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The 21st Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD)

Corinth, Greece, 24-26 June 2025

**Agenda Item 3: Report by the Coordinator on Sustainable Development Activities for the period
June 2023 – May 2025**

**Reports of the meetings of the extended Steering Committee of the Mediterranean Commission on
Sustainable Development**

Reports of the meetings of the extended Steering Committee of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development

1. Following the decisions of the 20th Meeting of the MCSD to establish an extended Steering Committee of the MCSD under the French leadership and with limited specific tasks linked to the preparation of the MCSD contribution to the COP 23 and to the support the MSSD revision process, five extended Steering Committee of the MCSD took place so far, respectively on 30 October 2023, 4 December 2023, 21 February 2024, 12 November 2024 and 20 December 2024.

2. The first meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD (online on 30 October 2023) had three objectives: (1) discuss and finalize the contribution from the MCSD to the COP 23, specifically to the Ministerial Declaration; (2) support the initial discussion on two new flagship initiatives “Sustainable Blue Tourism” and on “Protection and restoration of Seagrass/Posidonia Meadows as crucial ecosystems”; and (3) further advance on the discussion on the main directions, process, and timeline for the revision of the MSSD. The main deliverables of the first extended Steering Committee of the MCSD have been the contribution from the MCSD to the COP 23, specifically to the Ministerial Declaration and the presentation of draft concept notes of October 2024 of the new MSSD flagship initiatives “Sustainable Blue Tourism” and on “Protection and restoration of Seagrass/Posidonia Meadows as crucial ecosystems”, as presented in Annex I.

3. In the occasion of the COP23, the second meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD took place (in person on 4 December 2023, in Portorož, Slovenia). During the meeting the youth representative presented a draft proposal for the involvement of the youth in the MSSD revision and implementation process, while the two new flagship initiatives “Sustainable Blue Tourism” and on “Protection and restoration of Seagrass/Posidonia Meadows as crucial ecosystems” were further commented.

4. The third meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD (online on 21 February 2024) highlighted that the MSSD revision will be based to the extent possible on existing analysis, including the MED 2050 foresight study and the MSSD Dashboard, and taking in account the main recent global and regional frameworks, including the European Green Deal and by addressing the thematic and systemic identified gaps; the MSSD revision should cover also the current Flagship Initiatives, while embedding the three new Flagship Initiatives on “Sustainable Blue Tourism”, “Protection and restoration of Seagrass/Posidonia Meadows as crucial ecosystems” and WEFE NEXUS, as indicated by the 20th Meeting of the MCSD, and take into account proposals to embed youth and women contribution in the MSSD implementation and MCSD governance.

5. The fourth meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD (online on 12 November 2024) assessed the MSSD 2026-2025 Implementation Final evaluation providing comments that were taken into account in order to finalize the document, discussed the proposals to update the MSSD Strategic Directions, while comments on the new MSSD flagship initiatives were provided in written and included in the updated version of the flagship initiatives submitted to the fifth and last meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD of 20 December 2024. The meeting also briefly discussed the updated MSSD Targets table as well as the MSSD 10 core indicators and possible new/adjustment to the MSSD Dashboard of 28 indicators, as presented by Plan Bleu and based on the specific discussion and conclusions of the 25th Steering Committee meeting of the MCSD of 18-19 April 2024 (Athens, Greece).

6. The fifth and last meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD (online on 20 December 2024) discussed in depth the proposed updates to the MSSD, especially in terms of thematic approach to be reinforced and new/revised actions, the concept notes of the new flagship initiatives, as well as the approach on MSSD updated targets. The main outcomes of the discussion have been integrated in the updated MSSD version submitted to the thematic ad hoc MCSD meeting of 12-13 February 2025 (Istanbul, Türkiye), as per meeting working document UNEP/MED WG.600/4.

7. The reports of the second to fifth meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD are enclosed to this Information document, respectively as Annex II-V.

Annex I

**Main outcomes of the 1st meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD
30 October 2024, online**

Proposal from MCSD to the COP 23 Draft

“Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions into actions”.

General Considerations

Hosted by France from June 14-16 2023, the 20th Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) requested the President of the MCSD and the Secretariat to inform the Meeting of the UNEP/MAP Focal Points and the 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 23) about its conclusions and recommendations, including the present elements on the contribution of the MCSD to COP23, which have been finalized by the Secretariat following a consultation of the MCSD under the guidance of its Steering Committee.

The 20th Meeting of the MCSD reaffirmed the importance of this regional inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform for experience sharing and peer learning established under the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention¹. One of the **major roles of the MCSD is to promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean region through different actions including the evaluation of the development trends on the basis of a set of indicators and main development drivers in the region**, - in connection with:

- **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and**
- **international commitments (COP UNFCCC, CBD, IMO, BBNJ, etc.)**
- **regional evolutions in the Mediterranean**

The 20th Meeting of the MCSD emphasizes the importance, for the Mediterranean countries, their quality of life and their sustainable development, of mobilizing common efforts to update the MSSD adopted in 2016, under the French presidency of the MCSD, with the wish to make international decisions more legible and prescriptible taking into account all recent evolutions related to Sustainable Development. This is in line with **the ambitions of the French presidency for UNOC 2025, which will be held in Nice, of maximizing high-ambition coalitions (HAC)**, such as those engaged during the OOS in Brest in 2022 and UNOC 2022 in Lisbon.

Inputs of the 20th MCSD Meeting to COP 23

Main elements for MSSD update

In view of already available data and reports produced under the MAP secretariat's and RACs' coordination, and in view of works published by groups of scientists (MedECC, etc.), the MCSD Steering Committee recommended **to initiate and conduct the revision of the MSSD as soon as possible, that is to say during the next biennium 2024-2025**. This process should start by the production of a synthesis of the already available assessments and data. The ambition is to present the new revised MSSD 2026-2035 to the COP in 2025.

