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Agenda Item 5: Specific Matters for Consideration and Action by the Meeting, including draft Decisions

Evaluation of the Regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol and recommendations for the way forward

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2025

Note by the Secretariat

1. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan, give priority to the conservation of the marine environment and to the components of its biological diversity. This was confirmed by the adoption of the new 1995 Barcelona Convention Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) and of its annexes, among them a list of endangered or threatened species.
2. The Protocol sets out very detailed requirements for endangered or threatened species listed in Annex II and III to the Protocol.
3. Elaborating and implementing action plans to conserve one species or group of species is an effective way of guiding, coordinating and strengthening the efforts that the Mediterranean countries are making to safeguard the natural heritage of the region.
4. Although they do not have a binding legal character, these action plans were adopted by the Contracting Parties as regional strategies setting priorities and activities to be undertaken. In particular, they call for greater solidarity between the States of the region, and for coordination of efforts to protect the species 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.
5. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted 9 regional Action Plans: 1 Strategy and 1 restoration Programme.
6. These Action Plans, strategies and Programme constitute midterm regional strategies which are planned to be updated generally each five-year, based on an evaluation of their implementation at regional and national levels.
7. For the biennium 2024-2025, the Contracting Parties to Barcelona Convention requested SPA/RAC during the COP 23 (Portorož, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023) to evaluate the Regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol and to identify recommendations for the way forward, in the light of the new Global Biodiversity Framework, POST-2020 SPABIO and the EcAp/IMAP processes of the Barcelona convention and submit them for consideration of CoP 24.
8. The Evaluation of the Regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol and recommendations for the way forward is presentation hereinafter for information.

Table of content

I.	Background.....	1
II.	The evaluation method	4
III.	Evaluation of the approach of the Regional Action Plans/ Strategy	4
A.	The common approach of the Regional Action Plans	4
B.	Structural differences and specificities.....	5
C.	Results from the questionnaire.....	7
D.	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.....	9
E.	Conclusions.....	13
IV.	Recommendations and way forward for the Regional Action Plans approach.....	14
F.	General points	14
G.	Creating a Regional Action Plan (RAP) Working Group.....	14
H.	RAP structure and contents.....	15
I.	National implementation of the RAPs.....	15
J.	Regional aspects.....	15
K.	Connecting and cooperating	16
L.	Evaluation and updating process (see Annex IV)	16
	Annex I.....	17
	Annex II	22
	Annex III.....	29
	Table relative to aspects of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) with associated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for which recommendations are formulated to improve RAPs approach	29
	Annex IV	39
	RAP evaluation and update process including a RAP Working Group and a RAP format in two parts	39
	Annex V.....	41
	Proposed common format/pattern for Regional Action Plans on selected species and habitats under the SPA/BD protocol.....	41

I. Background

1. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, within the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan, give priority to the conservation of the marine environment and to the components of its biological diversity. This was confirmed by the adoption of the new 1995 Barcelona Convention Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) and of its annexes, among them a list of endangered or threatened species.
2. The Protocol sets out very detailed requirements for endangered or threatened species listed in Annex II and III to the Protocol.
3. Elaborating and implementing action plans to conserve one species or group of species is an effective way of guiding, coordinating and strengthening the efforts that the Mediterranean countries are making to safeguard the natural heritage of the region.
4. Although they do not have a binding legal character, these action plans were adopted by the Contracting Parties as regional strategies setting priorities and activities to be undertaken. In particular, they call for greater solidarity between the States of the region, and for coordination of efforts to protect the species 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.
5. The Mediterranean Countries adopted the following regional Action Plans / Strategy / Programme:
 - Regional strategy for the conservation of Monk Seal in the Mediterranean
 - Action Plan for the conservation of marine turtles
 - Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans
 - Action Plan for the conservation of marine vegetation
 - Action Plan for the conservation of bird species listed in annex II of the SPA/BD Protocol
 - Action Plan for the conservation of cartilaginous fishes (Chondrichthyans) in the Mediterranean Sea
 - Action Plan concerning species introduction and invasive species
 - Action Plan for the conservation of the coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea
 - Action Plan for the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemo-synthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark habitats Action Plan)
 - Restoration Programme of *Pinna nobilis*
6. These Action Plans, strategies and Programme constitute midterm regional strategies which are planned to be updated generally each five-year, based on an evaluation of their implementation at regional and national levels.
7. For the biennium 2024-2025, the Contracting Parties to Barcelona Convention requested SPA/RAC during the COP 23 (Portorož, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023) to evaluate the Regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol and to identify recommendations for the way forward, in the light of the new Global Biodiversity Framework, POST-2020 SPABIO and the EcAp/IMAP processes of the Barcelona convention. and submit them for consideration of COP 24.
8. All the Regional Action Plans (RAPs) under the SPA/BD Protocol are meant to contribute to the conservation of Mediterranean Sea biodiversity and ecosystems. Three concern benthic habitats (marine vegetation, coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions, dark habitats), five concern the conservation of species or groups of species (monk seal, marine turtles, cetaceans, cartilaginous fish, birds of the Protocol's Annex II), one is relative to the assessment and management of invasive species, and one is a restoration programme of a species threatened by extinction *Pinna nobilis*.

