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Plan Bleu's National Focal Points Meeting

By videoconference, 19-20 May 2021

Agenda Item 4: Observing the environment and the development

Regional Observatory on the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean

Table of Contents

- 1. Plan Bleu’s mandates3**
- 2. Elements of context.....4**
- 3. Main achievements in 2020 – 2021.....5**
- 4. Proposals of activities 2022 - 2023.....8**

Introductory note

This working document presents:

- the mandates received by Plan Bleu/RAC from Contracting Parties up to and during the 21st Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (COP21 - Naples (Italy) - 2-5 December 2019), for activities related to the regional observation of environment and development;
- the up-to-date achievements of Plan Bleu / RAC to implement these mandates in 2020 and 2021;
- proposed follow-up activities for the next biennium (2022-2023).

Agenda for Plan Bleu's Focal Points meeting:

The Focal Points will be invited to provide comments and suggestions on the next steps during the current biennium up to the COP22; as well as on the proposed activities for the next biennium, in relation with the topic of regional observation of environment and development. If they wish so, the Focal Points might agree on formalized recommendations on this topic as outcomes of the meeting.

1. Plan Bleu's mandates

1. Plan Bleu, as a UNEP/MAP Regional Activity Center (Plan Bleu / RAC) has carried out horizontal missions since its creation in 1977 and its mandate was renewed in Marrakech in 2009: "*The objective of the Plan Bleu is to contribute to raising the awareness of the actors concerned and Mediterranean decision-makers to issues related to the environment and to the sustainable development of the region by providing them with scenarios for the future so as to inform decision-making. In this regard and under its dual function of observatory of the environment and sustainable development and of systemic and prospective analysis centre, Plan Bleu's mission is to provide Contracting Parties with assessments of the state of the environment, environment and development in the Mediterranean and a solid base of data, statistics, indicators and assessments concerning the environment and sustainable development enabling them to underpin their actions and their decision-making process*".

2. Plan Bleu / RAC contributes to a better understanding of the state and trends of relations between development and environment at the level of the Mediterranean basin and more particularly in marine and coastal regions. It also provides decision makers at local and national levels with up-to-date and reliable information on the challenges of the environment and sustainable development in the Mediterranean, allowing them to orient their actions towards sustainable development.

3. Plan Bleu / RAC's role through its Observatory, reemphasized at the COP 21 of the Barcelona Convention (Naples, Italy December 2019)¹, allows Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention to report on the implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) through the Mediterranean sustainability dashboard. It also serves the two other pillars of Plan Bleu / RAC's mandate that are socio-economic analysis and foresight, in view of informing decision-making with relevant and updated data and their analysis (evidence-based approach). It also allows to animate

¹ [Decision IG.24/3](#) - Implementation, Monitoring and Mid-Term Evaluation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025 and of the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean.

the network of national entities in charge of reporting under international and Mediterranean commitments.

4. Specific requests to Plan Bleu/RAC from the Contracting Parties through Decision IG.24/14 Programme of Work and Budget 2020-2021, adopted during COP21, include the following items:

- 1.4.1.2. *Support the preparation of QSR 2023, by capitalizing on the results of SoED 2019, MSSD Dashboard and MedECC assessment report.* Expected deliverables are: *Inputs, information leads and lessons learned derived from SoED and MSSD dashboard feeding into QSR 2023 preparation, including input and leads on the link and geographic coincidence between state and pressures, as well as pressures and stakes.*
- 1.4.2.1 *Improve the work on the indicators of the Mediterranean sustainability dashboard in accordance with Decision IG. 23/4.* Expected deliverables are: *a) Dashboard indicators populated and updated to show trends; b) Development/improvement of the core set of Indicators for the monitoring of the MSSD implementation in synergy with the ongoing work on SDGs at the global level; c) Related factsheets and updating of the Med sustainability dashboard (in liaison with activity 6.2.1.1 led by SCP / RAC on population of SCP indicators).*
- 1.4.2.2 *Exchange of best practices on data and indicators among National Observatories and observation networks (in synergy with the MSSD dashboard, IMAP indicators, SEIS) and update the Regional Observatory.* Expected deliverables are: *a) Workshops organized with the participation of national Observatories and observation networks (to exchange best practices on SDG indicators, MSSD dashboard, NSSD monitoring, IMAP indicators, SEIS) b) Workshops reports produced c) Factsheets on best practices produced and disseminated; d) CPs national and relevant regional Observatories referenced on Plan Bleu / RAC website.*

