climate-water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus after the consultation with decision-makers and key stakeholders (the same as those indicated above) was peer-reviewed between October and December 2023. Plenary consultation has been prepared, to be held tentatively in May 2024.

42. Regarding the Special Report on Environmental change-conflict and human migration, the FOD and SPM were finalized in July 2023. Peer-review took place between October and December 2023. Activity was suspended as the plenary consultation is postponed due to the current geopolitical context.

43. Plan Bleu/RAC is a partner in the successful consortium which applied to the European Environment Agency's call for the European Topic Center on Climate Adaptation. Plan Bleu/RAC contributes to the task related to drafting the report on challenges and solutions related to climate change in Europe's seas.

**Outcome 3.4. Mitigation of Climate Change progressed through Circular Economy, increased resource efficiency and carbon neutrality business strategies**

44. During the MedCOP Climate event held in Tangier, Morocco from June 22-23, 2023, the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and Plan Bleu/RAC were present and actively participated in two dedicated hubs. These hubs focused on the topics of "Sustainable Management of Water Resources and Blue Economy" and "Nature Based Solutions".

45. SCP/RAC (MedWaves) liaised with partner organizations and experts to design an analysis model as underlying methodology to develop a handbook linking concrete circular economy business strategies and climate change mitigation measures. This exercise resulted in the publication of a study paper titled "Working Paper on the contribution of Circular Economy to Climate Action". The publication and its main findings were disseminated at the UNFCCC COP28 in Dubai. A side-event was organized on 1 December 2023 in cooperation with the Catalan Government in the Multi-Level Action Pavilion in Dubai. The report has also been translated to French and Arabic and will be further disseminated in the second quarter of 2024. SCP/RAC (MedWaves) was part of the Mediterranean Coalition, led by UfM, at the COP28 in Dubai.

46. SCP/RAC, in collaboration with a consortium of international universities, has been supporting the development of a Decision Support System (DSS), a Horizon2020-funded initiative, to assess and promote circularity of specific productive units, including climate change indicators. Disseminating the DSS in target countries, via ad-hoc communication and engagement strategies will be carried during mid-2024.

**Programme 4. Towards the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources including circular and blue economy**

**Outcome 4.1. Sustainability of coastal and marine resources achieved through the synergetic implementation of planning and management approaches, including the adequate consideration of Land-Sea Interactions (LSI)**

47. Under CP 2.1 of the MedProgramme, Plan Bleu/RAC has published the workshop report for Climagine Workshop 4. The final reports (of the entire Climagine process) are expected soon. Inputs provided to the TTA coastal plan that has been shared by PAP/RAC with the national institution (Direction Régionale de l'Environnement TTA). In Lebanon, a common decision was taken between executing partners to postpone activities until January 2024 due to the regional context.

48. The work on the preparation of regional coastal plans for the region Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima (TTAH) in Morocco and Boka Kotorska Bay in Montenegro progresses well. Regular online working meetings between PAP/RAC and national teams in both countries continue to be organised. The coastal plan for the TTAH region in Morocco was drafted and submitted to local stakeholders for comments in November 2023 and the expert team has been working to integrate the inputs received. In Montenegro, the national team continued working with the support of PAP/RAC and the draft version of the plan is expected shortly. The final presentation conferences in both countries are planned for the second half of May 2024. Launching of the National ICZM Strategy for Lebanon was on hold for an entire year due to the difficult economic and financial situation in the country. After the inception workshop organised in Beirut in 2023 together with GWP-Med, IHP-UNESCO and Plan Bleu/RAC, with the participation of some 70 participants representing national and local authorities and institutions as well as academia, NGOs and private sector, tendering procedure was successfully completed, the team of national experts was created and they have started working on the priority issues to be addressed in the Strategy. Regular online consultations with PAP/RAC Focal Point for Lebanon and the expert team continue.

49. Within the Transboundary CAMP for the Otranto area, regular online meetings of the project team continued until the end of the project in December 2023. All the activities were concluded as scheduled and the Final Conference was organised in Tirana, Albania, on 13 December 2023, providing an opportunity to share best practices and present major project outcomes.

**Outcome 4.2. Sustainable Blue and Green Economy tools and approaches in the context of Sustainable Development and MSSD implementation**

50. In coordination with EC Directorate General for the Environment and with the Liaison Office to the European Union, the Secretariat has further developed cooperation also with the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fishery (DG MARE). In the framework of the 2021/2027 European Union programming period the Secretariat has identified a number of initiatives and processes that are worth engaging with a twofold objective: to ensure coordination and develop synergies with these initiatives and processes, both at policy and operational/projects level, as well as to further expand the UNEP/MAP resource mobilisation strategy and means and contribute to the UNEP/MAP communication and outreach objectives.

51. More specifically, discussions are concretely advancing with DG MARE, also based on well-developed

concept notes, on the following EU initiatives and topics: a) with the WestMed Initiative for the development of sustainable blue economy, in coordination with the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, specifically foreseen in the WestMed Ministerial Declaration of June 2023 and by making concrete cooperation proposals to the WestMed Steering Committees with linkages to the MSSD revision process and flagship initiatives; b) Blue Economy Observatory linked to measuring sustainability of the Blue Economy; c) Sustainable aquaculture, equally supporting the energy transition of the sector, and linked to the EU Aquaculture Platform and MedFish4Ever project; d) Mission Ocean MED lighthouse, to support shaping the future for an Healthy, Pollution free Mediterranean basin; e) BlueMissionMed, to support transformative innovative solutions in all forms (technological, social, business, governance) in the Mediterranean on blue economy and the identified concrete cooperation lines within the BlueMissionMed Implementation Roadmap; f) monitor the developments towards the potential identification of an EU macroregional strategy at Mediterranean level and linkages to be developed with the MSSD revision; g) Concrete cooperation lines of work with 2021-2027 INTERREG transnational Programmes in the Mediterranean (INTERREG EURO-MED, INTERREG NEXT SOUHT) that finance transnational projects also on priorities covering environmental and sustainable development objectives, as well a number of MSSD Flagship Initiatives topics.