9. Action Plans on the conservation of selected species and habitats listed under SPA/BD

Protocol should contribute to the actions requested in the **Post-2020 SAPBIO** as much as possible. Therefore, all Post-2020 SAPBIO requested actions and expected results for 2027 and 2030 should be considered when updating Action Plans on the conservation of selected species and habitats listed under SPA/BD Protocol.

10. The date of adoption and latest updates of the Regional Action Plans may be found in Table 1 hereafter

Table 1: Basic information on the Regional Action Plans

	Regional Action Plans and Strategy	Adoption	Latest evaluation and update	Main objective/goal
SPECIES CONSERVATION	Action Plan for the management of the Monk Seal in the Mediterranean ¹	1987		Preservation of the remnant population of Mediterranean monk seal and allow the species to recover to a viable population level.
	Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Mediterranean Monk Seal (2014-2019) (2020-2025)	2013	2023: Midterm Evaluation, 2025: currently being updated	Reduce pressures enough to permit gradual recovery of the remaining populations of Monk seals in the Mediterranean Sea.
	Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean Marine Turtles	1989	2025: currently being updated	The recovery of the populations of marine turtles through appropriate protection, conservation and management of their habitats, including nesting, feeding and wintering areas and key migration passages.
	Action Plan for the conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea	1991	2021	The protection, conservation and recovery of cetacean populations and habitats including feeding, breeding and calving grounds in the Mediterranean Sea.
	Action Plan for the conservation of Cartilaginous Fishes (Chondrichthyans) in the Mediterranean Sea	2003	2025: currently being updated	The general conservation of the chondrichthyan populations of the Mediterranean.
	Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species listed in Annex II to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological	2003	2023	Maintain and/or restore the population levels of bird species listed in the SPA Protocol's Annex II to a favourable conservation status and to ensure their long-term conservation.

¹ The Regional Action Plan for the management of the Monk Seal in the Mediterranean and the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of Mediterranean Monk Seal are considered as one Regional Action Plan

	Regional Action Plans and Strategy	Adoption	Latest evaluation and update	Main objective/goal
	Diversity in the Mediterranean			
HABITAT CONSERVATION	Action Plan for the conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea	1999	2019	Ensure the conservation of macroscopic marine vegetation species and vegetal assemblages in the Mediterranean and avoid degradation of the seagrass meadows, and of other vegetal assemblages of importance especially those considered as natural monuments.
	Action Plan for the conservation of the Coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea	2008	2025: currently being evaluated and updated.	Conserve the coralligenous and others calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea and improve scientific cooperation and knowledge.
	Action Plan for the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemo-synthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark habitats)	2013	Evaluated in 2020 and updated in 2021	Reduce human impacts on deep-sea and cave habitats enough to safeguard their integrity and functions and improve knowledge.
	Restoration programme of <i>Pinna nobilis</i>	2023		Conserve fan mussels by applying specific conservation and repopulation actions in pilot areas, that are transferable to other Mediterranean areas.
	Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea	2003	2023	Promote the development of coordinated efforts and management measures to address the species introductions and invasive species in the Mediterranean in the most effective way possible.