2. Elements of context

5. Plan Bleu / RAC has played a key role in supporting and assisting Mediterranean countries in setting up national environment and sustainable development observatories and in building the needed capacities to run them, in particular through project-based activities in the years 2000 to 2015. Plan Bleu's role has been to build capacity and support Contracting Parties' institutions, to maintain and update the database content to monitor the MSSD, to communicate and trigger interest, but also to compare data elaborated through different methodologies and with different definitions (SEIS Project). Plan Bleu's observatory was intended to share and source data (with special mention of official national data), qualify their validity, and describe the associated meta-data, so that data can be used without ambiguity.

6. Once these projects have ended, data bases elaborated on a project-basis were neither updated nor maintained, with a risk to lose them. Capacity-building activities have been limited during the last years despite requests from several Contracting Parties.

7. It appears timely for Plan Bleu to stand up to its role and facilitate a dynamic Mediterranean network of national or regional observatories, so that they can feed the regional observatory with national data, information and indicators, for improved knowledge sharing among Contracting Parties.

8. Recent activities conducted by Plan Bleu / RAC show that, through reliable and updated data mobilized at the Mediterranean level, the Centre is able to populate a set of indicators (28 in 2021) and to coordinate regional assessments such as the recent SoED. The Centre also contributes to the planned MedQSR2023, as well as to socio-economic analysis activities and to evaluations of impacts of and responses to climate change.

9. Information and communication techniques change rapidly. Up to now, Plan Bleu / RAC's Observatory website has been providing static representations (maps and graphs) of environmental information. New tools are available which allow for more dynamic platforms, improved data sharing and more powerful observatories in network with remote connection to data bases.

10. UNEP wishes to move towards a centralization, an integration of all the platforms developed by the different branches of UNEP, as indicated in the "World Environment Situation Room - Work Plan 2020-2021" which states: "*The World Environment Situation Room² (WESR) is the future United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) on-line data and knowledge platform³*". WESR is directly integrated into unep.org, the direct link being either wesr.unep.org or data.unep.org. WESR enables users to visualize, query, access, link and download data, information and knowledge products regarding the world environment situation in near real-time.

11. [MapX⁴](http://www.mapx.org/) is the WESR's maps component, is an open-source and neutral open geospatial platform that aims at managing, analyzing and visualizing data on natural resources and the environment. It has been developed in partnership with UNEP since 2015 using open-source technologies compatible with international geospatial standards (e.g., OGC, ISO) and focuses on specific needs of stakeholders through various projects and locations.

12. MapX platform will be a primary tool for UNEP's data-driven assessments, foresight, monitoring, communications, and support to UN country teams and related Common Country Analysis (CCA). It will also help visualize progress made regarding the environment-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

13. This evolution has been supported by UNEP Contracting Parties through Resolution 23 of UNEA-4 which pushes for the development of collaborative platforms, mentioning at this occasion the work of UNEP/GRID-Geneva⁵.

14. This process is extremely cost-efficient as the core development costs are borne by UNEP on a project basis; the supplementary development and maintenance costs needed to further enrich the platform and update it are shared among users based on their share of the workload. The principles allow to build a system for the long-term with low functioning costs.

15. One of the goals, and of the benefits for Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, is to avoid duplication in reporting and to use official data from CPs' submitted under other reporting processes, such as SDGs or Aichi targets. There is an opportunity to benefit from streamlining efforts on reporting within WESR/MapX. Plan Bleu / RAC's data, collected within the mandate given by UNEP / MAP, have their place in this framework.

16. Furthermore, the functionalities enhance the capacity to develop the notion of observatory in network, where the central platform functions as a gate and is an entry point giving access to data collected and updated by local partners.

3. Main achievements in 2020 – 2021

3.1. Preparation of inputs for QSR2023 (Programme of Work item 1.4.1.2)

17. Plan Bleu / RAC with the support of a GIS specialist designed a series of [9 thematic maps to illustrate the relationships between the state of environment and human activities](#)⁶. The series of maps

² <https://wesr.unep.org/>

³ <https://owncloud.unepgrid.ch/index.php/s/4gL2000Xx07sfUq>

⁴ <http://www.mapx.org/>

⁵ <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28486/K1901170.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>

⁶ <https://www.obs.planbleu.org/en/maps/>

allows to update the MSSD dashboard and to contribute to the MEDQSR2023. They cover the following topics:

- Impacts of leisure boating on coastal habitats (in particular the Posidonia herbarium)
- Location of discharge points / outlets at sea (WWTP, industries ...) and fishing areas
- Impact of prospecting and offshore drilling of fossil products on areas of biological interest at sea
- Impact of offshore renewable energies (wind power) on migration corridors (birds).
- Quality of surface water and coastal ecosystems in and around large coastal towns.

