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

Videoconference, 30 June 2023

**Report of the Meeting**

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## **Introduction**

1. The Fourth Steering Committee (SC) Meeting of the Project “*Support to Efficient Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach-based Integrated Monitoring and Assessment of the Mediterranean Sea and Coasts and to delivery of data-based 2023 Quality Status Report in synergy with the EU MSFD*” (EcAp-MED III) took place on 30 June 2023, on line, at the invitation of the United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP). The EcAp MED III Project is funded by the European Union (EU) Directorate-General for Environment (DG ENV) in the framework of the Programmed GPGC Strategic Programme Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Commission (EC) and UNEP.

2. The overall aims EcAp MED III Project are a) to further assist the Southern Mediterranean Contracting Parties to implement the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) adopted in 2016, as part of the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap; b) to contribute to the preparation and delivery of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR) in line with the 2023 MED QSR Roadmap milestones at national, sub-regional and regional level.

3. The SC Meeting was attended by the following Members, ensuring the quorum: one representative of the EC – DG ENV C.2, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator (Chair of the meeting) and the EcAp MED III Programme Management Officer. The representatives of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the EcAp Coordination Group were equally invited however they were not able to attend the meeting. The full list of participants is attached as Annex I to the present report.

### **Agenda item 1 and 2: Opening of the Meeting and Adoption of the Agenda**

4. The Meeting was opened on Friday, 30 June 2022 at 14.00 (Eastern European Time), by Ms. Tatjana Hema, UNEP/MAP Coordinator and Chair of the meeting.

5. Ms Hema welcomed the representative of the EC, Ms Anna Bobo Remijn, and thanked her for the support in the implementation of the project.

6. The representative of the EC, Ms Anna Bobo Remijn, thanked for the invitation and expressed her appreciation for the smooth cooperation with the Secretariat.

7. The Steering Committee reviewed and adopted the provisional Agenda, which appears as Annex 2 to the present report. The meeting was conducted in English.

### **Agenda item 3: Status of EU funded EcAp MED III Project Implementation**

8. Ms Busolini, the EcAp MED III Project Management Officer, presented the Progress Report in detail (UNEP/MED WG.569/2). The Secretariat informed the SC on the status of progress of the activities of the EcAp MED III Project since its Third Steering Committee meeting of November 2022, including the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR.

9. Key positive developments concern the progressive advancement of those activities that had cumulated some delay between 2021 and 2022 and that are now in line with the project revised workplan that has been extended for six additional months, until the end of February 2024.

10. The activities concern a) the further implementation of the IMAP at national level by the Beneficiary Countries, b) the finalization of the project activities that are propaedeutic to the delivery of the 2023 MED QSR, as the thematic and integrated CORMON meetings, c) the preparation of the 2023 MED QSR by the COP23 meeting in December 2023, d) the development and launching of the full-fledged website version of the 2023 MED QSR immediately after the validation of the QSR during the COP23 and e) the finalization of the expansion of the IMAP Info System and the support to the Beneficiary Countries in terms of additional trainings.

11. On Outcome 1 “Effective ‘on-the-ground’ national IMAP implementation by the Beneficiary Countries providing quality-assured data that will enable the development of the quality-assured, region-wide and data-based 2023 MED QSR”, the progress is mainly on track. Amendments have been signed with Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco to extend the duration of the SSFAs and to provide the BCs with additional budget to implement additional samples collection and pilot test the CHASE+ assessment methodology.

The contract with a Libyan national expert is about to be signed to implement national activities on pollution and marine litter, while activities on biodiversity advance steadily with the support of SPA/RAC.

The IMAP Info System has been expanded to include all mandatory CIs of IMAP and it is fully operational. In 2023 new datasets are being uploaded.

12. At the request of the representative of the EC, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator explained that it was not possible to apply the same approach of identifying a national expert also for Egypt to implement national activities on pollution and marine litter, as the political context is different.