II. The evaluation method

11. The recommendations suggested hereafter stem from assessment and analysis led in the Assessment report on the regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol in the Mediterranean Sea report.

12. To evaluate the approach of the Regional Action Plans/ Strategy for the conservation of selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol, the 10 Regional Action Plans /Strategy were compared between each other to identify common approach and structural specificities. The latest evaluations of these Action Plans were also taken in consideration to determine successes and identify gaps that seem to hinder the effectiveness of the Regional Action Plan.

13. From the first analysis of the Regional Action Plans/ Strategy, a questionnaire was established to facilitate interviews of national SPA/BD Focal Points and relevant resource persons. The questionnaire intended to collect the opinion of Focal Points and resource people on strengths and weaknesses identified through the analysis of the Regional Action Plans.

14. Finally, a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was performed taking in consideration the answers and comments to the questionnaires, the analysis of the Regional Action Plans, the gaps highlighted in their evaluations, as well as other regional or international strategies and policies.

III. Evaluation of the approach of the Regional Action Plans/ Strategy

A. The common approach of the Regional Action Plans

15. The Regional Action Plans concern the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention which are the 21 Mediterranean countries and the European Union. Their ultimate goal is to contribute to the conservation of selected vulnerable marine species, groups of species or habitats in the Mediterranean Sea either by developing conservation actions including anthropogenic threat reduction, or by managing invasive species. The term “Regional Action Plans” (sometimes also referred to as Action Plans) used here after includes the 10 selected species and habitat Regional Action Plans, Strategy and Restoration Programme listed in Table 1.

16. All Regional Action Plans (RAPs):

- present **clear regional objectives**
- request actions to be implemented at **regional** and **national** level
- **request national implementation of the Regional Action Plans** by the Contracting Parties including a management plan in relation with the concerned species, groups of species or habitats
- request **scientific knowledge acquisition** including **geographic distribution** of species or habitats
- request to **initiate or enhance assessment and monitoring** of the concerned habitats or species
- request to **increase public awareness**
- request the **development of capacity building**
- request the **development of international collaboration**
- inform on the **main role of actors** (SPA/RAC, Contracting Parties and eventually regional institutions and partners)
- indicate **who is to accomplish the actions** requested (at different degrees of precision though)
- indicate **major threats** either as a list or in a developed form
- are **planned to be evaluated and updated** regularly, generally every 5 years

17. The large majority of the Regional Action Plans:

- requests to assess the **state of conservation** of the habitat/species
- refers to the use of **IMAP Common Indicators** for monitoring when appropriate indicators exist
- requests the **creation or the enlargement of existing MPA** to include species or habitats concerned
- gives **criteria to define appropriate conservation areas** or areas of interest for monitoring
- requests **actions** which are most often **not measurable**
- has been **evaluated and updated** at least one time (except recent *Pinna nobilis* restoration programme)
- has **over 10 years of existence**

B. Structural differences and specificities

18. Several recent Regional Action Plans have been edited by SPA/RAC with a same layout, it is the case of the Action Plans relative to the conservation of birds, cetaceans, dark habitats, marine turtles, marine vegetation and monk seals. However, there are differences in the content between RAPs even those presented with the recent common layout.

Structural differences between RAPs:

- Some RAPs will **include a state of the art of knowledge and geographic distribution** within the RAP, whereas others don't, or it will **be present in the evaluation** but not in the RAP document.
- The **number of actions** requested in the RAP vary from 15 to 38. However, 38 are a total of actions requested for different areas concerning the monk seal.
- Some RAPs will clearly **present international and regional policies and legal instruments** that concern the species (e.g. RAP on cetaceans, marine birds, *Pinna nobilis*) but others don't (e.g. habitat RAP). The clearest presentation being in a table as in the cetacean RAP. Policies concerning cartilaginous fish for example are referred to in the evaluation but not specifically in the Regional Action Plan.
- **Actions** required in the RAPs are of **different level of precision**. These are often quite general, making also difficult the evaluation of their implementation. Others such as the cetacean, the marine birds, the cartilaginous fish, the monk seal, the *Pinna nobilis* and the invasive species RAP request more specific actions.
- **Actions** requested may be **presented under different themes** or not.
- **Actions** requested are **more or less time-bound**.
- Generally, there is **no clear long- and medium-term strategy** presented except in the case of the monk seal strategy.
- Several RAPs request the creation of **working groups or advisory committees or task force** (e.g. coralligenous, monk seal, *Pinna nobilis*).
- RAPs on benthic habitats request to Contracting Parties to take the habitats in consideration for **environmental impact assessment**. It is also the case in the RAPs relative to cetaceans and to marine birds, but it is not the case in the others.
- **Restoration actions** are requested or envisaged in few RAPs.
- **Climate change concerns** are present in several RAPs but not all.
- **Priorities can be defined at several levels** (national, species and regional) but it is not always the case. In the cetacean RAP it is in the evaluation not in the Action Plan.

Specificities of some Regional Action Plans:

- **Three Regional Action Plans concern specifically the conservation of benthic habitats** (*AP on the conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea; AP on the conservation of habitats and species associated with seamounts, under water caves and canyons, aphotic hard beds and chemo-synthetic phenomena in the Mediterranean Sea; and the AP for the conservation of the coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean Sea*). Each include different types of habitats. However, but the Dark habitat Action Plan in particular **covers two very different types of habitats which are very different and under very different threats which leads to an action plan divided in two.**
- Although the difference is less pronounced in the AP on coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions, the situation is comparable for the coralligenous assemblages and the rhodolith/maerl beds.
- The three benthic habitat Regional Action Plans request to acquire knowledge on spatial distribution and on the condition of the habitat's typical species. Monitoring and assessment methods used for each habitat, indicator and Contracting Parties could be discussed in order to select the most cost-effective methods, mutualise means, increase relations between benthic habitat Action Plans and between these and IMAP. The recent report on benthic habitat assessment and monitoring (UNEP/MAP – SPA/RAC, 2023²) could represent a good basis of discussion.
- **Several RAPs** (cetacean, marine turtles, cartilaginous fish and birds) request to **assess and reduce by-catch of vulnerable species**. This could possibly lead to consider further collaboration and connection between these RAPs on the subject as experienced in the Medbycatch Projects I and II. Further, IMAP Common Indicator 12 “Bycatch of vulnerable and non-target species” (Ecological Objective 1 and 3) currently assessed by GFCM.

Remarks on the individual evaluations of the Action Plans

- **The evaluations are of very different content but there is often essential information which is not valued and which remains little accessible.** Evaluation reports are not shared directly with the Regional Action Plan text and are just prepared as information documents during the SPA/DB National Focal Points meetings
- Concerning the **implementation of RAPs actions at national level**, the evaluation can be presented in different ways by action and/or by country for example but **rarely in a synthetic way** (graphic or table) that would allow to have the information in a glance.
- Evaluations of RAPs implementation are generally based on the online national reporting and a questionnaire sent to SPA/BD Focal Points, resource people, and regional organisations. However, the evaluation method is not always clear. Frequently, further information from a desk review will be added to the evaluation of the implementation of the RAP.
- Interesting distribution maps or tables of the status and trends of species or tables presenting the current programmes for example **remain in the evaluation report whereas they could be of interest for a state of the art in the Action Plan.**

² UNEP/MAP - SPA/RAC (2023). *Monitoring and assessment elements for the IMAP common indicators (CII and CI2) on benthic habitats. Report prepared by Joaquim Garrabou and Silvija Kipson under Contract No.9_2021_SPA/RAC (IMAP-MPA Project)* (No. UNEP/MED WG.547/11; p. 40p+Annexes). https://rac-spa.org/meetings/cormon0323/docs/eng/23wg547_11.pdf

C. Results from the questionnaire

19. From the first analysis of the Regional Action Plans/ Strategy, a questionnaire was established (see Annex I) to facilitate interviews of national SPA/BD Focal Points and relevant resource persons. The deliberately short questionnaire intended to collect the point of view of Focal Points and resource people on strengths and weaknesses identified through the analysis of the Regional Action Plans.