3.2. Improve the work on the indicators of the Mediterranean sustainability dashboard in accordance with Decision IG. 23/4 (Programme of Work item 1.4.2.1)

18. As per Decision IG.24/3: *Implementation, Monitoring and Mid-Term Evaluation of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) 2016-2025 and of the Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production in the Mediterranean (SCP Regional Action Plan)*⁷, the [March 2021 edition of the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard](#)⁸ contains a revised list of 28 indicators – most of which corresponding or being linked to SDG indicators or SEIS II/Horizon 2020 indicators. Through this decision, the Contracting Parties requested the Secretariat (Plan Bleu / RAC) to populate the indicators, using existing sources of information and data, and giving priority to those addressing coast-related and sea-related issues. They recognized the living nature of the list of indicators and the need to keep it under review under the guidance of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) Steering Committee, with the technical support of Plan Bleu / RAC, as international work on SDG indicators progresses. COP 21 also requested the Secretariat, through Plan Bleu / RAC and SCP/RAC, to integrate the list of SCP indicators in the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard.

19. Based on this mandate, Plan Bleu / RAC delivered in March 2021 an updated populated version of the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard, including SCP indicators. A specific effort has been put to develop the indicator factsheet 8 entitled “proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels (SDG Indicator 14.4.1)” using as main reference the 2020 GFCM / State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries (SoMFi) report.

20. In 2020, SCP/RAC launched the review of 30 SCP indicators, in light of the latest development at the global level, in view of populating them. The integration of SCP indicators reinforced the MSSD dashboard on green, blue and circular economy issues.

21. 9 indicators have been identified as common between the MSSD dashboard and the SCP Action Plan and have benefited from joint expertise from SCP / RAC and Plan Bleu / RAC, resulting in specific factsheets (design and content).

22. Following recommendations from the MCSD Steering Committee held in December 2020, Plan Bleu assessed options about the methodology to follow, and related expertise to mobilize, to identify /define legal indicators on environmental regulations to better cover MSSD Objective 6 “Governance”, SDG 14 « Life Below water » and SDG 17 “Partnerships for the goals”. The objective is to initiate at least some methodological work in pilot sites during this biennium, so that possible adjustments of the MSSD dashboard might be proposed for the future to consider these new indicators. Plan Bleu postponed the development of indicators to monitor the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in the Mediterranean, especially on the relationship between the state of the environment and Human and ecosystems health, as meaningful and certified data might not be yet available.

⁷ https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/31701/19ig24_22_2403_eng.pdf

⁸ https://www.obs.planbleu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SMDD_Dashboard_Version_Mars_2021.pdf

3.3. New design for the Regional Observatory website (Programme of Work item 1.4.2.2)

23. A [new design for the website](#)⁹ of the Regional Observatory of the Environment and Sustainable Development has been launched in January 2021, in two languages (English and French). It offers the possibility to access specific webpages dealing with the monitoring of the MSSD and the SCP Action Plan implementation. It also gives access to specific publications and thematic maps. A section allows to access to the whole compendium of indicator factsheets.

24. Plan Bleu / RAC is currently ensuring the migration of its observatory (i.e., the MSSD dashboard as well as data obtained from previous Plan Bleu / RAC projects (such as Mediterranean Integrated Climate Information Platform - MedICIP) and current ones (pressure – state maps) to WESR through a collaboration with UNEP/GRID-Geneva and to establish connections with external databases. Further developments are considered until December 2021 to establish connections with external databases and enrich the Plan Bleu observatory with readily available data from partners, first and foremost UNEP/GRID-Geneva which provides access to a large number of official databases (on climate, risks, biodiversity, land use...). This will allow to dynamize the Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard and improve access of Contracting Parties to shared data, to better monitor progress towards implementing the MSSD and achieving the SDGs.