To organize the MSSD revision, the MCSD meeting agreed **to establish an extended committee with participation of the MCSD Steering Committee and some additional MCSD members on voluntary basis**, which will work online to finalize the redaction of MCSD contributions to the COP 23 under the French leadership. Every effort should be made to share the MCSD inputs to COP23 with the MAP Focal Points before their meeting in September.

The Bureau, at its 94th meeting (Izola Slovenia, 20-21 June 2023), agreed that the theme of the Ministerial Session of COP 23 will be **“Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions into actions”**. The input of the MCSD to the COP is thus taking this into consideration.

The revised Strategy should take into account the recommendations and priorities highlighted by **previously made reports and evaluations**, with the goal to **suggest appropriate objectives** to face the many challenges that Mediterranean populations and economies already face. Some general intentions are: raising the level of ambition concerning biodiversity, increasing consideration of the issue of climate

change and promoting sustainable nature-based solutions, fighting against plastic pollution and illegal or over-fishing, implementing new practices for water security and food security, increasing education, youth engagement and women employment.

Such changes will involve political decision-makers through technical and legislative ways and means, as well as citizens through changes in practice and awareness of the issues to be faced. For that purpose, it is crucial to consider **the role of local and regional authorities and of civil society organizations**, which are in a strategic intermediary position and detain concrete knowledge necessary to an effective implementation of the national agendas approved by the States.

The need for adequate resources, time and skills, which is more prominent in **the southern and eastern part of the basin**, has to be fulfilled by adopting regulatory, technical and financial measures to strongly involve all relevant stakeholders.

In addition to the substantive priorities on key sectors that are affecting the Mediterranean development and its sustainability (i.e. fisheries and aquaculture, energy, tourism, shipping etc.), the 20th MCSD meeting highlighted a number of **cross-cutting elements** to be further taken into consideration in the updated MSSD, and in particular:

- The development and implementation of appropriate **ecosystem service accounting mechanisms** in support of sustainable blue economy to enhance and fuel environmental monitoring schemes (such as the Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development).
- The use of **legal and political instruments offered** under the MAP Barcelona Convention, or other relevant institutional frameworks, to increase coastal resilience and anticipate the effects of climate change, to reduce all types of pollution, and to **increase the implementation of all Barcelona convention protocols**.
- The importance of **including gender parity and youth engagement in MCSD work and meetings** towards COP 23; to start each UNEP/MAP meeting with a message from the youth; and to support the UNEP/MAP Gender Action Plan targets related to the MCSD which will be presented at COP23.
- The building of **partnerships and networks to promote gender integration**, in order to support the Members of the MCSD in strengthening the gender aspects of their work and guidelines, and to ensure the participation of NGOs with gender expertise as civil society stakeholders in the Commission (i.e. dedicated seat for specialists in gender and development, gender mainstreaming in the selection process).
- The **further promotion of education to sustainable development and the engagement of relevant partners**, including Parliamentarians, in the new communication strategy.
- The suggestion by the contracting parties of COP23 to adopt **instruments providing training, financial resources and control of the use of financial resources**, which local authorities might receive as a result of decisions adopted by the states.
- The **involvement of all relevant stakeholders** (including Civil Society Organizations, Academia, regional and local authorities) to be ensured in the monitoring of the current MSSD 2016-2025 and the development of the new MSSD (2026).

New flagship initiatives to be included in the updated MSSD

New flagship initiatives are suggested to represent the strategy in an exemplary way and to propose demonstrative actions with significant potential for visibility.

The 20th MCSD meeting welcomed the proposal of H.E Minister Hervé Berville, French State Secretary for the Sea, to submit to the COP23 an **ambitious initiative on Posidonia** that would aim to support the action plan of the Med Posidonia Network (MPN), in particular its objective of protecting 100% of

seagrass beds by 2030 and thus making it a shared objective. The meeting therefore agreed to further discuss and work for submission to COP 23 of a proposal for « a POSIDONIA flagship initiative », supported by France, voluntary MCSD partners, and the MPN.

The meeting further agreed to consider **the re-launch of the Blue tourism initiative** (www.bluetourisminitiative.org) as an MCSD Flagship Initiative, starting by establishing a working group with support from ECO UNION and France. It could be supported by a workshop/side-event over COP23.

Besides, the meeting welcomed the proposal to launch a **new Flagship Initiatives on “the Water Energy Food Ecosystems nexus in the Mediterranean Source to Sea continuum”**.

In addition to this, the 20th MCSD meeting welcomed the proposal to continue work: (a) on the **Flagship Initiative related to waste reduction**, inter alia by considering specific waste streams such as food waste and plastic waste, by looking at Extended Producer Responsibility schemes and by considering zero waste options; (b) on the **Flagship Initiative on public procurement**, as proposed by COMPSUD, Israel, Morocco and ECOUNION, acknowledging the challenges faced on this issue.

It further acknowledged the importance of youth and of education as important aspects of sustainable development for consideration in the work of the MCSD and for inclusion in the new updated MSSD, inter alia through the continuation of the **Flagship Initiative on the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development**.

Thematic priorities for the updated MSSD

- **The preservation of marine biodiversity**

Make the preservation of marine biodiversity a political priority in the Mediterranean. Mediterranean Countries should strengthen their investment in the implementation of **the high-ambition Coalition for Nature and People** by concretizing for the Mediterranean the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal-MPA 30x30 framework. This will be also articulated with the objectives of the PAMEx, SAP BIO, particularly for marine protected areas. In particular, the objectives are to strength the effectiveness of the management of MPA/SPAMIs, to improve the monitoring of biodiversity and the associated ecological objectives within the framework of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program (IMAP), and to improve the capacity-building aimed at improving information and data submission.