20. Following the list of Focal Points and resource persons identified by SPA/RAC, interviews were requested to 11 National Focal Points and/or resource persons. Questions were related to the general approach of the Regional Action Plans and the opinion as Focal Point or resource person. A total of 8 answers were collected, 6 interviews took place during November and December 2024 based on the questionnaire and 1 filled the questionnaire was sent it back; all together 73% of the people contacted answered the questionnaire.

21. The answers to the questionnaire are presented in graphs in Annex II. These were taken in account in the following SWOT analysis.

Action Plans general accomplishments

22. The large majority (75% and over) of the participants to the questionnaires considered that Regional Action Plans on the conservation of selected species and habitats of the SAP/BD Protocol have:

- contributed to the protection of species and habitats,
- developed cooperation between CPs and with regional organisations on conservation actions,
- have helped mainstream conservation concerns and develop capacity building at national and regional level,
- contributed to the development of MPAs (e.g. management plans, training courses, enlargement of MPAs) and
- helped the acquisition of knowledge on species and habitats at national level.

23. To a lesser degree, it is considered that the RAPs have participated or supported other national legislation concerning the protection of species/habitats (62%), have helped build a bridge between international/regional policies and national policies (62%), have helped funding efficient programmes of conservation (50%), and contributed to the identification and creation of MPAs (37%).

Format of Action Plans

24. It is considered that Action Plans could benefit of using a comparable format (as much as possible a same minimum content) but that there would be no advantage to evaluate and update Action Plans, within habitat RAP or species RAP, simultaneously.

Action Plans and IMAP

25. Connexions between assessments requested in RAPs and Biodiversity/NIS IMAP monitoring and assessments should be developed. Referring to IMAP indicators in RAPs should be more explicit when appropriate. IMAP data should be used for RAPs and IMAP monitoring could also adapt to RAPs' assessment needs in some cases. However, RAPs assessment should not lose their specificities.

Actions requested in RAP

26. Actions requested in the Regional Action Plans should be more time-based, specific, measurable and to some degree more achievable. Actions for some countries are difficult to implement at national

scale when not backed by a programme. Actions requested have further chance to be implemented at national level when associated to technical and financial support. The most important is to foster the implementation of actions at national level.

Strategic long-term roadmap and short-term Action Plan

27. All participants agreed that RAPs would be clearer and more efficient if each present (i) an overarching long-term roadmap and (ii) priority short-term Action Plan. The first would include a current state of the art on knowledge, gaps, threats, conservation status, legislation, monitoring tools available and a framework with a vision and goals (e.g. similar to Post 2020 SAPBIO) which could be updated every 10 years. The second would be a short-term priority Action Plan (Targets/Actions) with more precise, limited in number and as much as possible measurable actions, which could be evaluated and updated every 5 years. Action Plans should be as homogeneous as possible, and it has been suggested that they represent a transposition of Post-2020 SAPBIO to species and habitat levels.

Role of each actor in RAPs

28. Each actor's role should be clearly defined in the RAPs, along with their responsibilities for every requested action. If multiple actors are involved, defining their specific tasks and expected outcomes can improve efficiency.

Reporting format

29. The current reporting format is considered appropriate. However, it has been noted that some answers (e.g. Under development or in process) are too general if there are no precisions. Such answers request that the CP gives further details. Reporting is uneven from one CP to another, sometimes inexistant and many CPs should make further efforts in reporting with precision.

Habitats in Regional Action Plans

30. Four participants considered that marine caves and deep-sea habitats currently in a same RAP should be separated. Further one person considered that it should be integrated in the coralligenous RAP, whereas three considered that a RAP should be created for marine caves.

31. No one considered that maerl/rhodolith beds (currently in the coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretion RAP) should be separated from coralligenous and integrated in the Marine Vegetation RAP. However, one suggested to create a separate RAP for rhodolith/maerl beds.

