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**Enhancing the efficacy of the Regional Activity Centre for
Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean**

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Enhancing the efficacy of the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean

1. Preamble

In the context of the assessment of RAC/SPA carried out in 2003 (Document UNEP(DEC)/MEDIG.15/Inf.6), with a view to the 13th Meeting of the Contracting Parties in Catania (11-14 November 2003), it was proposed that “the Centre should prepare a brief strategic document which presents a vision and the role of the Centre with regard to its partners in the region”.

A first approach to this issue (Document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG 268/Inf.15), gave rise to a debate at the Meeting of RAC/SPA’s Focal Points in Seville in 2005. The Centre was then requested to reflect further.

Taking the Seville discussions into consideration, the Centre did not deem it appropriate to prepare “a strategy” which could interfere with the strategies adopted in the MAP context, particularly the SMDD and the Strategic Action Programme for the conservation of biological diversity in the Mediterranean (SAP BIO). Instead it focused on formulating an intervention approach intended to enhance its efficacy, bearing in mind the Parties’ recommendations for implementing the SPA Protocol and integrating SAP BIO within the Centre’s activities. The present document makes suggestions for defining the Centre’s intervention approach with a view to these being considered at the Eighth Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs (Palermo, 6-9 June 2007).

2. Brief reminder of the stakes concerning biodiversity at international and regional level

It is particularly important when elaborating the intervention approach to bear in mind the stakes and challenges regarding the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. The conclusions of the diagnosis made in the context of SAP BIO are still topical and will serve as a basis for defining the intervention approach.

The elements that guided the elaborating of this document spring from the following international processes:

- The Earth Summit (2002) recommended the creation by 2012 of “representative marine biodiversity networks”
- In its Resolution 58/240, the United Nations General Assembly placed the issue of marine biodiversity in its resolutions on maritime law, encouraging the states to start protecting vulnerable and threatened marine ecosystems and
- addressing the issue of protecting biodiversity outside zones of national jurisdiction
- IUCN recognised that marine biodiversity had not received the attention it deserved regarding protection; it was stressed that marine protected areas only constituted 0.1% of the surface area of seas and oceans and that it was necessary to have more ambitious objectives
- After the Jakarta mandate was adopted at the 7th Conference of Parties, the Convention on Biological Diversity stressed in particular the need to work towards a marine biodiversity protection system beyond the zones of national jurisdiction, and to

protect 10% of the marine areas in waters under national jurisdiction. An action programme was adopted for the period 2004-2010

- Within the IMO, initiative followed initiative to establish particularly sensitive sea areas (PSSA), and a Convention on ballast water was adopted
- The regional fishing management organisations progressively integrated sustainability stakes and the FAO published worrying appraisals on fishing
- Specific MEAs, particularly CITES, attacked with greater ambition protection issues for marine protected species
- Finally, we should stress the action of the European Community, with the preparation of a marine strategy and a strong determination to strengthen the implementing of the Habitats Directive in coastal and marine areas.

The Mediterranean must bear in mind this international and European context aimed at enhancing marine and coastal biodiversity. At the level of regional governance, the Barcelona Convention constitutes the pertinent intergovernmental framework, with henceforth the legal capacity to intervene throughout the region's marine and coastal space. At the legal level, the new SPA Protocol, signed in 1999 and so far ratified by 15 Contracting Parties, allows a response to these stakes.

SAP BIO, approved by the Meeting of Contracting Parties in November 2003, is also an important approach, particularly with regional actors being involved in the process of preparation and then of follow-up, as well as its being followed through at country level in the shape of national action plans.

Moreover, many international bodies have stepped up their presence in the Mediterranean, such as the Ramsar Convention, IUCN and WWF, and financial instruments can be mobilized for this sector, in particular GEF, MEDA, bilateral cooperation and Foundations.

Lastly, the adoption in 2005 of SAP BIO by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention represents an important stage in the planning and consistency of the action of the Contracting Parties and the concerned regional actors.

3. RAC/SPA's mandates

On the grounds of the provisions of the SPA Protocol, and bearing in mind the expectations of countries as expressed in the Centre's assessment process, the results of which were presented to the Parties in 2003, the Centre must focus on the following three main assignments:

- The assignment of the Secretariat of the SAP/BD Protocol liaising with the MAP's Coordinating Unit
- The Centre's assignment to inform on biodiversity
- The assignment of technical assistance to the riparian countries for implementing the Protocol and the Parties' recommendations.