13. On Outcome 2 ‘Regional scale progress and consensus for the monitoring, assessment, and reporting processes at national, sub-regional and regional levels’, the work has equally well advanced in the period November 2022 – June 2023. The main activities are related to the preparation and implementation of three Thematic CORMON meetings held in March 2023, as well as the integrated CORMON meeting held on 27 and 28 June 2023. Thanks to the work of the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and these meetings, the 2023 MED QSR is nearly finalized and will be presented to the EcAp Coordination Group on mid-September 2023, while the final version will be presented for endorsement to the December COP 23.

The SPI pilot has been finalized and the report, including the methodology and main outcome, have been delivered.

14. The remaining activities to be implemented by the end of the project in February 2024 are related to the finalisation of monitoring activities at national level, the upload of new data in the IMAP Info System and the finalisation of the IMAP Data Policy Annex, the finalization of the 2023 MED QSR and the launch of its on line version.

15. The EcAp MED III Project Management Officer presented the 1<sup>st</sup> version of the 2023 MED QSR website, being developed by INFO/RAC.

16. The representative of the EC suggested to seek for potential synergies with the European Environment Agency (EEA) to the extent possible and with the Wise Marine platform.

17. The UNEP/MAP Coordinator welcomed the suggestion and commented that at a later stage an agreement with EEA might be considered on data policy.

18. The Chair of the meeting thanked the representative of the EC for the flexibility in accepting the request for project no-cost six months extension and budget reallocation and for rapidly approving them at the beginning of the year. This will ensure the achievement of the main project results as well as a satisfactory level of expenditures, despite the difficulties the projects has faced.

19. In fact, also the project budget implementation shows a stable advancement and the level of commitments/expenditures indicates that the 75% has been committed/spent by mid-May 2023, while the projection of the additional committed amounts and expenditures by the end of June as well as the calculation of the project management costs until the end of the project, indicates that the project remaining amount is indicatively 60.000 USD.

20. The SC agrees that the EcAp MED III unspent amount could be utilised for a final event at regional level, as already discussed during the 3rd Steering Committee meeting. The regional level

should be organised by the end of January/beginning of February 2024 and in cooperation with the Marine Litter MED II project, with the objective of presenting the main results of the two projects, their follow up phase, EcAp MED PLUS and Marine Litter MED PLUS, as well as the 2023 MED QSR and its recommendations. In addition, also the SEMPA project could be presented and financially contribute, highlighting the synergies among the three projects coordinated by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat.

21. In the same line, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator also proposed a COP23 side event focusing the three projects.

22. The level of commitments and expenditures of the Regional Activity Centres (RACs) were also presented. The budget implementation progression shows that the 50% of the total budget allocated to the RACs has been paid while only the 18% remains to be committed. Given the extension of the project duration until February 2024, also the perspectives of the level of expenditures are reassuring. The UNEP/MAP Secretariat will keep monitoring each month the level of commitments and payments to cross check the budget implementation progression is confirmed, and act in due time in case difficulties are identified.

23. With reference to the issues at stake identified by the Third SC, the Secretariat informed that the G5 project assistant should join the team between July and September at the latest; the thematic and integrated CORMON meetings took place respectively in March and June as planned thus ensuring that the progressively evolving preparation of the 2023 MED QSR is timely discussed by the UNEP/MAP governance bodies; the unspent budget of Egypt for the implementation of the pollution and marine litter cluster of the national IMAP has been reallocated to other Beneficiary Countries (Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia); INFO/RAC has increased its level of expenditures from 0 to 22,50%.

24. On lessons learned as detailed in the meeting working document (UNEP/MED WG.569/2), the SC discussed more in details the project management approach that for the EcAp MED PLUS project should adopt a Country based approach, rather than a thematic approach. Accordingly, each RAC should take the responsibility to work with 2/3 countries across the project technical activities and independently from the thematic aspects, while the Secretariat would ensure coherence by coordinating periodic national Steering Committee meetings with the Beneficiary Countries. This approach would simplify the administrative burden in terms of number of legal agreements and ensure a reinforced coordination with the RACs as well as with the Beneficiary Countries.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Full-fledged EcAp MED PLUS project**

25. Ms Busolini presented the overall approach, main objectives and activities of the EcAp MED PLUS project. The project will be crucial to keep supporting the Beneficiary Countries commitment on IMAP implementation and review process, especially via technical and policy capacity building activities that will capitalise the outcomes of EcAp MED III, the environmental challenges exacerbated after COVID-19 as the climate change challenges, the recommendations of the 2023 MED QSR, the evolving policy context that includes EcAp roadmap review, the MSFD and MSP review as well as a number of relevant UNEP/MAP COP22 Decisions, including the need to update the Programmes of Measures (PoMs)/National Action Plans (NAPs) on biodiversity, pollution and marine litter.