32. One considered that the habitat RAPs should stay as they are.

Connection and cooperation between RAPs

33. All participants agreed that further efforts could enhance coordination between Regional Action Plans (RAPs) where appropriate. Several highlighted the value of regular meetings among RAP-focused experts to strengthen collaboration and alignment in their implementation and updates. While the SPA/RAC Symposia partially facilitate this, they do not include dedicated discussions on RAPs and currently cover only habitat and non-indigenous species (NIS) RAPs—excluding those focused on species.

34. Creating exchange meetings between RAPs, could give the opportunity to share assessment methods, consider common data/information acquisition, when possible (e.g. bycatch), evaluate the necessity of updating RAPs, find solutions to common problems.

Other suggestions and comments

35. The further points were suggested by participants:

- Concerning Marine Vegetation RAP, each country should adopt a national plan on the species which are the most pertinent for the CP and communicate which are these species.
- The data which is acquired through the RAPs and the associated programmes needs to be centralised, made homogeneous and easily available. This is not currently the case. Efforts must be done at regional level in this direction.
- SPA/RAC reference list of habitats should be used systematically by all RAPs to describe the habitats concerned and species denomination should be common as well. This is important at regional and national level to be able to conduct spatial comparisons.

D. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

36. The use of SWOT diagnosis should help set priorities for the future updating of Regional Action Plans in particular in their common approach.

Table 2: Strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), stemming from the analysis of the Regional Action Plans and the answers to the questionnaire on the Approach of the Regional Action Plans on the conservation of selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol.

Strengths	Weaknesses
• The Regional Action Plans and Strategy on the conservation of selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol (RAPs) have a common, clearly defined geographical coverage (as delimited in Article 1 of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean) • RAPs have been adopted by all Mediterranean Countries and have³: ○ contributed to the conservation of species and habitats at national and regional scale ○ contributed to increase cooperation between Contracting Parties and between CPs and regional entities	• Regional Action Plans on the conservation of selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol are not legally binding for CPs • Implementation at national scale of RAPs is limited in certain countries • For some RAPs, only few countries report, all together for the biennium 2020-2021 only 8 CPs reported on the SPA/BD Protocol and Action Plans (see UNEP/MED WG.548/3 REV1 Rev.1⁴) • CPs do not inform sufficiently in reporting on state of implementation of RAP at national level • RAPs do not have the same type of content • There is little exchange and cooperation between RAPs to enhance collaboration on methodologies, data acquisition etc.

³ As indicated in the questionnaire Annex I on Regional Action Plans Approach

⁴ UNEP/MAP - SPA/RAC. (2023). *Report on the status of implementation of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) UNEP/MED WG.548/3 REV1 Rev.1* (No. UNEP/MED WG.548/3 REV1 Rev.1; p. 19). UNEP/MAP - SPA/RAC. https://www.rac-spa.org/meetings/nfp16/docs/working/WG548.-3_ENG_REV1.pdf