- **Reduction of pollution-related pressures**

The MCSD suggests to take into greater account, including in the next MSSD, the reduction of certain pressures already identified, but still insufficiently dealt with, which would benefit from better coordination. This would translate into:

- supporting the implementation of **the ECAMED zone** (Med SOx ECA) and possible future work on a Med NOx ECA;
- strengthening the work **of the network of prosecutors** to better coordinate the fight against accidental (or criminal) pollution at sea by ships;
- supporting the implementation **of the Particularly Vulnerable Maritime Zones for the protection of cetaceans**;
- supporting the management **of sustainable fishing and the fight against IUU fishing**;
- supporting the **fight against plastic pollution** with a proactive contribution of the UNEP/MAP to the negotiation of the legally binding Treaty against plastic pollution and the promotion of the HAC to eliminate plastic pollution by 2040.

- **Blue Economy, ICZM and Maritime Spatial Planning**

Considering the absolute necessity to ensure that the blue economy remains sustainable, towards more energy sobriety and a more sustainable management of marine resources, it is necessary to enhance the

protection of the marine environment from land-based sources of pollution, including through conservation.

The MCSD proposes to embody the ecosystem approach to **integrated maritime planning**, still insufficiently implemented in the current MSSD and work of UNEP/MAP. It would lead to concrete energy transition actions, in particular around the decarbonization of ships and the planning of MREs in the Mediterranean.

MSP should also be further implemented by UNEP/MAP and be at the heart of the MSDD's objectives, with the idea to promote dialogue among users of marine and coastal resources at various levels. Offshore **renewable energy infrastructure and the greening of maritime transport are emerging issues at a global level, and should be considered as priority fields for consideration by UNEP/MAP, including in the revision of the MSSD.**

Risks and emergencies are also a major concern for most of the Contracting Parties that have prepared the contingency of plans for national emergencies, or strategies for coastal and marine resources, but much remains to be done to improve resilience and adaptive capacity, in the first place in the face of rising sea level. The implementation of the 100 m setback zone is considered extremely useful. **The preparation of the Common Regional Framework for ICZM is recognized as important, and additional support is considered crucial regarding Maritime Spatial Planning.**

The 20th MCSD meeting, stressing the need to include comprehensive integrated Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in the next MSSD, recommended the **establishment of a dedicated UNEP/MAP Working Group**, building on and collaborating with other MSP mechanisms in the region.

From science to action and decision

It seems necessary to mobilize **financial funds for knowledge and scientific expertise** in the Mediterranean, with the objective to strengthen the science/policy interface (science to policy), working with MedEcc, MAP/UNEP, the OCEAN CLIMAT platform, IDDRI and all actors involved in Education for Sustainable Development. Possible actions include to:

- Promote financial support for networks of experts and for the communication and education to sustainable practices in several languages.
- Develop a participatory science network in the Mediterranean via an experimental and demonstrative project that could take place in 3 to 5 countries around the Mediterranean with the support of local scientists and NGOs and the youth collaboration.

POSIDONIA FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

A MSSD new flagship initiative

The MCSD suggests to the COP to validate the principle of implementation of a new flagship initiative on *Posidonia oceanica* meadows. It would be conceptualized during the 2024-2026 biennium. Linked with the revision of the MSSD, this initiative, would make it possible to promote existing initiatives, consolidate them and identify in support countries that have taken a position for the protection of *posidonia*, through national strategies, material and human resources or within the framework of the MPN network in particular, as well as project coordinators and leaders of NGOs involved in that issue. **This initiative could be explained during a side event dedicated to Posidonia during the 23rd COP in Slovenia.**

A FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE LINKED TO THE NEW MSSD: FRAMEWORK

The MCSD suggests to the COP 23, the adoption of a new “flagship initiative” on POSIDONIA, blue lung of the Mediterranean Sea. Such recommendation was adopted during the 20th meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, which was held in Marseille, from June 14th to June 16th, 2023.

The protection of *Posidonia* meadows is indeed crucial for the preservation of species which rely on it (1000 animal species and 400 plant species), and fisheries resources (50 commercial species rely on it). It is also essential to mitigate climate change (carbon stored for thousands of years: more than 5 tonnes

per hectare per year); and to adapt to it (reduction of coastal erosion, preservation of beaches). Posidonia is therefore very important for the quality of life of our populations and the good ecological state of our Mediterranean Sea. Its economic value is estimated at 69,000 euros per hectare and per year. It also plays an important role for coral reefs and mangrove. It is the most vulnerable species, growing of about one meter per century and being subject to very few restauration programmes – which are still mostly at the stage of research and development.

The Posidonia flagship initiative would be the continuity of major international commitments such as the Kunming-Montreal agreement, the Specially Protected Areas and biological diversity Protocol, the Post2020 SAPBIO, the "Action Plan for the Conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean" and the Med Posidonia Network's roadmap.