52. The Secretariat, as Observer of the WestMed Initiative Steering Committee, has actively contributed to the WestMed Ministerial Declaration that has been endorsed on 23 June 2023 in Malta, calling also for a reinforced cooperation with the Barcelona Convention and with the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD). Concrete follow up actions are being developed in coordination with DG MARE, in order to progressively concretise the cooperation. In the last WestMed Initiative Steering Committee that took place on 29 February 2024, the Secretariat presented the main outcomes of COP23, the revision process of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, as well as potential lines for concrete cooperation.

53. The main outcomes of the participation of the Secretariat to the Steering Committee meeting of the WestMed initiative of 29 February 2024 are concrete proposals to substantiate the reference in the 2023 WestMed Ministerial Declaration to a reinforced the collaboration with UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable MSSD. In particular the following synergies have been proposed and well received: cooperation with the EU community of practice on Marine Spatial Planning and the WestMed working group on sustainable tourism that will be set up before the Summer 2024 and the working group on MSP/blue economy that will be proposed to the Steering Committee of the MCSDD meeting of 18-19 April; cooperation in the framework of the WestMED Annual stakeholders event in October 2024 that could host a short session or side event on supporting the stakeholders' consultation on MSSD revision. These concrete actions should progressively allow the definition of additional synergies on flagship initiatives, exchange of best practices as well as on stakeholders and thematic events of common interest.

54. The Secretariat coordinated with the Regional Activity Centres a number of concept notes on Sustainable Blue and Green Economy in view of presenting them with a strategic approach in the framework of diverse financing opportunities that are available since February 2024, and including the INTERREG transnational Programmes covering specifically the Mediterranean, the HORIZON Europe Programme and the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership.

55. In addition to the participation of the Secretariat to the meetings of the BlueMissionMed General Assembly that allowed to concretely promote the synergies on blue and green/circular economy in the framework the BlueMissionMed roadmap of implementation, the Secretariat has developed the cooperation with the INTERREG transnational Programmes covering specifically the Mediterranean and the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership. The objective is to further define draft cooperation schemes and actions that would allow further outreach of multi-level South Mediterranean actors, availability of projects results financed by these programmes and that are relevant to the UNEP/MAP work, organisation of common events at regional/sub-regional level on topics of common interest, concrete support to broader stakeholders' engagement in the framework of the MSSD as well as support to identification of financial options for its flagship initiatives.

56. As part of the MoU between UNEP/MAP and UFM, bilateral meetings have been held to identify cooperation modalities in the framework of the Blue Mediterranean Partnership and its Blue Economy Fund, the new multi donor instrument, led by EBRD, EIB, EU and donors' countries for investments on Blue Economy pipeline of bankable projects in the non-EU MED area.

57. After 6 years of work, the horizontal Interreg Med project of sustainable tourism (Sustainable Tourism Community - STC) (2019-2022), bringing together more than 200 entities working on 30 sustainable tourism projects in the Mediterranean and in the continuity of the previous project entitled BlueTourMed (2016-2019), concluded its activities. On 11 November 2023, the STC organized a hybrid conference "Climate action plans for tourism in the Mediterranean: a vision for the future" in the framework of COP27 UNFCCC to discuss with European policy makers and representatives of international organizations and local authorities of the potential of the tourism sector to adapt to climate change and mitigate its negative consequences on the environment and Mediterranean communities. On 15 November 2023, Plan Bleu/RAC took part in the launch day of the Green Horizonte Festival in Calvi to present its activities concerning sustainable tourism. On 19 December, a webinar

was organized on “Cooperation success stories and best practices: future opportunities for sustainable tourism in North Macedonia”, to learn more about the main results of the STC as well as to present some good practices developed by four modular projects. Plan Bleu/RAC published the Catalogue of Best Practices on Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean and the State of Play of Tourism: A roadmap for a Greener, Inclusive and resilient tourism in the Mediterranean. The STC also published the Sustainable Tourism Community Catalogue of Outputs gathering 41 of the most tangible outputs produced by the STC, and a handbook on “How to use EU funding for Sustainable tourism”.

58. Plan Bleu/RAC published guidelines for sustainable tourism, with a focus on sustainable cruise and leisure boating. Those guidelines have been used by French institutions working on the “Document Stratégique de Façade” for the French Mediterranean coast.

59. Plan Bleu/RAC is a partner of the consortium awarded the follow-up EuroMed project Community4Tourism which will allow to further develop activities for sustainable tourism. In this frame, and with support from ADEME, Plan Bleu/RAC produced a Report on four scenarios of the tourism sector in the Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur Region, France. The report was presented in Regional Forum of Tourism, 5-6 December 2023, in Avignon, France, and in a webinar for ADEME staff, on 14 December 2023.

60. Under PoW activity 4.2.1, Plan Bleu/RAC oversees work carried out by the Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE) concerning a state of the art of regulations and strategies for the development of offshore wind power in Mediterranean countries.

61. The Secretariat has continued working on the implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy of Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025 and has initiated the process of MSSD review. Further information on the MSSD is provided under Programme 5.

62. A questionnaire to the Mediterranean aquaculture community was elaborated and disseminated, including during the European Aquaculture Society Congress (Vienna, 18 to 21 September 2023) where participants were interviewed. A scoping study on sustainable aquaculture and its resilience to climate change, based on the results of the questionnaire and bibliographic research, was finalized.

63. Plan Bleu organized on 23 November 2023 a multi-stakeholder Workshop on Blue economy. Out of this meeting, a report has been prepared on measuring the sustainability of the Mediterranean Blue Economy

64. MedWaves (SCP/RAC) has supported 25 Mediterranean circular businesses to assess their environmental, social and economic impact through the online tool available in <https://www.theswitchers.org/>

**Outcome 4.3. Innovative environmental management and economic instruments implemented for the protection and efficient use of coastal and marine resources**

**Outcome 4.4. Measures defined within the Mediterranean Offshore Action Plan applied at regional level and by each Contracting Party within their jurisdiction to ensure the safety of offshore activities and reduce their potential impact on the marine environment and its ecosystem**

65. REMPEC organised, with the support of IOGP and representatives from the OSPAR Commission, a training course on Common Standards and Guidance on the Disposal of Oil and Oily Mixtures and the Use and Disposal of Drilling Fluids and Cuttings, as well as on Guidelines related to the Use and Discharge of Harmful or Noxious Substances and Materials, including Chemical use plan for offshore operations, in Malta on 7-8 November 2023. REMPEC also launched the work of the Intersessional Correspondence Groups (ICGs) on Decommissioning and the related financial aspects in October 2023 through the development of the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft guidelines on Decommissioning. These were submitted in December 2023 to the Offshore Focal Points for feedback by March 2024.

