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Integrated Meetings of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups (CORMONs)

Athens, Greece, 27-28 June 2023

Agenda Item 1.C.iii:

Report of the meeting of CORMON Coast and Hydrography, 28-29 March 2023

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Introduction

1. In accordance with the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work 2022-2023 adopted by the 22nd Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (Antalya, the Republic of Türkiye, 7-10 December 2021), PAP/RAC organized the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Monitoring (CORMON) on Coast and Hydrography held on 28 and 29 March 2023 in Marseille, France (WTC premises). The main objectives of the meeting were to (i) present and discuss the content of the chapters for the 2023 Quality Status Report (QSR) related to the IMAP Ecological Objectives (EOs) 7 and 8; (ii) discuss strengthening Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for the implementation of IMAP with a focus on CI 15 Hydrography; (iii) present the upgraded Guiding Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25 “Land cover change” and discuss the way forward; and (iv) agree on the definition of Good Environmental Status (GES) for the CI 16 “Length of coastline subject to physical disturbance due to the influence of human-made structures”.

Attendance

2. The meeting was attended by participants from 13 Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and the Republic of Türkiye.
3. Priority Actions Programme/Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) was present as the organizer, along with the Coordination Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and Plan Bleu, and the experts engaged with the SPI activity - namely from Mohammed V University Rabat and T-Elika Ltd.
4. The list of participants is attached as Annex I to this report.

Opening of the Meeting and Organizational Matters (Agenda Items 1 and 2)

5. The meeting was opened at 9:30 a.m. on 28 March 2023 by Mr. Marko Prem, PAP/RAC Deputy Director, who welcomed the participants and introduced the background and objectives of the meeting.

Rules of Procedure

6. The Meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/IG 43/6, annex XI), as amended by the Contracting Parties (UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.1/5 and UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5), would apply *mutatis mutandis* to their deliberations.

Election of Officers

7. Following rule 20 of the rules of procedure, the Meeting unanimously elected the following Officers:

Chair: Ms. Senida Džaić-Rghei (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Vice-chairs: Mr. Giordano Giorgi (Italy)

Ms. Mounia Hamdaoui (Morocco)

Mr. Emrah Soylemez (Türkiye)

Rapporteur: Mr. Rok Sozcka-Mandac (Slovenia)

Adoption of the Agenda

8. The Meeting reviewed and adopted the agenda and its timetable set out in documents UNEP/MED WG.549/1 and UNEP/MED WG.549/2, noting that simultaneous translation in English and French was to be provided during the Meeting. The final adopted agenda is presented in Annex II to this report.

2023 Quality Status Report (QSR): Content on IMAP Ecological Objectives (EO) 7 and 8 (Agenda item 3)

9. Mr. Marko Prem (PAP/RAC) presented PAP/RAC's contribution to the 2023 MED QSR chapters on EO7 'hydrographic alterations' and EO8 'coastal ecosystems and landscapes'. PAP/RAC has prepared three thematic assessment reports, namely on hydrographic alterations (CI 15) and on coastline artificialization (CI16), both at the Mediterranean scale and on land cover change (candidate CI 25) for the Adriatic sub-region. The proposal of the 2023 MED QSR chapters on Coast and Hydrography was presented for review and discussion by the Meeting with a view to its finalization for consideration by the Meeting of the Integrated CORMONs (envisaged for the end of June 2023). It was noted that the assessments of presented CIs (i.e., the content of the chapters) were based on national reports (by reporting to the IMAP Info system or in the frame of EcAp MED III and IMAP MPA projects), contributions from the scientific partners and compiled datasets from open-source data.
10. Regarding **Common Indicator 15**, it was noted that the impact on the marine environment (hydrographic alterations and consequently habitats) could be due to the combination of the following drivers: newly installed structures and climate change. New infrastructures may now have an impact because of climate change effects that wouldn't usually have an impact in previous decades. For example, warmer water could increase the incidence of algal blooms when new structures are built. Although it is not easy to distinguish the exact drivers of such changes, it is assumed that climate change would exert stronger impacts on hydrographic alterations.
11. Participants agreed that the link between CI15 and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) should be stronger.
12. It is obvious that for this particular indicator, countries had difficulties in monitoring and hence, in data reporting. Hence, it can be concluded that this indicator is not operational yet and certain changes need to be carried out - either the indicator will be further simplified (to include only the structures' immediate footprint where habitats

