

PROGRAMME 2: TOWARDS HEALTHY MEDITERRANEAN ECOSYSTEMS AND ENHANCED BIODIVERSITY

General introduction

58. The Mediterranean remains a hotspot for marine biodiversity and endemism, which are fragile and threatened by species extinctions, habitat losses, pollution and climate change. The preservation of these marine and coastal habitats is not only vital in terms of their unique biodiversity but also play an essential role in water quality regulation, coastal protection, carbon fixation and storage and increased resilience from climate change as well as providing feeding, breeding or nursery grounds, including species of commercial interest for fisheries and endangered or threatened species, such as the seagrass *Posidonia oceanica*, which is endemic to the Mediterranean. Whilst there have been significant advances towards a strengthened and coordinated approach to protect and restore key vulnerable habitats and species, the Mediterranean sea and its coasts are under constant and growing human pressure caused by increasing population in coastal and urban areas (where one out of three people live in a Mediterranean coastal region), an additional 360 million tourists per year (~27% of world tourism in 2017), intensive resource exploitation and increasing maritime transport.

59. Programme 2 aims at the protection, preservation and sustainable management of marine and coastal areas of particular natural and cultural value, and threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna, in line with the SDG's and the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This will be achieved through assistance to the Contracting Parties in meeting their obligations under Articles 4 and 10 of the Barcelona Convention, and under the "*Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean*" (SPA/BD Protocol), Ecosystem Approach-related COP decisions and the "*Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region*" (Post-2020 SAP-BIO), currently under development, as well as the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development (MSSD). To guide and facilitate the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol and Post-2020 SAP-BIO, a number of regional strategies and action plans have been developed, adopted and regularly updated, aiming at the protection, preservation and sustainable and effective management of marine and coastal areas of particular natural and cultural value and threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna:

- The "*Regional Working Programme for the Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Sea including the High Sea*", and the emanating "*Roadmap for a Comprehensive, Coherent Network of Well-Managed MPAs to Achieve Aichi Target 11 in the Mediterranean*";
- Eight Action Plans for the conservation and/or management of endangered or threatened species and key habitats: Mediterranean Monk Seal, Marine Turtles, Cetaceans, Marine Vegetation, Marine and Coastal Birds, Cartilaginous Fishes (Chondrichthyans), Coralligenous and other Calcareous Bio-concretions, and Dark Habitats;
- A Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Mediterranean Monk Seal;
- An Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea; and
- The Mediterranean Strategy on Ships' Ballast Water Management Strategy and its Action Plan.

60. To improve synergy and avoid overlapping and duplication of activities, collaboration will be enhanced with relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and other regional, national and local stakeholders, as well as the MAP Components. Many of the regional partners collaborating in marine conservation issues rely very much on technical tools, strategic documents and other outputs produced within the Barcelona Convention context.

Contribution to global and regional priorities and targets

61. Programme 2 directly contributes to a number global and regional objectives and targets including the SDG's and actions towards the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration as well as multilateral environmental agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and Post-2020 Global Diversity Framework, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and its Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and its Strategic Vision 2021-2030, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and its Strategic Plan 2016-2024, and the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic area (ACCOBAMS). It also contributes to European level policies such as the EU Green Deal, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and Birds and Habitats Directives, where applicable.

62. For the development of Programme 2, due consideration was given to the recommendations of two reports on Analysis of Existing Regional Measures identifying gaps vis a vis the achievement of Good Environmental Status and potential new/updated regional and national measures, building on the work that has been since undertaken in line with these recommendations, i.e. strengthen implementation of SAP BIO and Action Plans in key areas, enhance MPA and other spatial measures networks and improve their management, support restoration actions, improve NIS control and management, enhance protection of sea-floor integrity, better address impacts from aquaculture and fisheries related activities etc.

Programme 2 key relevant SDG targets:

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| Goal 14. Life below Water: | Targets 14.2, 14.4, 14.5 |
| Goal 12. Responsible Consumption and Production: | Target 12.2 |
| Goal 15. Life on Land: | Targets 15.5, 15.8, 15.9, 15a |

63. It also considers the resolutions of UNEA and in particular UNEA-5 which will be conducted virtually on 22-23 February 2021, with the overall theme of "Strengthening Actions for Nature to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals". Also important are the Contributions of the UN Environment Assembly to the 2020 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development [\[LINK\]](#) which notes that the COVID-19 outbreak calls for the urgent need to address threats to wildlife and ecosystems and recognizes the role of regional level coordination as key to address transboundary issues and facilitate regionally coherent approaches.

64. Programme 2 is also coordinated with global and regional partners in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), ACCOBAMS, relevant EU Directives and Strategies, including the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity strategy for 2030 and the EU nature restoration targets under development, as well as to MSFD where applicable, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN), the Trust Fund for Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (The MedFund), OCEANA, etc. It is in line with UNEP's Marine and Coastal Strategy 2020-2030 Strategic Objective 3.

Objectives

65. Programme 2 includes the following strategic objectives linked to the Specially Protected Areas and Biodiversity, and ICZM Protocols:

1. To protect, preserve and manage in a sustainable and environmentally sound way areas of particular natural or cultural value notably by the establishment of specially protected areas in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction as provided for/in line with Article 5 of the Biodiversity and SPA Protocol of the Barcelona Convention;
2. To protect, preserve and manage threatened or endangered species of flora and fauna and their habitats; and
3. To ensure preservation of the integrity of coastal and marine ecosystems, landscapes and geomorphology.