1. *The functions of the Protocol's Secretariat*

To carry out the functions of the Protocol's Secretariat, the Centre must cover the following issues:

Managing the processes related to protected areas, in particular:

- Managing the SPAMI process: drawing up the files submitted by the countries, to collect the opinions of the Focal Points, following up commitments made, reviewing the List

- Following up the countries' designations of SPAs and generally the SPA database
- Cooperating with the Secretariats of other European and international conventions and processes which have a marine protected area-related side (PSSA/IMO, Habitats Directive, Réseau Emeraude, CBD Process related to biodiversity, including out at sea.

Actions related to threatened species, including:

- Monitoring already approved 'species' Action Plans: assessing the implementation of the Action Plan, identifying the strong points and weaknesses, looking for partnerships, proposal for updating
- Possibly elaborating new action plans with regard to the state of populations.

Other Protocol-linked actions such as:

- Monitoring actions related to species whose use is regulated, and those related to introductions of non-native or genetically modified species and, lastly, preparing guidelines and common criteria in the fields where Article 16 of the SPA/BD Protocol applies.

Finally, the Centre must actively contribute to the implementing of the reports system and the conformity monitoring mechanism that is presently being set up as part of MAP after the decisions of principle already made by the Contracting Parties.

To help the Centre, the Advisory Committee for monitoring SAP BIO has already been reactivated for this biennium. This process enables necessary and useful inter-organisation dialogue to be organised. After the countries so requested, the Centre drew up its work framework for the coming biennium as regards SAP BIO and suggested an operational planning to facilitate its implementation (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.308/5).

2. The functions of centre for biodiversity information

RAC/SPA is not a scientific research body; it does not do research and does not fund research programmes. However, its activity is fully underpinned by scientific knowledge and its staff is mainly made up of executives with scientific training in the field of marine science.

To support programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biological diversity in the Mediterranean, it is important that the Centre:

- carries on a scientific watch that enables the changing knowledge related to the field it covers in the Mediterranean to be monitored
- be able to satisfy the concerned countries' and organisations' information requirements (scientific, technical and legal) to help them carry out actions relating to marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean
- regularly prepare assessments on the state of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean. These assessments are to be done if necessary in collaboration with qualified partners.

To this end the Centre can exploit the databases and inventories it has for several years been setting up, improving them and integrating them within the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM=Exchange Centre) on biodiversity, which was started up two years ago in compliance with the Parties' recommendations.

3. *The functions of technical assistance to the riparian countries with a view to implementing the Protocol and the Parties' recommendations

This is a crucial part of the Centre's mandate. The countries regularly ask for the Centre's technical assistance, and the assessment of RAC/SPA revealed that several Focal Points

considered that helping the countries carry out actions to implement the provisions of the SPA Protocol must be the Centre's main priority.

But the Centre's human – and especially financial – means are absolutely unequal to satisfying this objective, for MAP and its institutional structures are not intended to be assistance and/or funding structures. Given the importance of this function, and the sizeable plus it can give to the Mediterranean region, the Centre, in collaboration with MAP's Coordinating Unit, has to find the means to mobilize the necessary funds for such assistance.

4. Suggestions for enabling the Centre to better carry out its mandates

1. **Enhancing RAC/SPA's assessment function in the context of the Protocol's Secretariat*

The functions entrusted to RAC/SPA by the SPA Protocol as set out above lead it to develop a scientific and technical assessment function.

In the context of implementing the Protocol, RAC/SPA has to:

- assess the status of the species, giving rise to the adoption and implementation of action plans regarding that species
- contribute to following up SPAMI files and/or revising the SPAMI List
- draw up requests to amend the Lists of Species appearing in the Annex to the Protocol with a view to possibly revising these
- possibly assess critical situations of Protocol application at the request of the Contracting Parties and the Coordinating Unit in the context of the conformity control mechanism.

Other activities appearing in RAC/SPA's mandate under Article 25 of the Protocol may also lead to assessment actions, particularly assistance to the states for setting up and managing SPAs or preparation of SPA management plans.

This assessment function implies that the Centre set up, after acceptance by the Meeting of Focal Points, precise assessment protocols and approach. Actions towards this end are now under way (Annex 2 and 3) and must be continued. This assessment function must also concern the actions of the Centre itself, and must give rise to assessment procedures in terms of activities carried out and also in terms of the efficacy of such activities when compared to the target objectives.