26. The representative of the EC commented that it is crucial to profit of the review process of both EcAp and MSFD are undergoing and that according to the presentation, the EcAp MED PLUS project has well integrated the indication to clearly focus on the support to the South Mediterranean Beneficiary Countries.

27. The UNEP/MAP Coordinator confirmed that the budget will be mainly dedicated to the support to the Beneficiary Countries on IMAP review and PoMs/NAPs upgrade and development/implementation, while the Secretariat will implement the activities related to the regional governance with no budget needed, exception made for SPI activities.

**Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business**

28. No other business was raised

**Agenda Item 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

29. The approved conclusions of the SC meeting are presented in Annex III.

**Agenda Item 7: Closure of the Meeting**

30. Following customary courtesy exchanges and concluding remarks Meeting was declared closed at 16.00 (Eastern European Time) on 30 June 2023.

**Annex I**  
**List of Participants**

**List of Participants**

<b>UNEP/MAP</b>	<b>Tatjana Hema</b> Coordinator <a href="mailto:tatjana.hema@un.org">tatjana.hema@un.org</a>  <b>Patrizia Busolini</b> EcAp MED III Project Management Officer <a href="mailto:patrizia.busolini@un.org">patrizia.busolini@un.org</a>
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**Annex II**  
**Agenda of the Meeting**

## **Agenda**

**Friday, 30 June 2023**

- Agenda Item 1:** Opening of the Meeting
- Agenda Item 2:** Adoption of the Agenda
- Agenda Item 3:** Status of EU funded EcAp MED III Project Implementation
- Agenda item 4:** Full-fledged EcAp MED PLUS project
- Agenda Item 5:** Any Other Business
- Agenda Item 6:** Conclusions and Recommendations
- Agenda Item 7:** Closure of the Meeting

**Annex III**  
**Conclusions and Recommendations**

## Conclusions and Recommendations of the Meeting

1. The Fourth Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded Project EcAp MED III took note of the good process in the project implementation that shows significant improvement since the last SC meeting in November 2022, thus providing a good indication that all project activities are on track, with the exception for Egypt on cluster pollution and marine litter. As such, the request for six months no cost project extension was well justified and was necessary to ensure successful completion of the project.
2. The SC agrees that the EcAp MED III unspent amount of indicatively 60.000 USD could be utilised for a final event at regional level, as already discussed during the 3rd Steering Committee meeting. The regional level should be organised in cooperation with the Marine Litter MED II project, with the objective of presenting the main results of the two projects, their planned follow-up phase, EcAp MED PLUS and Marine Litter MED PLUS, as well as the 2023 MED QSR. In addition, also the SEMPA project could be presented and financially contribute, highlighting the synergies among the three projects coordinated by the UNEP/MAP Secretariat.
3. A COP23 side event dedicated to the three projects could equally be organised to share the results of the project achieved by then and promote its planned continuation.
4. The project management of the EcAp MED PLUS project, which is in preparation, should revise its approach if compared to EcAp MED III, by adopting a Country-based approach, rather than a thematic one. Accordingly, each RAC should work with 2/3 countries across the project technical activities and independently form the thematic aspects, while the Secretariat would ensure coherence by coordinating periodic national Steering Committee meetings of the Beneficiary Countries. This approach would simplify the administrative burden in terms of number of legal agreements and ensure a reinforced coordination with the RACs as well as with the Beneficiary Countries.
5. In the framework of the publication of the online version of the 2023 MED QSR, it is suggested to seek in the future for potential synergies with the European Environment Agency (EEA) to the extent possible and with the Wise Marine platform, and based on potential data policy agreements to ensure consistency in the information provided for the region in the different databases and seek further synergies in data collection/use.