25. To enable staff from Contracting Parties' national or local observatories and statistical offices to access the functionalities of WESR, a training workshop is scheduled during the second semester in the premises of the University of Geneva, which hosts the technical team of the UNEP/GRID-Geneva partnership. It would be reorganized as one or a series of webinars if the sanitary conditions do not allow for travels of trainees.

3.4. Strengthen regional observation networks (Programme of Work line 1.4.2.2)

26. Plan Bleu / RAC launched a study to prepare a state of play by country about national capacities regarding observatories and environmental monitoring programs. Some challenges related to the collection and processing of data, as well as their sharing within the observation systems existing at the Mediterranean and national levels have been highlighted. The technical report provides 22 factsheets (one per Contracting Party) and has been submitted for review to all Contracting Parties, with feedback received by 8 countries¹⁰. A synthesis has been published on the Plan Bleu / RAC Observatory website¹¹.

27. Plan Bleu / RAC established preliminary contacts (2 virtual meetings) with CNRS-LB and CNRS-FR and the Research Institute for Development (French: Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, IRD) regarding a bilateral initiative (O'LIFE: a Lebanese-French Environment Observatory focusing on the risk and vulnerability of Mediterranean societies and ecosystems). Plan Bleu / RAC national Focal Points of Lebanon and France have been informed. Plan Bleu / RAC and O'LiFE are currently drafting a concept note to highlight possible activities and room for collaboration. Similar but less advanced contacts have been initiated with other institutions from Contracting Parties.

28. Plan Bleu / RAC's work on the MSSD dashboard fed into the first module of the Med2050 foresight exercise, through clear links between the dashboard's 28 indicator factsheets and the 38 sheets

⁹ [Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development – Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development \(planbleu.org\)](#)

¹⁰ <https://planbleu.org/en/publications/technical-report-mapping-of-mediterranean-observatories-and-monitoring-programmes-for-the-environment-and-for-marine-and-coastal-activities/>

¹¹ <https://planbleu.org/en/publications/summary-report>

on variables of MED 2050. EEA also agreed to join the effort in sharing its experience and capacity from its current mandate of working on the EU SDG monitoring report / indicator set 2021. MED2050 thus benefits from a range of regional and national data which will inform the foresight exercise.

4. Proposals of activities 2022 - 2023

29. During the biennium 2022-2023, Plan Bleu proposes to pursue its mission of informing the MSSD implementation through the Dashboard, while making full use of the opportunities offered by the collaboration with UNEP/GRID-Geneva and of the functionalities WESR offers (cartographic viewer, display of environmental information, download of data and interactive drafting and editing of report) to further support Contracting Parties and enrich the Observatory.

30. The migration of the MSSD indicators to MapX (1) allows an efficient management and follow-up of the MSSD indicators; (2) ensures a high standard for environmental information sharing; (3) provides a complementary substantive coverage with easy access to additional data from other providers to Plan Bleu's regional observatory.

31. Under programme 6: *Together for a shared vision of the Mediterranean Sea and coast, Outcome 6.1. Environment and Development Observation and IMAP monitoring provide updated and quality assured data in support of decision-making by Contracting Parties and assessment of GES; Activity 1. Strengthen the MSSD monitoring framework and a regional observatory on the environment and development*, Plan Bleu proposes two activities:

- Activity 1: deliverable 1 *Framework agreement with UNEP Science Division and / or UNEP/GRID-Geneva signed*; deliverable 2 *MAP Environment & Development observatory worked out, based on up-to date tools and technology on an open-access data-sharing platform* these two output aim at establishing a long-term collaboration between UNEP / MAP (with a clear role for Plan Bleu / RAC) and UNEP/GRID-Geneva for the hosting of Plan Bleu MSSD Dashboard and Regional Observatory's data on the WESR platform, their updating and their progressive enrichment under the guidance of the MCSD; and deliverable 3. *4 agreements with national or regional partners to give access to their data through the shared platform*, aiming at building the first agreements to build the observatory in network which will best serve the needs of the Contracting Parties.
- Activity 2: *Support and strengthen existing national and subnational observation networks and capacities*. In continuity of the first training workshop scheduled in fall 2021, Plan Bleu proposes to organize sub-regional workshops to build national and local observation capacities and benefit from feedback and experience of local and national observatories for the further enrichment of the observatory in network. On a volunteer basis from Contracting Parties and their institutions, specific technical and methodological assistance could be brought at national or local level. The long-term objective would be to create a coordinated Observation and Information System at regional level (by strengthening networks between National Environment Agencies, NSIs, National Observatories, ...).