○ for the conservation of vulnerable species ○ helped develop the biodiversity conservation concerns at national level ○ contributed in the development of MPAs by supporting e.g. management plans and training courses ○ contributed to the development of national legislation on the protection of species and habitats ○ enhanced the acquisition of knowledge on vulnerable species and habitats at national and regional scale ○ fostered relations between international/regional policies and national policies • The existence of a coordinating regional structure for the CPs (SPA/RAC) dedicated to the conservation and management of Mediterranean marine biodiversity which coordinates training sessions through programmes, publishes guidelines for assessment and monitoring and organises symposia on species and habitats of RAPs is a considerable advantage. UNEP/MAP-SPA/RAC greatly participates at the coordination of conservation actions at regional level and fosters national implementation of actions • RAPs give common direction for the conservation of vulnerable species and habitats progressively adopted at national scale. • Several regional organisations contribute as partners to RAPs and support their implementation (e/g. ACCOBAMS, GFCM etc.) • There is an increasing number of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas with management plans taking vulnerable species and habitats into account. • Assessment and monitoring programmes have been financed in some CPs for the implementation of RAPs at national level. • The Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme for the Mediterranean (IMAP) which concerns many of the species and habitats of the RAPs supports many assessment and monitoring needs of RAPs. • RAPs' implementations are evaluated regularly and updated taking in account the	• Data collection, management and availability is not efficient at regional level • Limited interaction and consideration between RAPs assessment needs and IMAP data • Actions requested in RAPs are often not specific, measurable, achievable and time-based • Only one RAP has an overarching long-term strategy and short-term action plan • Each habitat RAP regroups several habitats which in some cases can be very different. • Evaluation reports are very different. • Evaluations which precede RAP updating contain important information which is not sufficiently valued • Actions requested in RAPs are often numerous, five have over twenty actions. • Digital data infrastructure requested from several RAPs are not yet set up at regional level
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latest knowledge, state of the art and priorities. • The reporting format for the RAPs is appropriate for CPs. •	
Opportunities	Threats
• Development of sustainable ecotourism and green tourism concerned about conserving biodiversity and environmental subjects • Development of new assessment and monitoring technologies which are more efficient and less time consuming in field work and data processing • Possibilities of co-fundings for conservation programmes and development of national action plans • The opportunity to review the RAPs approach should contribute to increase efficiency of RAPs. • Several species concerned by the RAPs benefit of a sympathy capital such as monk seal, cetaceans and sea turtles and therefore contribute to their conservation. • The existence of several funding tools for the Mediterranean Sea: ○ MedFund which is a conservation trust fund specifically dedicated to the financing of MPAs in the Mediterranean ○ The PAMEx Local Investment Finance Facility (PLIFF) a financial mechanism created under the umbrella of the initiative titled “PAMEx: The Mediterranean: a model sea by 2030”. ○ The Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) of the UN Decade ○ The UN Decade finance tools such as Finance Task Force and the Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) • The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) • The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) • The EU Restoration Law should contribute to finance actions of restoration of special areas or areas important for vulnerable species and habitats. • The Post-2020 SAPBIO defines clear vision, mission, goals, targets and actions which concern directly or indirectly the Regional Action Plans for selected species and habitats objectives. • The CBD agreed during the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework on	• Biodiversity conservation is often not yet a priority for many CPs • Several CPs are in political instability or facing war • Increasing impacts of climate change in the Mediterranean affect ecosystems and species • Several other threats are increasing in the Mediterranean Sea (increase of maritime transport and underwater noise, growing quantities of plastic and microplastics) • Increase in tourism and development of urbanisation along the coast increases artificialisation but also economic value of coastal areas which tend to counter the development of protected areas • The effects of cumulated impacts of climate change with other anthropogenic pressures are not well known yet • Increase of massive mortality events which could increase the number of vulnerable species and habitats

tasks to achieve are supported by the RAPs in particular but not only to: ○ effectively restore under task 2 by 2030, 30% of the areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems. ○ conserve under task 3 by 2030, 30% of earth's land and sea through the establishment of protected areas and other area-based ○ to halt species extinction by management actions (target 4) ○ to reduce the introduction of Invasive Alien Species by 50% and minimize their impact (target 6)	
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E. Conclusions

37. Ten Regional Action Plans/Strategy have been adopted by the Contracting Parties under the SPA/BD Protocol. These concern the conservation of habitats (Marine vegetation, coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions, dark habitats (deep-sea and marine caves)), species (marine turtles, monk seal, cetaceans, cartilaginous fish, birds of SPA/BD Protocol Annex II, *Pinna nobilis* restoration Programme) and invasive species to manage. All contribute to the Post-2020 SAPBIO vision and mission and are in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework and its 2030 Targets.

38. This Regional Action Plans Approach evaluation offers the opportunity to identify gaps and elements that hinder the efficiency of RAPs, and to adjust and update the common approach of these Regional Action Plans (RAPs) with the intention of enforcing efficiency, effectiveness and integration of the RAPs at national level.

39. By adopting RAPs, CPs have agreed to set priorities and activities to be undertaken for vulnerable species and habitats and invasive species. RAPs call for coordination and reinforcement of national conservation efforts.

40. The evaluation shows that RAPs have achieved to prioritise conservation of vulnerable species and habitats at regional and national level, to support the acquisition of knowledge on these species and habitats, to effectively contribute to the conservation of vulnerable species and habitats, to support the implementation of action plans at national level, to develop capacity building and regional cooperation on the conservation of species and habitats.