The status of the assessments thus made must be designed and presented with rigour and openness.

Concerning more particularly the functions of expertise on critical issues (e.g. revising the SPAMI List, considering how far the conditions imposed at the time a site was put on the SPAMI List have been satisfied, the effectiveness of protecting one species or one SPA), the Centre must involve the concerned countries throughout the assessment process, including the open consideration of experts' reports, with the final decisions falling within the competence of the Parties.

2. **Enhancing the scientific watch and the monitoring of biodiversity, and increasing the actions of information on biodiversity*

To enhance its efficacy, the Centre has to strengthen scientific watch in a way that appropriately defines the terms of reference of the assessments it has to make, "to

successfully complete the exchange of scientific and technical information between the Parties” in compliance with Article 25 of the Protocol and to set up efficient databases, accessible via the Mediterranean CHM, and to increase the scientific quality of its publications and reports.

This scientific watch will particularly help to nurture more substantially than in the past the documents published by MAP and its Centres in the field of biodiversity.

To this end it is necessary to mobilize the required human means for data collection and compilation and a multidisciplinary work group, responsible for ensuring the quality of the data.

As to aspects of monitoring, so far MAP has especially focused on the continuous monitoring of marine pollution; nothing like this has been done in the field of marine biodiversity.

Information in this field is patchy; there is no guaranteed follow-up of trends based on indicators. This situation is a general feature of the field of biodiversity at national, regional and world level, as the Imoseb project, launched after the 2005 UNESCO Conference in Paris, shows. It is particularly critical in the marine field.

RAC/SPA’s medium-term objective must be to try to substantially improve this situation, bearing in mind future methodological progress, and to suggest that the Parties set up a continuous biodiversity monitoring mechanism, to be built up in stages.

RAC/SPA manages an internet site. It publishes documents intended either for a public of experts: proceedings of conferences (e.g. marine vegetation), species action plans, brochure on the Protocol, or a wider public (posters).

However, all this information back-up has not rendered RAC/SPA’s action sufficiently visible. Now, the field of biodiversity implies that continuous attention be paid to communication, because it is vital that the awareness the public like actors and decision-makers have of this issue be heightened, as regards both problems and solutions. And this is what the NGOs, which are very active and professional in this field, are doing.

MAP’s action in the various fields, including marine and coastal biodiversity, remains little known, as was highlighted by the different assessments. Recognition of this led to the creation of RAC INFO.

RAC/SPA therefore suggests collaborating with RAC/INFO in accordance with its mandate to elaborate a more structured information programme directed to the concerned publics.

3. **The functions of technical assistance to the riparian countries with a view to implementing the Protocol and the Parties’ recommendations*

Developing technical assistance to the countries can only be done via RAC/SPA’s recourse to outside funding that, in the present situation of financial sources available at bilateral and multilateral level, involves the preparing and submitting of projects to the competent bodies.

RAC/SPA has already started on a policy of projects directed at support for the countries. This was the case of the MedMPA project, funded by the European Commission, and is today the case of a project funded by private sponsorship.

It is important that the Centre deepen this approach by projects that have recourse to:

- multilateral funds like the GEF, FFEM and MEDA

- help that can be given in the context of very active bilateral cooperation in the Mediterranean region, including non-Mediterranean European countries and other OECD countries.

Setting up projects must also include management staff, in order to avoid making the workload of the Centre's executives even heavier.

To this end, the Centre must give itself the capacity to prepare projects which require both great scientific, administrative and financial expertise and a great deal of time to devote to elaborating requests and consulting the partners to be involved in the projects (governments, NGOs, etc.).

These projects could be prepared in partnership with those regional organisations that are active in the field of biodiversity. This partnership approach should become the rule in this field, as in others.

The projects should not only include technical support but also training and capacity building programmes for the concerned countries, in order that in the long run the concerned countries should have capacities that enable them to carry out their obligations under the Protocol.

Bearing in mind the curb on action that the lack of financial resources represents, the GEF's current reticence about funding SAP BIO follow-up, and the fact that the 2020 Horizon Initiative does not include marine biodiversity as one of its priorities, we should define a strategy for approaching backers and starting a Donors' Meeting on SAP BIO.