- will be completely lost) or it will be merged with the upcoming indicator on seabed integrity (EO6).
13. When discussing habitat loss, the Meeting commented that the loss of ecosystem services should be underlined, for example, the loss of *Posidonia* meadows as extremely valuable habitats.
 14. As for the indicators on climate change parameters, it was agreed that, for the time being, these should be included in the 2023 QSR and associated with the CI15. However, for future reference, these should be separated because climate change influences much more parameters than ones related to hydrography. Climate change is not a feature of the current EcAp Roadmap, but it needs to be part of the renewed EcAp Roadmap. Therefore, the climate change indicators should be developed and agreed upon by the Contracting parties in the future.
 15. Regarding **Common Indicator 16**, it was highlighted that most countries have reported at least one set of data, while three countries have also reported a second set (Italy, Malta and Spain). Although this indicates a good baseline overall, for most countries the trends cannot be assessed yet. On the other hand, based on the baseline assessment, countries now have the possibility to establish their own national GES.
 16. The Meeting agreed that the Mediterranean countries should strive to be as homogeneous as possible regarding dataset development, particularly in terms of scale and baseline year. However, since coastlines change through time (erosion), even a relatively short period can result in differences in the baseline.
 17. It was observed that within the *Key messages* sub-chapter the figures on the Mediterranean scale don't add up, so it was agreed that this discrepancy should be reviewed after the meeting.
 18. Moroccan representatives emphasized that, at the moment, they are the only country that has proposed GES for this indicator and this should be mentioned in the QSR.
 19. Greece and Cyprus announced that they would do their best to provide the CI16 data, at least to a certain extent, considering that the time available for drafting the QSR chapters is relatively short.
 20. Mr. Prem continued to showcase the QSR chapters with the **Candidate Common Indicator 25** which will be represented in QSR as a case study on the level of the Adriatic sub-region. The Meeting welcomed the proposed assessment for the Adriatic sub-region as highly relevant for a number of reasons - for example, the analysis is very cost-effective as it is based on common data sources, its spatial scale covers the whole territory and reveals trends in development that have important impacts to coastal biodiversity and landscapes, the processes within the protected areas and within the Low Elevation Coastal Zone (LECZ) are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts.

Solutions to strengthen the Science Policy Interface (SPI) - The case of CIs 1 and 15 in Morocco (Agenda item 4)

21. Under this Agenda Item, Mr. Antoine Laffite from Plan Bleu presented the main findings of two reports on scientific gaps, policy needs and difficulties to comply with the requirements of the Guidance Factsheet for CI 15 on hydrography in Morocco and also at regional level. The presentation focused on the integration of reflections and findings about difficulties/barriers and possible solutions/opportunities in assessing the CI 15 in terms of scientific and technical issues and gaps, as well as policy, governance, administrative and communication hardships and gaps.

22. The Meeting welcomed the work carried out in Morocco as an added value in identifying existing barriers and opportunities in the governance, legislation, communication, data acquisition and data sharing domains.
23. The exercise on SPI in Morocco has shown that national capacities exist but are not systematically formalised as processes, mechanisms, frameworks and structures. It was highlighted that, in general, an issue of how to bring scientists and policymakers together still remains because decision-makers and scientists have different needs, concerns and expectations.
24. Moroccan representatives emphasized that, in the future, it is essential to have all the documents related to the SPI process and to all other activities in general, translated into French on time, to avoid any complexities in francophone countries.
25. It was proposed to include the SPI case on Morocco in the MEdQSR2023.
26. It was noted that an important lesson learned from the Moroccan case, but also looking at the IMAP-MPA results and at some examples of EU countries reporting under MSFD for Descriptor 7, is that monitoring of CI 15 seems feasible at the local scale but could be too demanding to be implemented at the national level, particularly for countries with a long coastline and a large number of infrastructures (demanding in terms of hydrographic data, habitat data and use of simulation models).
27. Institutions responsible for the monitoring of Common Indicators 15 and 16, and CCI25, should be identified as soon as possible in the countries that haven't done so yet.
28. In order to improve IMAP and the related SPI, there is a need to reform institutions at the country level and strengthen their components and existing mechanisms in order to be able to monitor and manage ongoing pressures and impacts on the coastal and marine environment.
29. Decision-makers need indicators that "raise the alarm", implying that scientists and technicians need to attract the attention of policymakers with relevant and straightforward statistics which includes engaging key figures.
30. From the technical point of view, more work on information exchange platforms, communication forums and all other types of web interfaces is needed. The repository of EIAs was mentioned, although the realization of such a repository could be very challenging because certain entities are often reluctant to disclose data.