**Programme 5: Governance**

**Outcome 5.1. Effective Implementation and Enforcement by the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols, MAP Policies, including Ecosystem Approach related COP decisions, the MSSD and Programmes of Measures achieved at regional and national levels**

66. The results of a comparative analysis of coastal laws of Algeria, France, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia with regard to the ICZM Protocol, produced within GEF MedProgramme Child Project 2.1 in the previous semester, was presented at a conference organised jointly by PAP/RAC and the Tunisian Coastal Agency (APAL) in Tunis on 6 November 2023 to celebrate and inform about the ratification of the ICZM Protocol by Tunisia. This day brought together eminent speakers, including three of the most relevant ministers for coastal zone management, namely the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Equipment and Housing, as well as an audience of more than 150 representatives of numerous ministries, APAL branches at the regional level, several NGOs as well as two national deputies.

67. A similar presentation was done during the study tour to Croatia of an Algerian delegation composed of representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Renewable Energy, the Ministry of Fisheries and the national and regional Coastal Commissions on 23-27 October 2023. This visit contributed to achieving several objectives of GEF MedProgramme, particularly in terms of capacity building and raising awareness of the importance of

the ratification of the ICZM Protocol. The visit was organised by PAP/RAC with the financial support of GIZ. Under CORMON and CORESA guidance, the Secretariat, through the IMAP Task Force and with the support of the EcAp MED III project, and in close collaboration with several partners finalized the 2023 MED QSR which was submitted to COP 23 which took note of the Report and endorsed its provisional Executive Summary. The EU-funded projects IMAP-MPA, EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II have continued to support beneficiary countries to implement IMAP and to submit their national monitoring data to the Info System, supported by the MAP Components and particularly INFO/RAC.

68. Following the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the MCSD (Marseille, France, 14-16 June 2023) and its conclusions, on 30 October 2023, the extended Steering Committee of the MSSD met to finalise the preparation of the contribution to the COP23 Ministerial Declaration, to further discuss the revision process of the MSSD, and to present two new flagship initiatives on blue tourism and Posidonia Oceanica meadows. The Terms of Reference for the evaluation of the MSSD have been launched in mid-February and by end of February the expert has been selected. On 21 February the extended Steering Committee of the MSSD met to discuss and validate the further elaborated MSSD revision process and timeline, to present the main objectives, expected outcomes and timeline of the MSSD evaluation, as first component of the broader MSSD revision, and to initiate the discussion on the thematic working groups that would support the MSSD revision. The preparation of the MCSD Steering Committee meeting, that will take place in Athens on 18 and 19 April, is under way.

69. COP23 adopted, through Decision IG.26/1 on Compliance and Reporting, the amendments to the Procedures and Mechanisms on Compliance under the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. Further information on Compliance and Reporting is presented in Document UNEP/MED BUR.95/6 (Report on Specific Issues).

**Outcome 5.2. Systemic strengthening and effective functioning and delivery of MAP decision-making and advisory bodies ensured, and efficiency enhanced with new digital approaches**

70. In line with the decision-making process, the regular meetings of the governing and advisory bodies of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system have been convened with an active participation of representatives of Contracting Parties (CPs) and stakeholders, while in some cases efforts should be made in order for meetings to be attended by all CPs, to the extent possible.

71. During the current reporting period, the following governance meetings were organized:

- (a) The 23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP23, Portoroz, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023);
- (b) The 52<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Executive Coordination Panel (Vrachati, Greece, 16-17 January 2024);
- (c) The Extended MCSD Steering Committee Meeting (Teleconference, 21 February 2024).

72. For the next months a number of meetings are planned including: (a) The 95<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Bureau (Ljubljana, Slovenia, 3-4 April 2024); (b) The 25<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the MCSD Steering Committee (Athens, Greece, 18-19 April, 2023); (c) The 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SAP BIO National Correspondents (Teleconference, 10 May 2024); (d) The CORMON Meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (Teleconference, 6 June 2024); (e) The 20<sup>th</sup> Compliance Committee Meetings (Athens, Greece, 19-20 June 2024).

73. The fourth Steering Committee meeting for the implementation of the Bilateral Agreement with Italy/MASE was held in Athens, Greece, on 9 November 2023. It agreed on a three month extension for two activity fiches, i.e. fiche 37.2 executed by PAP/RAC, on the study on transboundary EIA/SEA, and fiche 37.2 for the organization of a training on the use of SPA/RAC databases and platforms and an big international meeting on the use of databases for marine conservation to be held in Morocco in early March 2024. The next Steering Committee meeting is planned to be held in Rome, Italy on 11-12 March 2024, to review and approve the final reports of the Bilateral Agreement and decide on a potential new Agreement for the implementation of POW 2024-2025 activities.

74. The Agreement with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France signed with UNEP in 2022 in support of the PoW 2022-2023 activities has been implemented and the majority of activities have been completed. An agreement was made to grant a 6-month extension for completion of a certain number of activities executed by SCP/RAC and REMPEC. In parallel, a new Agreement was signed on 23 November 2023 for the allocation of voluntary contribution of 1,430,280 EUR in support of a number of activities of the MAP PoW and Budget 2024-2025 adopted by COP 23 through Decision IG.26/14. This voluntary contribution has been integrated into the Project Document and Legal Instruments with RACs for the operationalisation of the PoW and Budget 2024-2025 and activities implementation has been launched. Work is ongoing for the timely recruitment of a new expert to be seconded by France to the Coordinating Unit to coordinate the implementation of PAMEx and ensure synergies between the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system and work under other regional instruments and initiatives.