Relevant Ecological Objectives:

- EO 1. Biological diversity is maintained or enhanced: the quality and occurrence of coastal and marine habitats and the distribution and abundance of coastal and marine species are in line with prevailing physiographic, hydrographic, geographic, and climatic conditions;
- EO 2. Non-indigenous species introduced by human activities are at levels that do not adversely alter the ecosystem;
- EO 3. Populations of selected commercially exploited fish and shellfish are within biologically safe limits, exhibiting a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock;
- EO 4. Alterations to components of marine food webs caused by resource extraction or human induced environmental changes do not have long-term adverse effects on food web dynamics and related viability; and
- EO 6. Sea-floor integrity is maintained, especially in priority benthic habitats;
- EO 8. The natural dynamics of coastal areas are maintained and coastal ecosystems and landscapes are preserved; and
- Contribution to all other EO's in particular EO5, EO9, EO10, and EO11.

Outcomes

66. The 2022-2027 MTS will achieve the following outcomes and associated Indicative targets/Indicators.

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

67. To ensure ecosystem function for the future, restoration programs must: (1) learn from the past; (2) integrate ecological knowledge; (3) advance regeneration techniques and systems; (4) overcome biotic and abiotic disturbances. Certain habitats are not particularly resilient, that is, making them vulnerable to adverse outcomes that are irreversible. In this sense irreversibility is indirectly proportional to a system's resilience. A system with greater biological diversity is also usually more resilient than one with less diversity. The aim of this outcome is to assist the Contracting Parties to implement national measure to restore the most resilient marine and coastal habitats and address the artificialisation of the coast and soils, as mean to allow successful restorations during the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and get experience in the future, through the elaboration of tools and guidelines, specific training and where and whenever possible action in the field by countries, including actions to support ecosystem evaluation and the mapping of ecosystem services, development of

methodologies for valorisation and monitoring of their status. This outcome is expected to also cover the restoration of degraded priority/of key importance ecosystems or specific habitats, for example to tackle climate change or other priority issues.

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

68. In order to establish, expand and operationalize a comprehensive coherent Mediterranean network of effectively-managed marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), countries will be supported in the elaboration or updating of their national strategies and action plans for the development of MPAs and OECMs networks, based on the orientations and priorities of the post-2020 SAPBIO, post-2020 regional strategy for MPAs and OECMs, the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and other relevant global and regional goals and targets. Parties will be encouraged to streamline the updated regional strategies and action plans into their national legal and institutional frameworks. At the implementation level, countries will be assisted, as much as possible, in collaboration with each other, in extending their national MPAs and Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs), Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) and OECM networks, by extending existing areas, declaring new ones, including in Areas Beyond National Jurisdictions (ABNJ), designating highly and fully protected zones, and enforcing efficient management measures for their long-term conservation, in line with the obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment under international law, as reflected in the UNCLOS. Specific support will be provided in terms of strengthening effective SPAMI management through SPAMI Twinning Programmes. Enforcement activities will be guided and supported by technical tools, standards, criteria, guidelines, tailored at regional or sub-regional level, as needed and relevant. The multidisciplinary Ad hoc group of Experts for Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (AGEM) will deliver timely advice and orientations to support the Secretariat and Contracting Parties. Synergies and collaboration with regional partners will be strengthened to support effective management of MPAs at local level through joint activities of capacity building, knowledge development, experience-sharing and networking.

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

69. The Regional Action Plans on key species and habitats and the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean are adopted by the Contracting Parties as regional governance tools setting priorities and activities to be undertaken. They call for greater solidarity between the States of the region, and for co-ordination of efforts to protect the species and Habitats in question. This approach has been proved to be necessary to ensure conservation and sustainable management of the concerned species in every Mediterranean area of their distribution. To be more efficient, they are adapted to the sub-regional and national context. Strengthened cooperation and joint actions with relevant regional institutions (e.g., ACCOBAMS, GFCM, MedPAN etc.) and the main stakeholders (fisheries stakeholders, fishery and marine scientists, MPA managers, environmental and fisheries governmental institutions, NGOs, citizen science) is essential towards a better optimised conservation status and the sustainability of the natural resources use. The deliverables and targets of this outcome will contribute to the implementation of the Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Protocol, following the priorities of the Post 2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean region (SAP BIO) and Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) of the Ecosystem Approach.

70. The actions foreseen under this outcome aim to improve the conservation status of marine and coastal species and habitats covered by Regional Action Plans for endangered species or by the Annex II and III of the SPA/BD Protocol through assistance to the Contracting Parties including capacity building programmes (symposia, workshops and thematic regional, sub-regional and national training sessions). It will also support, the updating and elaboration of regional and national annexes/regional action plans/strategies. It will ensure the implementation of measures to mitigate the impact and interaction with coastal and human activities and enhance the adoption of national measures by the Contracting Parties.

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

71. Non-indigenous species (NIS), particularly invasive ones, are considered among the greatest threat faced by coastal environments, and can contribute substantially to altering the abundance, diversity, and distribution of many native species. Unlike many forms of pressures that degrade over time, non-indigenous species can persist, increase, and even disperse. Records of NIS on the Marine Mediterranean Non-Indigenous and Invasive Species database (www.mamias.org) indicate that corridors are the most important pathway for introductions into the Mediterranean, followed by shipping and aquaculture. Assessing pathways of introduction of marine non-indigenous species is essential to identify appropriate measures and evaluate management decisions to regulate and prevent new introductions.

72. The actions foreseen under this outcome aim at assisting the Contracting Parties to update and implement the Regional Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea in line with Post 2020 SAPBIO to prevent, manage and control NIS and invasive non-indigenous species and their introduction pathways to minimize/reduce their impact on ecosystem integrity. It includes the elaboration of tools and guidelines and their adaptation to sub-regional and national contexts, to enhance knowledge and capacities. These measures will also contribute to the collective enforcement of the Ballast Water Management Strategy for the Mediterranean Sea (2022-2027) and other international instruments and guidelines to minimize the transfer of invasive alien species.