The Guiding Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25 "Land cover change" (Agenda item 5)

31. Mr. Ivan Sekovski, Programme Officer at PAP/RAC, presented the proposal for the amendments to the Guiding Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25 "Land Cover Change", based on the experience and lessons learned from the testing on the Adriatic sub-region. The following amendments were proposed:
 - a) Low Elevation Coastal Zone of < 5 m asl to be added as a reporting unit. This is an additional analytical unit belonging to the elevation breakdown within the coastal area. It is a zone contiguous to the coast that indicates areas prone to future risks caused by climate change: coastal flooding and erosion.
 - b) Coastal administrative units (cities/municipalities) to be added as reporting units. These represent the lowest level of an authority responsible for the development of spatial/urban plans and managing the coast.
 - c) Change of minimum mapping unit (from 25 to 1 ha), minimum change detection (from 5 to 1 ha) and temporal scale to 3 years. Following the improvements in methodology and availability of open-source high-quality data, it was proposed to harmonize the Land cover classes with the Land Cover Classification System

(LCCS) developed by the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-LCCS system).

Finally, the most recent open-source global datasets relevant to indicator calculation were indicated.

32. The proposed inclusion of the Low Elevation Coastal Zone of 5 m above the sea level as an additional reporting unit was welcomed by the Meeting as an area within the coastal zone potentially prone to future risks caused by climate change, such as sea level rise, coastal flooding and erosion. It was also emphasized that within this zone, each country could implement country-specific measures to cope with the risks based on the most relevant climate change scenario for the country.
33. Participants raised an issue on the cases where national datasets are more detailed than the open-source ones, e.g., more up-to-date and with a higher resolution, and agreed to use such data if available.
34. Coastal administrative units were considered as introducing additional complexity in reporting. Hence, the focus of the reporting should be at the national level, the results of which could then serve as an indication of sub-national areas to which measures need to be applied in order to achieve GES.
35. The Meeting disagreed on the proposed 3-year reporting cycle and agreed to use the 6-year cycle as the most appropriate, i.e., the reporting aligned with the IMAP reporting cycle.
36. Finally, the participants highlighted the importance of the Land cover change candidate common indicator 25 as one of the priority indicators, and strongly recommended including it in the list of IMAP common indicators as early as possible.

Definition of GES for the CI 16 “Length of coastline subject to physical disturbance due to the influence of human-made structures” (Agenda Item 6)

37. Mr. Marko Prem presented the document on assessment criteria and the guiding document for their application considering the IMAP Common Indicator 16. The document was prepared by PAP/RAC with the support of the EcAp MED III project partners and its draft has already been presented and discussed at the previous CORMON Coast and hydrography meeting (25 November 2021). It was presented along its three main components: the list of the assessment criteria; the method on how to prepare the baseline status of the coastline and specify GES; and the instructions on how to prepare the periodical assessment reports.
38. The Meeting added that the GES could have different thresholds within a country (in particular within larger countries) where there are significant differences between sub-national areas regarding coastal artificialization.
39. It was noted that adaptation to climate change should be taken into account since some structures could be constructed for the purpose of coastal adaptation to climate change that would impact GES for this indicator.
40. Further criteria were highlighted as relevant such as population density and growth, while the possibility of upgrading existing structures for multi-purpose use to serve a wider population was mentioned as a relevant target to add.
41. The Meeting welcomed the invitation to countries to prepare or complement the CI16 baseline status report with the definition of country-specific GES based on the assessment criteria defined in the report.

It should be highlighted that certain Contracting Parties also provided additional comments and suggestions in writing (European Commission, France, Israel, Malta, Montenegro, and Spain) which were fully taken into consideration during the presentations of relevant Agenda Items, and those for which consensus was achieved are referred to in this Report, particularly in Conclusions and recommendations (Agenda Item 7).