75. The updated Resource Mobilisation Strategy (RMS) for the MTS 2022-2027, that was attached as Annex IV to the Governance decision IG.26/2 was adopted by COP23 and its implementation has been initiated.



76. GEF 8 is open for project proposals, and the Secretariat is considering to participate in the preparation and execution of the relevant child projects related to the following Integrated Programs: (a) Food Systems Integrated Program; (b) Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Program; (c) Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program; and (d) Elimination of Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains Integrated Program.

77. EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II EC funded-projects have successfully implemented the joint final event on 6-7 February 2024. The EC has confirmed its satisfaction for the achievements of the ECAP MED III and Marine Litter MED II projects, including support with the Ecosystem approach in the Southern Mediterranean, including comprehensive monitoring and assessment, thereby directly contributing to the QSR2023, and establishing effective measures, through numerous pilot actions and guidelines. The follow-up phases of the two projects, EcAp Med PLUS worth US\$2.2 million, and Marine Litter MED PLUS worth US\$1.2 million, will commence in March 2024 and preparatory work is already undergoing with the seven beneficiary countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia) to sign the implementing legal instruments as soon as possible.

78. The IMAP-MPA project ended on 22 July 2023, and its follow up project SEMPA “Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and MCPAs for nature” worth €4 million euros, has started in August 2023. After the initial inception phase, the first Steering Committee meeting has been successfully held on 7 February 2024.

79. In order to support efforts made at the MAP level, SPA/RAC organised a training session on gender mainstreaming in the Post-2020 SAP BIO implementation process targeting the SAP BIO National Correspondents (Tunis, Tunisia, 12-13 December 2023), so that they could raise local and country-specific constraints and give them the tools for gender mainstreaming.

80. The Steering Committee established for the CAMP project in Bosnia and Herzegovina met on 19 December 2023 in Sarajevo in the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations to discuss the CAMP follow-up and agree on the way forward with the inauguration of the proposed Inter-Ministerial Committee for ICZM, the ratification of the ICZM Protocol and the preparation of the Law on Coast and Sea, all with the support of PAP/RAC and the GEF MedProgramme Child project 2.1.

81. The Secretariat internally has re-arranged the modalities of implementation for EcAp and IMAP, through the establishment of two dedicated task forces in February 2024: (a) IMAP Task Force; and (b) EcAp Task Force. The IMAP Task Force will oversee and coordinate IMAP implementation and revision, whereas the EcAp Task Force will oversee and coordinate the upgrade of EcAp Roadmap. The Task Forces have started working on their respective mandates. Furthermore, the Secretariat, established in February 2024 the Task Force on Implementation Reporting with main mandate for this biennium to support the Contracting Parties to submit their pending National Implementation Reports for the biennia 2018-2019 and 2020-2021, to support the Contracting Parties in the preparation and submission of the 2022-2023 National Implementation Reports, and, finally, to upgrade the reporting format of the BCRS in order to include the recently adopted amendments to Protocols Annexes and legally binding measures as well as to make it more user-friendly. Finally, the Secretariat established an Internal Group on the Review/Update of the Mediterranean Offshore Action Plan (2026–2035) comprised by representatives of REMPEC, CU, MED POL and SPA/RAC.

82. Plan Bleu/RAC is partner of 4 Interreg EURO MED project (D4N on biodiversity conservation; C4T on tourism and ICZM; Natour4CChange on Governing sustainable tourism in territories with high environmental value - reconnecting tourism and nature for addressing the climate crisis with an ecosystem-based approach; Artemis on Accelerating the restoration of Seagrass Meadows in the Mediterranean area through innovative ecosystem-service based solutions) and one H2020 project (Waterlands on Water-based solutions for carbon storage, people and wilderness).

**Outcome 5.3. Policy coherence and complementarity ensured among relevant work at global, regional and national levels and among MAP-Barcelona Convention system’s policy and regulatory instruments**

83. The Secretariat participated at the Third Joint Technical Meeting - Identification of Synergies and Possible Cooperation Activities in Marine Region between representatives of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. The meeting focused on possible cooperation activities to promote the effective application of SEA and transboundary EIA in marine regions – with a focus on activities for 2024–2026; on recommendations, to be proposed to the Meeting of the Parties to the Espoo Convention (9<sup>th</sup> session) and Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on SEA (5<sup>th</sup> session) on 12 - 15 December 2023; and, on selected example(s) of good practice in the application of the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA in marine regions.

84. Furthermore, two online meetings were held between the Secretariat and ESPOO Convention Secretariat (24 January and 22 February 2024) to discuss (a) possible cooperation between the Compliance Mechanisms of the two Conventions, (b) exchange of relevant information on each Convention’s work, and (c) possible participation in each-others meetings, including in the first sub-regional meeting on cooperation on the ESPOO Convention and its Protocol in the Mediterranean Sea, which will take place in Rome, on 27-28 May 2024.

85. Following a bilateral meeting on 3 November 2023, there is growing interest for collaboration with OECD,

who is expanding its outreach to non-OECD members through its External Committee, which addresses the MENA region relevant to the Mediterranean. It is also increasingly integrating the issue of Oceans, as the item is spanning across several directorates of the organization (Environment directorate; Trade directorate; Agriculture, Fisheries; Science, Technology and Innovation directorate). A sustainable ocean initiative set up in 2019 mapped out ocean-related work across the house including country diagnostic on oceans, country programs with a green growth strategy review in Egypt and Morocco. OECD could support MAP in designing an ambitious new MSSD, inter alia, with general statistic and data to make the environmental and economic dimension converge. Furthermore, there is a lot of interest to collaborate with respect to Environmental Peer Review processes. A follow-up meeting took place online on 15 February 2024.

86. The Secretariat aims at continuing contributing to relevant regional and global processes on Sustainable Blue Economy, building on and sharing its solid experiences, in particular in areas related to the shipping sector, sustainable aquaculture, sustainable tourism, offshore activities, ICZM and MSP etc.