GOALS

This flagship initiative would support the development of an *Action Plan for the preservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean*, composed of:

- 1- Actions linked to **the acquisition of knowledge on this species** - in particular its location and repartition, as well as the pressures it suffers from:
 - The mapping of Posidonia presence areas, still insufficiently assessed in many Mediterranean countries, or its update in case of outdated data.
 - The analysis of pressures exerted on Posidonia in each area (anchoring, illegal fishing, artificialization, pollution, invasive species, etc.), the identification of solutions aimed at reducing them, the feasibility of these solutions (costs, means, governance, opportunities, obstacles, etc.).
- 2- Innovative actions, especially on:
 - Innovative financial mechanisms by 2025: the creation of a Posidonia Fund (not linked to carbon compensation) to finance conservation actions in priority sites.
 - The development of active and passive restauration projects (cf EU law on nature restauration), to remove pressures on priority sites for actions.
- 3- Actions on reinforcement of regulations:
 - Prohibition of anchoring in the meadows for ships over 20 meters.
 - The development of MPAs including Posidonia oceanica
- 4- Actions to enhance the management of priority sites for actions (buoys, action plans for sustainable gestion of beaches, etc.)/Actions to raise awareness and engagement:
 - Creation of local and national alliances meant to drive changes in behaviors and positive actions of involved actors.
 - A regional cultural event shared by patrimonial institutions of culture and nature, NGOs, local authorities and citizens. For instance, a "great annual feast for Posidonia".
- 5- Actions linked to capacity building through the creation of practical toolboxes for managers of marine protected areas. Actions linked to the sensibilization of Maritime Spatial Planners in the region, in order to improve the integration of the protection of seagrass blue carbon ecosystems in these processes.

Considering funding, it would be appropriate to set up a Posidonia fund by 2025. In particular, it could be a Posidonia credit financing mechanism meant to finance areas where action is a priority. An estimated minimum of 50 million euros should be required.

Member States of the Barcelona convention are thus particularly concerned by Posidonia protection and would be encouraged by the MSDD to:

1. Establish national regulations to improve monitoring of the meadows and in particular to prohibit anchoring of large ships on Posidonia;
- ~~2.~~ Complete mapping in the southern shore countries;
3. Implement effective monitoring means to prevent illegal trawling on seagrass meadows;
4. Improve quality of water (upgrading to STEP standards, water treatment plants);
5. Reach the goal of establishing 1,000 ecological moorings for small-scale and large-scale pleasure craft in priority action sites by 2030.

FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE on BLUE TOURISM

in the framework of the

Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD)

Context

The Mediterranean area with a population of more than 500 million people welcomes more than **400 million international tourist arrivals (ITAs)** annually, concentrating during summer. The **North-West** of the Mediterranean receives 64% of international tourist arrivals in the entire region, while the **South-East** receives 17%, the North-East 14% and the South-West 5%. The tourism sector is an important pillar of the regional economy, representing up to **15% of the regional GDP and 11% of jobs**. Moreover, the Mediterranean is a **biodiversity hotspot**, home to around 9% of the world's marine biodiversity. Around 30% of species are endemic and 51% of native marine fish species are in danger of extinction and 4% are listed as near threatened due to habitat loss from unsustainable resource exploitation, pollution, climate change, eutrophication and invasive marine species.

Additionally, housing and tourist infrastructure are concentrated along the littoral areas, resulting in high levels of coastline artificialization, erosion, over-consumption of energy and water, marine pollution, and biodiversity loss. Mainstreaming sustainable blue tourism is crucial for the Mediterranean region to ensure that tourism activities continue to generate economic sustenance for its coastal communities while ensuring the sustainability of the use of natural resources in a changing climate as well as social acceptance.

Objective

The initiative aims to promote the emergence of **sustainable blue tourism policies and practices** in the Mediterranean using a **bottom-up approach** and **participatory tools** with public and private stakeholders, with special attention to youth and women. Through enhanced **multi-stakeholders cooperation**, it aims to foster new ways of **sharing knowledge and upscaling best practices in the Mediterranean region**, including through the design of new **indicators, planning, management and governance tools** to support a truly sustainable blue tourism in the Mediterranean coastal territories.

The initiative is transversally linked to all six **Strategic Objectives (SO)** of the **Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025**, including **SO1** (Ensuring sustainable development in marine and coastal areas), **SO5** (*Transition towards a green and blue economy*) and **SO 6** (*Improving governance in support of sustainable development*). The initiative also contributes to **the 2030 Agenda** through **Sustainable Development Goal 8** (*Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all*), **SDG 9** (*Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*), **SDG 12** (*Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*) and **SDG 14** (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*), among others.

Additionally, the initiative leverages insights from the recent reports [Towards Sustainable Blue Tourism: Trends, Challenges, and Policy Pathways](#) (IDDRI & eco-union, 2023), [Catalogue of Best Practices on Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean](#) (Plan Bleu, 2022) and [State of Play of Tourism in the Mediterranean](#) (Plan Bleu & eco-union, 2022) which outlines key challenges and opportunities faced by marine regions in adopting sustainable blue tourism models. It emphasizes the importance of bottom-up innovation, stakeholder engagement, social and territorial inclusivity, regional collaboration, and the promotion of best practices in shaping policy pathways for sustainable blue tourism.

Background

*This new Flagship initiative was discussed and approved during the 20th Meeting of the **Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD)** that took place in Marseille (14-16 June 2023). It will be based and capitalize on two existing initiatives, presented during the MCSD, related to Sustainable Blue Tourism in the Mediterranean. First, the [Blue Tourism Initiative](#), a global initiative, with a Mediterranean component, led by **IDDRI** and **eco-union**, co-financed and supported by the **French Government** (through the French Facility for Global Environment - FFEM), **UNEP** (One Planet Program), **GIZ** (Our Blue Future) and the **World Bank** (PROBLUE) aims to improve the governance of coastal and maritime tourism, reduce its environmental pressures and increase its social benefits. Secondly, the Interreg Euro-MED **Community4Tourism (C4T)** (2023-2029), a multi-partner initiative led by **DIBA** – Barcelona Provincial Council (Spain) and **Plan Bleu** aiming at contributing to the improvement of European and transnational territorial cooperation with one of its main objectives being to strengthen sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean region. Following the presentation of these initiatives, participants at the MCSD suggested the integration of an official **Flagship Initiative (FI)** on sustainable blue tourism within the **Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD)** framework. Building on the two ongoing initiatives, the Blue Tourism Initiative and the Community4Tourism, a draft proposal for a FI on blue tourism is being proposed. An informal meeting of the extended steering committee of the MCSD has been proposed at the **COP23 of the Barcelona Convention** to advance the content, organization and milestones of the blue tourism Flagship Initiative.*