Conclusions and recommendations of the meeting (Agenda Item 8)

42. Following presentations and discussions of all agenda items, the Meeting agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

Agenda item 3: 2023 Quality Status Report (QSR): Contents on IMAP Ecological Objectives 7 and 8

The Meeting appreciated and reviewed the draft document UNEP/MED WG.549/3 on the IMAP Ecological Objectives (EO) 7 and 8 for the 2023 Quality Status Report (QSR). The Meeting provided comments structured along the main chapters, as follows:

1.1 Common indicator 15: Hydrographic alterations

- Under the Key messages and Key findings chapters to highlight the difficulties that countries have with the monitoring of this indicator instead of saying that countries do not provide data.
- In order to facilitate the reporting on this indicator, the following solutions for the revision of the CI 15 Guidance Factsheet were proposed:
- To further simplify the Guidance Factsheet so as to only request reporting on the structure's footprint where habitats will be completely lost;
- To merge this indicator with the upcoming indicator on seabed integrity (EO6).
- It was suggested to separate climate change parameters from this indicator and to develop a specific set of climate change indicators.

1.2 Common indicator 16: Coastline

- Verify the figures in the Key messages;
- Make reference to the Guiding document on how to define the GES that was tested in Morocco;
- Greece and Cyprus will make their best efforts to provide monitoring data by the end of June 2023.

Agenda item 4: Solutions to strengthen Science Policy Interface

- The Meeting acknowledged the difficulties in monitoring the CI 15 encountered by all Mediterranean countries, and the added value provided by the SPI exercise in Morocco in identifying the existing obstacles and opportunities belonging to: 1) Governance; 2) Legislation; 3) Communication; 4) Data acquisition and 5) Data sharing.
- The Meeting agreed that the exercise on the SPI in Morocco had shown that national capacities existed but were not systematically formalized as processes, mechanisms, frameworks and structures. There is a need for operationalization in order to meet the IMAP CI 15 monitoring requirements.

- The Meeting recognized the usefulness of improved integration of monitoring of the EO1 (CI 1), EO7 (CI 15), EO8 (CI 16) and integration across the entire IMAP system and under the SPI perspective, in order to effectively address the monitoring and assessment complexity.
- Additional funds should be mobilized to undertake the aforementioned activities.

Agenda item 5: The Guiding Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25: Land-cover change

The Meeting had a discussion on the proposed amendments to the existing Guidance Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25 amounting to the following:

- The proposed inclusion of the Low Elevation Coastal Zone of 5 m above sea level as an additional reporting unit was welcomed. This is the area within the coastal zone potentially exposed to future risks caused by climate change, such as sea-level rise, coastal flooding and erosion. Within this zone, each country can implement country-specific measures to cope with the risks based on the climate change scenario most relevant for the country.
- In case updated national datasets with a better resolution are available, these should be used instead of the open-source datasets proposed in the Guidance Factsheet.
- The newly-proposed reporting units – coastal administrative units - were considered as unnecessarily complex. The focus of the reporting on this indicator is at the national level. Its results can serve as an indication to the countries on which measures need to be applied in sub-national areas in order to achieve the GES.
- As the most appropriate temporal scale, the Meeting agreed to use the 6-year reporting cycle to be aligned with the IMAP reporting cycle.

Similar to the Guiding document for the definition of the GES for the CI 16 on coastline, the Meeting agreed on the need to prepare a similar guiding document for the CCI 25. This document should take into account a number of criteria, such as impacts on the provisions of coastal ecosystem services, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, degradation and restoration of ecosystems.

The Meeting emphasized the importance of the Land-cover change candidate common indicator 25 as one of the priority indicators, and strongly recommended including it in the List of IMAP common indicators as early as possible.

Agenda item 6: Definition of GES for the CI 16: Coastline

The Meeting appreciated the “Guiding document for application of assessment criteria for the IMAP Common Indicator 16” to support the countries to define the country-specific Good Environmental Status (GES), and it will be used for future assessments once the next sets of monitoring data are available.

The participants agreed to consider other relevant criteria when defining the GES, such as the population density and growth, activities relative to the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

As a potential additional target within the socio-economic context, it was agreed to consider the possibility of upgrading the existing structures for a multi-purpose use to serve a wider population.

The Meeting agreed to invite the countries to prepare or complement the baseline status report with the definition of the country-specific GES based on the assessment criteria.