87. The Secretariat participated in a regional training on the Promotion of the Aarhus Convention in the whole of the Mediterranean organised by WAS and UNECE in Athens, Greece on 14-15 November 2023. The meeting offered an opportunity to showcase linkages between Barcelona Convention and Aarhus Convention, and the work of MAP on the matter including through the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development and the flagship initiative of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development on promoting accession to and implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

88. The Secretariat continues its collaboration with the Government of Greece for the involvement and active role of UNEP/MAP in the 2024 Our Ocean Conference (Athens, Greece, 16-17 April 2024), including participation of the Coordinator as panel member in the panel on the Mediterranean, submission of side event proposals, and organisation of a communication stand.

89. UNEP/MAP participated to the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Seas surrounding Europe Coordination Meeting on the implementation of the respective Regional/Action Plans on Marine Litter, hosted by OSPAR, in London, UK, on 24 January 2024.

90. The UNEP/MAP Coordinator actively participated at UNEA-6 (Nairobi, Kenya, 26 February - 1 March 2024) also contributing in three side events/discussions on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, on Regional Seas, and on Raising ambition for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ocean and Seas by 2030 by accelerating action at global, regional, and national levels on biodiversity, pollution and climate change (co-organized by France and Costa Rica).

91. In the framework of the EEA-UNEP/MAP Joint Work Plan (JWP) 2022-2030, coordination has continued with EEA for the implementation of relevant activities of the MAP Programmes of Work. A joint session between the UNEP/MAP Executive Coordination Panel (ECP) and EEA officials was held in Copenhagen Denmark, on 3 October 2023, to discuss about ongoing and planned activities of relevance to the Strategic Priorities of the JWP that could benefit from mutual cooperation and agree on the expected contribution from each side. Specific discussion was held on the sustainability gap report indicated in the Joint Work Plan and it was agreed that further work would be undertaken in cooperation with EEA in view of preparing a fully-fledged concept note for this activity.

92. In the margins of this joint session of ECP and EEA, the Coordinator had a bilateral meeting with the EEA Executive Director, Ms. Leena Ylä-Mononen where both sides reaffirmed the importance and relevance of the Joint Work Plan and agreed on the required follow up actions for its effective implementation, including on the resources mobilization needed.

#### **Outcome 5.4. Enhanced partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement, including with the private sector and science policy interface**

93. The Secretariat continued collaboration with key partners which have MoUs with UNEP/MAP, including the Secretariat of the Union of the Mediterranean (UfMS), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, the Black Sea Commission, ACCOBAMS, IUCN, etc. Three new MoUs were adopted by COP 23, to replace the expired ones, with the following Organizations and Secretariats: MOU with the Permanent Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS<sup>2</sup>); MOU with the Permanent Secretariat of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (BSC); and, MOU with the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea & Gulf of Aden (PERSGA). Further to the above, the updated MoU with the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean was adopted by COP 23. The MoU with ACCOBAMS was signed during COP23 while the process of signature of the other three MoUs is underway.

94. Since the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNEP/MAP and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) in 2012, both Secretariats have significantly increased their interaction, exchange of information, expert knowledge, and cooperation. A meeting took place on 20 February 2024 during the FishForum 2024 in Antalya (Türkiye) between the UNEP/MAP Coordinator and the Executive Secretary of FAO/GFCM, with the presence also of the new Director of SPA/RAC.

95. The Secretariat keeps strengthening collaboration with the European Commission; in coordination with the EC Directorate General for the Environment, the Secretariat has further developed the cooperation with the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs and Fishery (DG MARE) on a number of concept notes on blue economy as well as on the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, and with the aim of setting the ground of a progressively more streamlined formalised cooperation.

96. Collaboration with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has also been promoted. In 2024, various meetings were held by the REMPEC Head of Office with IMO to identify ways of further consolidating the cooperation with IMO. In February 2024, the newly appointed Secretary General, Mr Arsenio Dominguez, paid a visit at REMPEC whereby discussions were held on ways to improve the coordination with UNEP/MAP. It was also agreed that during 2024, the IMO will continue and increase the amount of Technical Cooperation funds for activities to the benefit of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

97. Collaboration with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) has also been enhanced. A bilateral meeting was held between the REMPEC Head of Office and the Executive Director of EMSA, Ms Maja Markovčić Kostelac, whereby it was agreed that EMSA and REMPEC will coordinate and cooperate on their activities in support of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

**Outcome 5.5. Coordinated approaches implemented to strengthen public institution capacities for the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols**

98. PAP/RAC has renewed the agreement with the Syrian Virtual University (SVU) to support its Master's Programme of Qualification and Specialization in Integrated Management of Natural Resources. Like in the previous years, PAP/RAC team will be contributing with lectures to the third semester focused on Integrated Management of Natural Resources. Topics of relevance for the students were selected: ICZM Protocol and implementation of the ICZM process; MSP and land-sea interactions; addressing climate change challenges by ICZM/MSP and best adaptation practices in coastal zones; Coast and hydrology cluster of IMAP. The assignments for the students were prepared by the PAP/RAC team using the MedOpen experience.

99. Together with IOC-UNESCO, the African Union, the Nairobi Convention Secretariat and the Abidjan Convention Secretariat, PAP/RAC co-organized the 2<sup>nd</sup> MSP Forum for Africa that took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 5-6 November 2023. The objective of this event was to exchange on the progress towards the implementation of Blue Economy and MSP in three Regional Seas Programmes of UNEP. Around 60 participants from various African countries, including those from Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, gathered to discuss and exchange around the following themes: MSP & Africa Blue Economy Strategy; tools for MSP; and MSP & Regional Seas. PAP/RAC presented the draft Conceptual Framework for Implementing MSP in the Mediterranean and the MSP tool (MSP Workspace) which is an online checklist for land-sea interaction, ecosystem-based approach and climate adaptations within MSP developed by PAP/RAC.