Implementation

The initiative would be implemented through the following three main components:

- 1. Knowledge building and monitoring mechanisms** to regularly assess the impacts of blue tourism, conduct sectorial sustainability and policy effectiveness assessments, and enrich the body of knowledge available to blue tourism stakeholders.
- 2. Sustainable blue tourism in action** to support innovative blue tourism activities on the field and bridge the gap between destination-level action and relevant policy and governance mechanisms.
- 3. Regional cooperation for sustainable blue tourism** to leverage on pilot actions and knowledge building and ensure that regional collaboration is enhanced within the Mediterranean, promoting innovative exchanges through social-geographical inclusivity.

1 - Knowledge building and monitoring mechanisms

So far, the monitoring of blue tourism activities and the measurement of their sustainability, including policy effectiveness, in the Mediterranean are very weak. This is due to lack of data, analytical tools and knowledge sharing mechanisms. This Component aims at developing and annually updating a **State of blue tourism** in the Mediterranean as a basis for robust sectorial scientific assessments. Through desk research and collaboration with regional experts, it will collect data, develop indicators, identify policies, review practices and governance mechanisms at regional and national level. It will assess the environmental, social and economic issues related to blue tourism, and highlight the challenges, opportunities and enabling policy directions to foster a more sustainable, inclusive, resilient and cooperative blue tourism sector in the Mediterranean. An initial diagnose on market analysis and mapping of vulnerabilities is planned to be published in February 2024.

In general, this component will provide support for:

- Maintaining up-to-date data on Mediterranean sustainable blue tourism development through indicator-based tracking, including benchmarking and sub-sector analysis for informed policy and planning and to enrich blue tourism knowledge hubs (e.g., Join the Med platform).
- Continuously assessing policy effectiveness and its impact on regional blue tourism.

- Addressing socio-economic and geographical disparities in the Mediterranean and outlining their practical policy implications.
- Evaluating the effects of crises on the blue tourism sector and proposing timely mitigation strategies.
- Highlighting standout practices, challenges, and innovation opportunities within the sustainable blue tourism sector in individual Mediterranean countries, as applicable.
- Outline opportunities for expanding blue tourism networks such as the Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories of the Mediterranean (NSTO)

This component will inform the activities of the flagship initiative, including pilot actions in Component 2, to be well-supported and integrated in the regional, national and local contexts. It should be integrated and coherent with the Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development managed by Plan Bleu within the UNEP/MAP program.

2 - Sustainable blue tourism in action

Informed by the activities in Component 1, this component monitors and, when relevant support, field actions at various pilot sites in the Mediterranean countries to promote sustainable blue tourism through inclusive and participatory approaches with public and private stakeholders at local and national level. The flagship initiative will establish synergies with different projects and programmes that are already being developed¹ and could serve as a basis to develop field projects in Mediterranean countries, for example:

- 1. Blue Tourism Initiative pilot sites:** each pilot site will identify the key stakeholders, review tourism externalities, and assess the current state of play of blue tourism. The flagship initiative will annually back **three or more coastal destinations** in piloting innovative solutions. It will also **pair pilot sites** for knowledge exchange and policy regional integration. Workshops will be organized based on the pilot site to promote sharing of lessons learned, replicability and scaling up of good blue tourism practices.
 - a. Djerba Island (Tunisia):** *Djerba is an example of mass beach-based leisure, with a high dependency on international tourism, a marked seasonality, without much consideration for the environment. The objective is to promote sustainable management of natural coastal areas, reconciling site preservation and tourism development, by supporting the implementation of visitor management plans and field activities in the 3 Ramsar sites (Ras Rmel, Bin el Ouedian and Guellala), and supporting the transition of the hospitality sector to improve their biodiversity performance.*
 - b. Tyre to Tripoli Coastal Route (Lebanon):** *The coastal circuit from Tyre to Tripoli, with a remarkable natural and cultural heritage, enjoys a certain tourist popularity, however it is facing structural management problems. The objective is to support a more sustainable management of the nature reserve of the coasts of Tyre, the saltworks of Anfeh and the nature reserve of the Palm Islands (opposite Tripoli), through the financing of locally-led field initiatives.*
 - c. Al Hoceima National Park (Morocco):** *The Al Hoceima National Park (ANH), the most important protected area on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, is aiming to structure its tourism development. The activities include capacity building of local stakeholders and development of an action plan for the development of new touristic products. Al Hoceima National Park is also participating in the development of the Coastal Plan for*

¹ <https://bluetourisminitiative.org>

the Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima region, supported by PAP/RAC and Plan Bleu, in the framework of the GEF MedProgramme

2. **ReBootMED² blue ecotourism experiences in the WestMED (Sept 2023 - June 2025):** In this EMFAF Flagship project, 19 blue ecotourism experiences are being developed in 10 WestMed area destinations, including Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, Spain, France and Italy. Policy recommendations will be issued at the end for the process of co-designing tourism experiences for rebooting tourism after Covid in the framework of locally developed blue recovery action plans.
3. **NaTour4CChange³ (April 2024 - October 2026):** In this InterregMED project, the role of Nature-based Solutions will be explored to improve the resilience of coastal tourism destinations via destination and regional level tourism climate plans. The focus will be in six regions and destinations in the northern Mediterranean (Andalucia, Sud, Sardinia, Croatia, Bosnia, Crete).