Closure of the meeting (Agenda Item 9)

43. The Chairperson closed the Meeting at 13:00 on Wednesday, 29 March 2023.

Annex I List of participants

REPRESENTATIVES OF CONTRACTING PARTIES

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	Ms. Senida Džaić-Rghei Hydro-Engineering Institute, Sarajevo
CROATIA	Ms. Sunčana Habrun Head of Sector, Institute for Spatial Development, Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets
CYPRUS	Mr. Stelios Zervos Department of Public Works, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Works, Cyprus
FRANCE	Mr. Fabrice Bernard Délégué Délégation Europe & International, Conservatoire du littoral
GREECE	Mr. Kapsimalis Vasilios Research Director Department of Marine Geology and Geophysics Institute of Oceanography Hellenic Centre for Marine Research Mr. Dimitris Velaoras Institute of Oceanography Hellenic Centre for Marine Research
ITALY	Mr. Giordano Giorgi Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), Rome, Italy
LEBANON	Mr. Adel Yacoub Head of Department of Natural Resources Protection, Ministry of Environment, Lebanon

MONTENEGRO	Ms. Marija Nišavić Department for Spatial Planning, Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Development and Urbanism, Podgorica, Montenegro
MOROCCO	Ms. Mounia Hamdaoui Service du Littoral Ministère de la Transition Energétique et du Développement Durable
SLOVENIA	Mr. Rok Sozcka Mandac Institute for Water of the Republic of Slovenia
SPAIN	Mr. Safo Piñeiro Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO), Madrid, Spain
TUNISIA	Mr. Adel Abdouli Directeur de l'Observatoire du Littoral à l'APAL
TÜRKİYE	Mr. Emrah Soylemez Ministry of Environment Urbanisation and Climate Change Directorate General of Spatial Planning Department of Spatial Strategies and Environmental Plans

Annex II Meeting agenda

Day 1: Tuesday, 28 March 2023		Relevant documents
9.00 – 9.30	Registration of participants	
9.30 – 9.45	Agenda item 1 Opening of the meeting	
9.45 – 10.00	Agenda item 2 Organizational matters	UNEP/MED WG.549/1 UNEP/MED WG. 549/2 UNEP/MAP WG.549/Inf.1
10.00 – 13.00	Agenda item 3 2023 Quality Status Report (QSR): Content on IMAP Ecological Objectives (EO) 7 and 8	UNEP/MED WG.549/3
10.00 – 10.45	3.1 Chapter on EO 7 - Hydrographic alterations: Common Indicator 15 <i>“Location and extent of the habitats impacted directly by hydrographic alterations”</i> Presentation and discussion	
10.45 – 11.00	Break	
11.00 – 11.30	3.1 Cont. Discussion	
11.30 – 13.00	3.2 Chapter on EO 8 Coastal ecosystems and landscapes 3.2.1 Common Indicator 16 <i>“Length of coastline subject to physical disturbance due to the influence of human-made structures”</i> Presentation and discussion	
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch break	
14.30 – 16.00	3.2.2 Candidate Common Indicator 25 <i>“Land cover change”</i> Presentation and discussion	
16.00 - 16.15	Break	
16.15 – 17.15	Agenda item 4 Solutions to strengthen Science Policy Interface (SPI) - The case of CIs 1 and 15 in Morocco Presentation and discussion	UNEP/MED WG. 549/4 UNEP/MED WG.549/Inf.2
End of Day 1		
Day 2: Wednesday, 29 March 2023		
9.30 – 11.00	Agenda item 5 The Guiding Factsheet for the Candidate CI 25 <i>“Land cover change”</i> Presentation and discussion	UNEP/MED WG. 549/5 UNEP/MED WG.549/Inf.3 UNEP/MED WG.549/Inf.4 UNEP/MED WG.549/Inf.5
11.00 – 11.15	Break	
11.15 – 13.00	Agenda item 6 Definition of GES for the CI 16 <i>“Length of coastline subject to physical disturbance due to the influence of human-made structures”</i> Presentation and discussion	UNEP/MED WG. 549/6 UNEP/MED WG.549/Inf.6

13.00 – 14.30	Lunch break	
14.30 – 15.00	Agenda item 7 Any other business	
15.00 – 15.15		
15.15 – 16.15	Agenda item 8 Conclusions and recommendations of the meeting	UNEP/MED WG. 549/7
16.15	Agenda item 9 Closure of the meeting	