100. An SSFA was signed and implemented with the MEPIELAN Centre, currently under EPLO, for the preparation of a short online course on "Sustainable Marine Governance in the Mediterranean: Environmental Governance and Sustainability". The course is planned to take place in May 2024 and act as a pilot to a possible post-graduate course on the

**Programme 6: Towards Monitoring, Assessment, Knowledge and Vision of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast for Informed Decision-Making**

**Outcome 6.1. Inclusive and participatory foresight activities conducted at regional and national and local levels, with associated capacity-building**

101. With the aim to improve monitoring of marine environment in offshore areas and related data collection, an initial draft of the MedProgramme Offshore Monitoring Strategy has been developed. This includes identification of a provisional set of IMAP Common Indicators to be monitored, along with the proposal of 20 proposed offshore monitoring stations located in Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco, and Tunisia. The work is ongoing, and the intention is to support the beneficiary countries to upgrade their national monitoring programmes in line with IMAP requirements to also cover the offshore areas.

102. Med2050 Scenarios were finalized and included into an information document for COP23; [www.med2050.org](http://www.med2050.org) continuously updated and the Final Med2050 report is under finalization taking into account feedback received during COP23; its publication is planned by March 2024 and its release by April 2024.

103. Further work on diagnostic reports (climate and environmental, regulatory, socio-economic) in the framework of the local foresight project on coastal adaptation in South of France (Sophia Antipolis, project "CASAdapt"), is continued, for publication during the first semester of 2024.

104. The Secretariat is also following closely the developments under the "Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection" (GESAMP), and participated in the UNEP/GESAMP

Planning Meeting held in February 2024 (online). During this meeting the GESAMP developments under Working Groups (WGs) (in particular, WG 40- Sources, fate, and effects of plastics and microplastics in the marine environment; WG 42- Impacts of wastes and other matter in the marine environment from mining operations, including marine mineral mining; WG 43- Sea-based sources of marine litter; WG- 45 Climate change and greenhouse gas related impacts on contaminants in the ocean) were discussed, including the collaborative planning between UNEP and GESAMP for 2024.

**Outcome 6.2. Science-based IMAP, foresight and other assessments and assessment tools for strengthened science-policy interface and decision making**

105. Benefiting from the results obtained in the eligible countries of the GEF MedProgramme Child project 2.1, an online workshop was organised by PAP/RAC on 28 November 2023 regarding the preliminary analysis of land cover change for the Montenegrin coastline. The workshop included the main overview of the IMAP CCI 25 on land cover change; presentation of the results for Montenegro's coastal zone, the methodology used and data sources; and data visualization, data validation and quality control. Together with experts that carried out the analyses, participants discussed potential considerations in future establishment of GES concerning land cover change, as well as potential practical implications of the assessment's results. INFO/RAC upgraded the IMAP Infosystem to allow data submission and their quality control checks and processing assessment offline. It also collected data for cartographic representation of the 2023 MED QSR. The development of the website for the visualisation of the MED QSR is ongoing and the final version will be released in March 2024.

106. COP23 took note of the integrated 2023 MED QSR, endorsed its provisional Executive Summary, and requested the Secretariat to further develop an additional Summary for Policy Makers (SfPM) to serve as one of the communication products of the 2023 MED QSR planned under the MAP PoW and Budget for 2024-2025. A working group was established in February 2024 with the aim to coordinate the preparation of the SfPM.

107. With the support of MTF, EU-funded EcAp MED III, IMAP-MPA and ML MED II projects, the Italian Cooperation Agreement, as well as the voluntary contribution made by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, technical and financial assistance was provided to execute national monitoring programmes and deliver quality assured data, namely:

- i. An integrated monitoring plan for biodiversity and pollution was developed collaboratively by the Secretariat and SPA/RAC. This plan is implemented in pilot monitoring sites, including MPAs and high-pressure areas. Fieldwork and data collection have been completed in Israel, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia. The compilation of new and historical data into the IMAP information system occurred between June 2023 and February 2024. Implementation of the national IMAP monitoring programmes for pollution and marine litter, and for biodiversity and NIS was implemented in Montenegro with the support of MED POL and SPA/RAC. Work was undertaken in cooperation with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Institute of Marine Biology of Montenegro. A complete monitoring plan for the field surveys of the selected CIs in selected monitoring sites in line with the national monitoring programme was prepared and agreed with the national counterparts. The activities were finalized and monitoring data uploaded into the IMAP Info System, as collected for pollution and marine litter, as well as for the biodiversity, including data collected in the framework of previous projects and initiatives. The assessments were also prepared for pollution, eutrophication and marine litter based on new monitoring data collected in 2022 and 2023.
- ii. The national IMAP monitoring programmes for pollution and marine litter were implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the support of MED POL. The activities were finalized and monitoring data uploaded into the IMAP Info System, as collected for pollution and marine litter. The assessments were also prepared for pollution, eutrophication and marine litter based on new monitoring data collected in 2023.
- iii. Implementation of national IMAPs for biodiversity in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina has been completed with the assistance of SPA/RAC. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sea bird field surveys were conducted, and data are already on the IMAP Info System. In Türkiye, monitoring of Posidonia Oceanica meadows was conducted in Foça SEPA, and data are already on the IMAP Info system. These activities were finalized in December 2023.
- iv. IMAP-based monitoring programmes for marine litter are ongoing in 15 countries with the support of MED POL for uploading datasets for beach macro-litter (M1), seafloor macro-litter (M2) and floating microplastics (M3) extended over the period 2016-2022.
- v. In Tunisia, two contracts were signed with two NGOs: (a) with "Méditerranée Action Nature" (MAN) to establish a monitoring point for Posidonia meadows in La Galite MCPA and to revisit the monitoring point in Cap Negro – Cap Serrat Site (Medkeyhabitats I); activities were implemented in the last quarter of 2023; (b) with "Notre Grand Bleu" (NGB) to revisit the monitoring points of Posidonia meadows; activities were implemented in the last quarter of 2023.
- vi. A MoA was signed under the EU-IMAP-MPA project to contribute to the implementation of IMAP through the execution of the national monitoring programme in MPAs including the site concerned by the Medkeyhabitats I project and in high pressure areas. The MoA includes the provision of related quality

assured data, as well as respective national reporting using the IMAP Info System.