3 – Regional cooperation for sustainable blue tourism

The third component aims to foster regional cooperation in sustainable blue tourism. It will build on the previous two components by providing opportunities for inter-regional exchanges and synergies. Therefore, ensuring that sustainable blue tourism models developed in Component 2 are leveraged and the lessons learned will reach governance and policy processes at the Mediterranean levels. Activities that upscale the lessons learned on more enabling policy actions are at the core of this component and of transversal nature throughout the initiative. A specific attention will be paid to raise the profile of blue tourism related issues on the environmental, social and economic policy agenda, including at UNOC 2025 and other relevant institutional frameworks.

The component is composed by the following main activities:

- **Inter-regional cooperation and exchanges:** Inter-regional exchanges will be regularly organized during the initiative between target countries in the Mediterranean and with other marine regions, through dedicated workshops and/or in connection ("back-to-back with") with already planned events.
- **Development of Roadmaps and Action Plans:** These exchanges will lead to a programmatic document, such as a roadmap or action plans that identifies areas for strengthening cooperation on tourism issues within and across regions.
- **Blue tourism Innovation working group:** Establish a formal, multi sectoral working group within the Mediterranean region. This working group will leverage on different regional initiatives to boost innovative policy dialogue within the sector building on the strategic directions outlined in the roadmaps.
- **Mediterranean high-level Conference:** A blue tourism Mediterranean annual conference with specific focus on bridging destination sustainable blue tourism solutions with governance and policy processes will be led by the blue tourism working group. The conference will leverage on the blue tourism initiatives in the Mediterranean and their lessons learned. It may have a sub-sectoral focus and be the platform for blue tourism awards (e.g., youth and women entrepreneurs, blue tourism innovation).
- **Sustainable Blue Tourism Indicators:** Develop blue tourism indicators to add to the MSSD dashboard.

Expected Achievements

1. Development of blue tourism **Monitoring mechanisms, indicators and toolkits** to support, promote and benchmark sustainable blue tourism at destination / national / regional level.

² <https://www.reboot-med.eu/en/home/>

³ https://interreg-euro-med.eu/wp-content/uploads/documents/calls/call-2-thematic-projects/call_02_list_results_final_en.pdf

2. Publication of annual **Regional state of play** of blue tourism along with suggested policy pathways.
3. Support innovative blue tourism **Pilot initiatives** implemented in X countries and X different destinations.
4. Facilitation of **Regional and National policy dialogues** on sustainable blue tourism, with a special attention to the UNOC 2025 process and others relevant policy fora.
5. Launch of a **Regional blue tourism Working Group**, gathering experts, policy-makers and industry actors to share policy innovation and best practices at national and regional level.
6. Organization of an annual **High-level conference on blue tourism**, gathering key public and private stakeholders, to build momentum, share knowledge and develop synergies. The annual **Blue Tourism report** will serve as a basis for discussion and **Awards for sustainable blue tourism** will target innovative community, youth and/or women-led tourism activities.

Technical secretariat

The technical secretariat will be composed of four partners.

- **Plan Bleu:** *Regional Activity Center of the UNEP/MAP, in charge of its Blue Economy program and the Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development. Plan Bleu will play an overall supervisory role for this flagship initiative and ensure the link with the UNEP/MAP - Barcelona Convention system.*
- **eco-union:** *independent Think and Do Tank based in Barcelona (Spain), whose objective is to accelerate the ecological transition of the Euro-Mediterranean region. It is an invited member of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) and a partner of UNEP/MAP.*
- **IDDRI:** *independent think tank based in Paris (France) at the interface of research and decision-making that investigates sustainable development issues requiring global coordination.*
- **IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation:** *established in Malaga (Spain), it is the Mediterranean regional office of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. IUCN-Med aims to influence, encourage and support Mediterranean societies to reconcile the conservation of natural resources with their use.*

Leading Countries (tentative, open to any contracting parties)

- *France: French Ministry of the Sea (Anne-France Didier)*
- *Spain / Italy*
- *Morocco / Tunisia / Lebanon*

Annex II

**Report of the 2nd meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD
4 December 2023, in Portorož, Slovenia**

Background

The meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD has been organized in order to advance on the technical discussion on new Flagship initiatives as well as on youth involvement, profiting of the presence of some MCSD SC Members and Observers at the COP23.

The main outcomes of the meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD will feed the preparation and work of next extended MCSD SC meeting, planned to take place on line in February 2024, which will equally discuss the process for the review and preparation of the revised MSSD, and provide some initial feedback on the substance, with the support of an expert.

Agenda points

1. Presentation of the new Flagship initiative on Tourism
2. Discussion on the Flagship initiative on Posidonia (to be presented at the CoP23)
3. Ways and means of sharing the MSSD revision process with the Youth and discuss their potential involvement
4. Any other matters that the members wish to discuss
5. Presentation of the new UNEP/MAP Officer responsible for the MCSD

1. Presentation of the new Flagship initiative on Tourism

The initiative was presented by Jeremie Fosse from ECOUNION (Annex 1).

The draft is well received by the informal SC and considered as an excellent initiative and to be linked with MSSD revision as well as with the key initiatives and projects implemented by other institutions/actors in the region.

In particular, it is important to develop concrete linkages and cooperation with a) the WestMed initiative for sustainable blue economy⁴ and its June 2023 Ministerial Declaration⁵ which explicitly calls for reinforcement of the collaboration with UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention and its Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), b) with the two governance projects on sustainable tourism mission of the INTERREG EURO MED Programme and with c) BlueMissionMed and its priority on Tourism.

Professor Scoullou from MIO-ECSDE highlighted the importance to foresee also actions tackling the use of plastics in the hotels and suggested to plan cooperation with the WES initiative, while involving the pilots of MIO-ECSDE.

Proposed next step: ECOUNION and IDDRI will update the Flagship initiative with all input of the informal SC and will propose a meeting specifically dedicated to this flagship in early 2024.

2. Discussion on the Flagship initiative on Posidonia (to be presented to the CoP23)

The proposal, already presented during the online extended SC meeting of the MCSD (Annex 2), is well received and a strong will to support it has been confirmed.

Proposed next step: for next online extended MCSD SC - planned in February 2024, the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and the MCSD Chair will elaborate a revised concept of the Flagship initiative that better reflects the MSSD flagship initiatives framework.

In addition, it is suggested to:

- Develop a framework/methodology on how the MSSD flagship initiatives are reported and their impact assessed, linked to the MSSD Dashboard indicators;
- Once validated by the MCSD SC, publish on the UNEP/MAP website the new flagship initiatives, in order to facilitate the information sharing with the stakeholders, including civil society and youth.

⁴ [Home - WestMED \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

⁵ [WestMED-2023-Revised-Ministerial-Declaration-Final-Draft.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

3. Ways and means of sharing the MSSD revision process with the Youth and discuss their potential involvement

The Med Youth proposal is presented by Fares Shmayssani, on behalf also of Agness Nohra and Mohamed Fathy (Annex 3).

The proposal is well received by the informal SC of the MCSD with the recommendation to:

- Capitalize on the existing numerous initiatives/networks and groups of youth already existing and involved on sustainability priorities in the Mediterranean;
- Link this initiative with the MSSD flagship initiative Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (MSESD).

Proposed next step:

- Prepare the list of contacts and initiatives/networks in the Mediterranean countries and at regional level, that could be reached out for cooperation purposes;
- Elaborate the questionnaire to identify what Youth see their future, and with reference to the MSSD priorities;
- Disseminates the questionnaire to the identified list of contacts and initiatives/networks to capture the results and prepare a report to the MCSD SC;
- Organize a short webinar to present to the youth the UNEP/MAP, MSSD and its MCSD the MED2050 scenario for future and the flagship initiatives;
- With the support of the UNEP/MAP Secretariat and Professor Scoullos leader of the MSESD, identify how the youth involvement could be framed within the MSSD flagship initiative Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.

4. Point not in the agenda: Proposal for the revision of the MSSD

By end of December 2023, an indicative planning will be defined in order to finalize the reviewed MSSD by June 2025 for adoption by the COP 24, in December 2025. The planning will be shared during the next extended MCSD SC meeting, planned to take place online in February 2024.

The Secretariat will launch soon the Terms of reference for the recruitment of a consultant who will support the evaluation of the MSSD.

5. Presentation of the new UNEP/MAP Officer responsible for the MCSD

Patrizia Busolini is the new UNEP/MAP Programme Officer in charge of the MSSD, since Mid-November 2023.

Annex III

**Report of the 3rd meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD
21 February 2024 (on-line)**

1. The revision process will update the MSSD based to the extent possible on existing analysis and taking in account the main recent global and regional frameworks, including the European Green Deal
2. The MSSD revision will not open the floor to extensive changes but to an update, while aligning the Strategy with the most recent global and regional frameworks while addressing the thematic and systemic identified gaps, building on the 2021 MSSD mid-term revision
3. To this end, the evaluator, who will be soon selected, will mainly do a **desk research gap analysis**, that needs to be combined with **the outcomes/projections of the MED 2050**. It will be also based on the **updated evaluation of the indicators of the MSSD Dashboard**.
4. The evaluation of the MSSD will equally cover the implementation of the **Flagship Initiatives**
5. In principle, with regards to the MSSD revision there is already an agreed list, however new flagship Initiatives will considered, as recommended by the MCSD CS on June 2023 in Marseille, including on youth and women leadership
6. For the time being 2-3 working groups are suggested: on **MSP/Blue economy, Circular Economy, Ocean Economy/Sustainable Finance**. **This groups will be composed by a limited number of experts from different countries**, elected on their own capacity and civil society representants
7. MAP components and MCSD members will be involved in undertaking Consultation mechanisms also for other relevant subjects, even if there is no respective dedicated working group
8. A potential working group **on climate change** is to **be decided in a second phase**, after more reflection is undertaken regarding the process for updating **UNEP/MAP 2016 Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas** and clarifying the role of MedEEC
9. A potential working group **on indicators** for the time being **remains on hold**, as the MSSD can already relay in a sound number of indicators, even though some work can be done, while new indicators need to be approved by the MCSD
10. It was agreed to strengthen in principle the systemic aspects embedded into the revised MSSD: ie science-policy interface, Ocean Economy/Sustainable Finance, strengthen the role for local authorities, streamlined cooperation with key regional initiatives and programmes
11. In terms of timeline: **by January/February 2025, an ad hoc MCSD meeting** will be called to discuss the revised MSSD, in view of the **MCSD meeting to be held in June 2025 that will validate the revised MSSD**.