- vii. Monitoring of marine turtles nesting sites (known and sporadic) during summer season of 2023 has been implemented in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Lebanon.
- viii. Within the Monk seal Alliance funded project, MoUs have been signed with National partners from south Mediterranean countries ( Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco) for the implementation of the Monk seal habitats monitoring including awareness campaigns.
- ix. Within the Budget of the French Voluntary contribution (FVC), SPA/RAC: (a) Organised the third Mediterranean Symposium on ecology and conservation of Bird Species (Djerba, Tunisia, 13-15 February 2024) where more than 80 participants took part; (b) Supported the Lesser tern breeding monitoring programme in their main area in Libya; (c) Assisted EEAA, Egypt for the elaboration of the NAP for the conservation of Bird species along the Mediterranean Coast of Egypt; (d) Supported INRH (Morocco) for the functioning reinforcement of the first sea turtles rescue centre; (e) Contributed to the achievement of the monitoring and identification of possible Monk seal habitats in the northern coast of Lebanon; (f) Contributed to the implementation of the monitoring of the known marine turtles nesting during the 2023 summer in central and south Tunisian coastlines has been supported, where new sites nesting has been discovered; (g) Organized a sub-regional training on cartilaginous fishes' identification and monitoring (Sfax, Tunisia 11-15 December 2023) where theoretical and practical sessions were delivered to the representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia; (h) Contributed to the GFCM FishForum 2024 and promoted the activities implemented through the FVC.
- x. Within the Sea turtles rescue centre twinning programmes supported by MASE, an exchange visit has been carried out, as planned, by a designated team from Libya to the sea rescue center of INSTM Monastir, where training session on the administrative and technical aspects has been delivered by the responsible of the center. A training session in the administrative and technical aspects has been delivered by the responsible of the center.
- xi. A review of available data on marine turtles stranding in the Mediterranean has been finalized.
- xii. A desk review of available data sources, best practices and methodologies in the Mediterranean for the monitoring and assessment of seafloor damage was elaborated. This study was used for the elaboration of the proposal on the Ecological Objective 6 on sea floor integrity.
- xiii. A regional review of available data on stranded sea turtles in the Mediterranean is ongoing.
- xiv. Contribution to the CAMP Bosnia and Herzegovina by implementing the sub-activity to prepare a document/report: "Marine species and habitats in the territorial waters of Bosnia and Herzegovina, issues, monitoring, protection and future financing".
- xv. The guidelines for monitoring microplastics from wastewater treatment plants are also under preparation by MED POL. Work is expected to be completed in the first Quarter of 2024.
- xvi. The Updated Regional Action Plan on seabirds listed in Annex II to SPA/BD Protocol was adopted by COP23.
- xvii. Support to Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro by MED POL including coaching and guidelines regarding implementation of substantive activities within the monitoring and assessment efforts for IMAP Pollution Cluster at national level; providing training modalities for national counterparts and contributing to training workshops, as required.
- xviii. Support by SPA/RAC to Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia for the preparation and operationalization of the national monitoring programme of CI 24. In close collaboration with MED POL and INFO/RAC the Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD) for IMAP Ecological Objective 10 - Common Indicator 24 (Ingestion and Entanglement on Marine Turtles) have been also prepared and IMAP InfoSystem is ready to host relevant data.
- xix. Support by SPA/RAC to Morocco and Tunisia to further advance and operationalize the monitoring programme of IMAP CI24 with focus on the ground implementation of the regional operational strategy.
- xx. SPA/RAC co-organised with ACCOBAMS Secretariat the Biannual cetacean conference for the south Mediterranean countries held in Monastir, Tunisia 14-16 November 2023.

108. In order to reinforce national capacity on seabird monitoring, the bird winter census was implemented by SPA/RAC, the AAO (BirdLife Partner in Tunisia), and Tour du Valat, in a training format where participants from Mediterranean countries took part. Moreover, support has been provided to the national team under the coordination of the Ministry of Environment of Libya for the implementation of the monitoring of Lesser Crested Ten colonies in Libya.

109. Plan Bleu/RAC has published in the framework of the EU-funded MSFD support-project ABIOMMED and with support from OFB, two reports in support of methodological guidance on ex-post socio-economic analysis of measures aiming at achieving GES in the Mediterranean: a Case study (Palamos fishing town), and a

publication on the evaluation of costs and benefits of strong protection measures in two French MPAs which are SPAMIs (Banyuls NP and Port-Cros NP).

110. The MSSD Dashboard has been updated for its 2023 version under the WESR Platform and presented as an on-line dashboard to the MSSD. A summary of the state of the sustainable development achievement at the Mediterranean level has been prepared by Plan Bleu/RAC. A detailed evaluation report will be prepared under the frame for the MSSD revision process by end of June 2024.

**Outcome 6.3. IMAP implementation and Environment and Development Observation provide updated and quality assured data in support of decision-making by Contracting Parties and assessment of GES.**

111. Further to the signing of a renegotiated UN to UN Agreement with IAEA/MESL, the Proficiency Tests (PTs) related to the determination of trace metals and organic contaminants in sediment and biota matrixes were finalized, along with the preparation of related Training Courses which took place in November 2023. The activities managed and coached by MED POL resulted in i) the preparation of the programmes for nutrients and contaminants in commonly consumed seafood, whereby the programme for biomarkers is expected to be provided in the coming biennium; ii) addressing the specific knowledge gaps of the IMAP competent laboratories, along with the technical missions to the IMAP competent laboratories with the greatest need.

112. The best practice review of Descriptor 8 (D08C04, 2018 Reporting) of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) was prepared by REMPEC in November 2022 to contribute to the development of IMAP Common Indicator 19.

113. The ILIAD pilot's capacity-building needs were evaluated, and a roadmap is currently under development. The assessment was conducted through a survey during the 2nd plenary meeting of the ILIAD project, and the results will lead to more tailored training sessions. Additionally, a series of virtual training sessions have been conducted, and still ongoing. Moreover, since January 2023, a series of webinars on ILIAD-related topics have been initiated with active participation from SPA/RAC, including the promotion of the SPA/RAC Mediterranean Biodiversity platform (MBP). Within the Activities of Iliad project, SPA/RAC and the Port of Valencia foundation launched a call to develop a NIS/ballast water monitoring plan and an early warning system to be applied for the Port of Segundo (Port of Valencia) as pilot. The monitoring plan will be aligned with the IMAP, Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean, and the regional BWM harmonised procedures and an early warning system based as appropriate on an eDNA approach and at the extent possible satellite oceanography and other Copernicus Marine data.