Action Points/follow-up

- Secretariat to prepare:
 - o A letter for the MCSD Members and the MAP FPs, explaining that the MSSD revision foresees WGs for the time being (MSP/Blue economy, Circular Economy, Ocean Economy/Sustainable Finance) and that accordingly they need to appoint experts
 - o Terms of reference for the WGs
 - o Start reflecting on how to strengthen the systemic governance part of the MSSD, reinforcing and streamlining the cooperation with key regional initiatives, programmes and institutions. A first draft to be presented at the MCSD SC meeting as information document
- Plan Bleu to:
 - o Define how they **plan to utilize/include the outcomes/projections of the MED 2050** within the MSSD revision process and share the proposal with CU
 - o Provide the Coordinator with the **updated assessment of the MSSD Dashboard of current indicators**, as soon as possible
- Next **Steering Committee of the MCSD will take place in Athens on 18 and 19 April**:
 - o Secretariat to prepare the agenda in coordination with the President of the MCSD
The main identified agenda points will cover: Progress report on MSSD and Flagship Initiatives in the period June 2023-April 2024; MSSD evaluation and Revision process; Mediterranean Sustainability Dashboard and Indicators and Related Trends; new

Flagship Initiatives; Report on the work of the MED Youth Group. Specific time to be foreseen to have an atelier on gender/ women leadership.

- Secretariat to prepare for each of the new Flagship Initiatives and in coordination with the respective identified partners, half a page on the main objectives and potential new partners.

Annex IV

**Report of the 4th meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD
12 November 2024 (on-line)**

1. MSSD Evaluation process: for next evaluation exercises, consider define a baseline for the agreed actions and targets and give opportunity to as many as possible key actors to contribute to evaluation processes; therefore promote an inclusive evaluation process;
2. 2016-2025 MSSD Final Evaluation: to add the 2019 Mid-Term evaluation color coding tables by Objectives/Strategic Directions, to reflect the progress to date more clearly;
 - a. Updated MSSD Targets: Secretariat will further work on this section; Inputs from the MCSD Extended SC are more than welcomed; Secretariat to further look at the relevant commitments/targets made under the MAP system beyond 2030 as appropriate
3. MSSD Dashboard indicators: Proposals to consider possible new indicators (ie flooding, fisheries, food security, air quality);
4. Agreement on selecting 10 core indicators to better communicate on main sustainability messages. Further consideration on their selection including the new ones proposed (Water withdrawal per inhabitant; Plastic leakages at sea; Air quality).
5. New flagship initiatives: The Secretariat in parallel with their finalization will work to involve as many as possible countries/partners/regional initiatives for their implementation
6. Secretariat took note of the request of the Members of the Extended SC for more time to provide more concrete inputs on the proposals made

Agreed Action Points

- Extended MCSD SC members may **provide input/comments by 27 November**, to the following documents which are attached to this email:
 - o MSSD 2026-2025 Implementation Final evaluation
 - o Proposals on the section related to the Strategic Directions
 - o Updated MSSD Targets table
 - o 8 new MSSD flagship initiatives
 - o Possible adjustment on proposed 10 core indicators
 - o Possible new/adjustment to the MSSD Dashboard of 28 indicators (keeping in mind the need for relevance, data availability and the global context)

Annex V

**Report of the 5th meeting of the extended Steering Committee of the MCSD
20 December 2024 (on-line)**

1. MSSD main changes

- **Proposed updated and new MSSD actions** seem pertinent.
- The following aspects should be better reflected: **marine litter and plastic pollution; construction and demolition waste recycling; waste management** and related preventive actions to be linked not only to the urban dimension (under MSSD Obj 3), but also to private sector/circular economy (under Obj 5); **blue economy** to be better reflected in the actions; **market instruments** to support delivery of environmental targets to be considered for inclusion; **phase out environmental harmful subsidies** better embedded as approach
- Consider **possibilities to merge some Actions**, as appropriate, to ensure balance distribution among Objectives
- **Climate change** as 1st priority/Objective 1. Plan Bleu to take the lead to assess how the main outcomes of MedEcc reports can be used in terms of MSSD updated/new actions under Obj 4. Appropriate linkages to be developed with the other Objectives to ensure cross cutting approach. **WEFE NEXUS flagship initiative** concrete tool on climate change adaptation
- **Reference to local authorities** to be expressly mentioned also in the Executive Summary
- **Timeframe of actions:** to be revised

2. Indicators

- Many quantitative indicators (number of), while it is important to have also **qualitative indicators**. Potential **reduction and review** is to be considered
- Highlight the indicators that are relevant to more than one Strategic Direction and Action, to **facilitate linkages**

3. New Flagship initiatives

- Add a paragraph in the narrative on **how FIs contribute to different objectives** or/and a diagram to show integrated approach vs. silo approach
- Develop flagship initiatives in a detailed way

4. Governance

- Proposed changes seem pertinent and aligned to needs
- **New action 6.2.1** (institutional capacity of local governments/ municipalities to integrate and implement the MSSD objectives, while ensuring governance coordination with the national level): Local Authorities/Municipalities should not be considered as responsible actors but rather the national government and related policy/financial support

5. Targets

- Some more work needed with reference to **global commitments**
- Targets must be **meaningful and measurable**, therefore narrative generic descriptions are to be avoided
- To add target on **waste reduction under Obj 5**, linked to sustainable consumption and production
- Link targets to indicators but also to Flagship Initiatives
- One proposal to be considered could be to have, for each objective, **2030 and 2035 timeframe targets**

Action Points

- **Climate change:** Plan Bleu to assess how the main outcomes of MedEcc reports can be used in terms of MSSD updated/new actions under Obj 4
- **Indicators and Targets:** Secretariat to further work and based on the receive inputs
- **Governance:** comments to be provided **by Thursday 26 December**
- **ECOUNION:** to send formal request for a potential new flagship initiative. The template will be shared and it should be filled in and sent to the Secretariat **by 6 January**