114. The MAMIAS web application is planned to be deployed on the SPA/RAC production server during March 2024 in order to be tested by selected users before its official release and use during the planned national training on data collection on NIS within the new GEF FISHEBM Med project.

115. SPA/RAC organised a training session on 6-7 February 2024 at the premises of Ispra - Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale, in Rome, on the use of its main data platforms: the Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI), Mediterranean Biodiversity platform (MBP), and the Mediterranean Marine Invasive Alien Species Platform (MAMIAS). The training is organized within the Bilateral agreement between the Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica (MASE) and UNEP/MAP, and in collaboration with INFO/RAC. The training focused on the processes of data collection, analysis, workflow, and dissemination of crucial information related to marine biodiversity and invasive species in the Mediterranean region through the use of SPA/RAC data platforms. Participants attending the training came from Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Lebanon, Egypt, and Tunisia.

116. SPA/RAC is organising the international event on the use of databases for marine conservation (marine biodiversity, fisheries, aquaculture, oceanographic data, pollution, and marine traffic) and its promotion that will take place at Al Hociema, Morocco from 4 to 6 March 2024, in coordination with the local NGO AGIR. The event is organised within the Bilateral agreement between the Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica (MASE) and UNEP/MAP.

117. Discussion has started with MEDPAN to update the data concerning marine protected areas on the web platform Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas Database (MAPAMED). GIS Data from various SPA/RAC projects were updated and checked for quality, to be available for the MBP in 2023 on: (a) marine Turtles in Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, Egypt, Italy and France; (b) marine spatial planning in Albania; and (c) Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean. Partnership will be established with data providers to cover some data gaps like EMODNET, COPERNICUS.

118. The WESR/Med platform is regularly enriched with new maps to reach 335 maps and indicators available on the Observatory on February 2024. One expert in GIS per country were invited to attend a capacity building workshop in Geneva on 3 and 4 October 2023. 10 country's representatives attended and expressed strong interest to have more training on MapX, the cartographic component of WESR/Med

**Programme 7: For informed and consistent advocacy, awareness, education and communication**

**Outcome 7.1. Stakeholders and policy makers properly informed about the state of the Mediterranean Sea and coast and aware of the environmental priority issues**

119. The English version of the Parliamentarian's Guide to protecting the Mediterranean Sea and coast, prepared by the Secretariat with substantive input by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) has been cleared by the UNEP Publications Committee. The Guide will also be published in Arabic, French, and Italian at the request of MASE Italy as the donor. It will be launched with support from UNEP Communication Division, which is also ensuring design services and the creation of a promotional video. The possibility of a launch event in the sidelines of the 9<sup>th</sup> Our Ocean Conference (OOC 2024, Athens Greece, 16-17 April 2024) is currently being considered.

120. [The Young Person's Guide to the MAP-Barcelona Convention](#) written and published by the CU in 2022 is being finalized for publishing in Arabic and Italian by INFO/RAC.

121. The MAP Coordinating Unit recruited the IISD to report on COP 23 and related events, The extensive coverage, including daily reports and highlights with, photos and videos are published on the Earth Negotiations Bulletin website ([Summary by IISD/ENB](#)). The CU also issued media advisories and news releases, organized the accreditation and coordinated the Secretariat's engagement with media attending the event.

122. The Secretariat prepared the concept notes in relation to UNEA-6, UNEP/MAP's representation in the 9<sup>th</sup> OOC (Athens, Greece, 16-17 April 2024), and the Mediterranean high-level event at the UN Ocean Conference (Nice, France, June 2025). The concept for a communication campaign for the MAP's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (MAP@50) is also being developed by the Secretariat.

123. Plan Bleu/RAC introduced a new communication format in 2023, the Rendez-vous du Plan Bleu, an online event that focuses on specific subjects (Med SOx ECA, sustainable cruising, MCSD, Etc.). The latest edition took place on 12 October 2023, jointly with MedECC, and will shed light on the recent impacts of climate change in the Mediterranean.

124. A joint effort at the MAP system level is on-going regarding gender mainstreaming. Gender focal points were identified by the RACs and together with the Coordinating Unit, a MAP Gender Strategy is under finalisation, in order to support and coordinate efforts made at the MAP level to reach the objectives of SDG 5.

125. Web content and stories were published in the news section of the UNEP/MAP website addressing the preparations and outcomes of COP23, also highlighting the IEFCA Award, and gender mainstreaming.

**Outcome 7.2. Citizen and general public awareness and outreach raised through citizen science and digital campaigns**

126. Plan Bleu/RAC continued its publication of monthly newsletters (1200 contacts, two languages) and further expanded its visibility on social networks (As of 31.12.2023: Twitter: 1908 followers (4 posts/week minimum); Facebook: 2242 followers (1 post/week); LinkedIn: 5351 followers (2 to 3 posts/week).

127. SPA/RAC produced and disseminated its agenda 2024, including a calendar with infographics and key messages on SPA/RAC activities under the theme "science in the service of marine biodiversity", to raise awareness about science-based biodiversity conservation.

128. SPA/RAC produced two videos on various themes: Empowering Local Civil Society for Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean Cities and SPAMIs (ENSERES project); *Why is it important to link gender mainstreaming to biodiversity conservation?*.

129. For the organisation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Mediterranean Symposium on Ecology and Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species (13-15 February 2024), SPA/RAC produced a mini website <https://act4med-marinebirds.org/why-attend/> and launched a digital campaign to inform about the event and raise awareness about bird conservation.

**Outcome 7.3. Towards a digital transformation: use of digital technologies to improve networking and MAP visibility**

130. Video tutorials in English and French on the use of the SPAMI Evaluation System were prepared.

131. Improvements have been made to the SPAMI collaboration platform to facilitate its administration and use.