41. The evaluation confirms that elaborating and implementing action plans to conserve one species or group of species is an effective way of guiding, coordinating and strengthening the efforts that the Mediterranean countries are making to safeguard the natural heritage of the region.

42. Regional Action Plans for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol have greatly contributed to the conservation of Mediterranean marine biodiversity and ecosystems fulfilling their primary role.

43. However, efforts are still necessary to implement the RAPs' actions at national level especially in non-European countries. Some changes in the RAPs Approach could be efficient to better assist the implementation of the RAPs. Further, increased connexion and interaction at regional scale between RAPs could better integrate the ecosystem approach in the RAPs approach.

44. At regional level, a lack of data aggregation and data availability has been highlighted. Such a task is essential, but difficult to accomplish since the number of CPs and the number of Regional Action Plans requests a dedicated team to data management and answer requests relative to the data.

IV. Recommendations and way forward for the Regional Action Plans approach

45. The evaluation and analysis of the Regional Plans Approach for the conservation of selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol including the answers to the questionnaire given by the SPA/BD Focal Points and resource persons led to the following recommendations

46. These recommendations take in account the Ecosystem Approach (decision IG.17/6 adopted by COP 15), the associated IMAAP (Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme for the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and related assessment criteria; decision IG.22/7 adopted by COP 19) and the Post-2020 SAPBIO (Post-2020 Strategic Action Plan for the Biodiversity and sustainable management of Natural resources in the Mediterranean region; Decision IG.25/11 adopted by COP 22).

47. Several aspects had been raised by the analysis and the questionnaires which are presented in Annex III with strengths, weaknesses, opportunity, threats leading to recommendations relative to the aspect considered.

48. Annex IV presents a diagram proposed for the evaluation and updates of future Regional Action Plan (RAP) taking in account several propositions/recommendations including the creation of a RAP Working Group. It is based on the current updating process of the RAPs.

49. Annex V details what could be included in the proposed two parts of future RAPs and which could be taken in consideration for future updates.

F. General points

50. The 10 RAPs which have been developed concern the main emblematic vulnerable species, groups of species and habitats and the NIS. For the following years, it is recommended to focus on the implementation and efficiency of the current RAPs at national and regional level, before developing new RAPs on other species or habitats.

51. The fact that RAPs are not legally binding reduces the action implementation at national scale. However, if they were binding, RAPs would be adopted with more difficulty. The role of RAPs is to define an action plan and request participation of CPs to contribute as much as possible. Therefore it is recommended that the actions requested in the RAPs remain not legally binding. However, these should be considered by the CPs as high priority conservation actions to be implemented.

52. It is recommended to persist in enforcing knowledge acquisition on species and habitats concerned throughout all RAPs, starting with geographic distribution and continuing with composition, structure and ecosystem functioning

G. Creating a Regional Action Plan (RAP) Working Group

53. It has been suggested by several questioned people but also within certain RAPs, to create a working group, advisory committee or task force for the RAP. It is recommended to consider creating a RAP Working Group (which would be the same for all RAPs), which could have an overall view of the RAPs and their difficulties and handle several points including (but not only): necessity to review or not RAPs, increase collaboration between RAPs and between RAPs and other organisations etc. The RAP Working Group should include at least one representative of each RAP expert and/or stakeholder. The frequency of meeting is to be defined but once a year starting by online meetings could seem appropriate.

H. RAP structure and contents

54. When updating a RAP, it is recommended to take in consideration the Post-2020 SAPBIO requested actions and expected results for 2027 and 2030.

55. RAPs concern very different species and habitats and it is normal to find differences between RAPs. However, it is recommended to suggest a common plan/structure when RAPs will be updated so that same type of content can be found in each RAP.

56. Further, it is recommended to consider dividing the structure of RAPs in two parts: one general part including a clear list of species or habitats concerned, a state of knowledge and related policies, threats, methods of assessment as well as vision/goals and targets etc. (see Annex B). This part could be reviewed less frequently. A second part containing mainly the short-term action plan would be evaluated and updated more frequently than the first part.

57. If the proposition of RAP format in two parts as suggested is adopted, the first part needs to be updated less frequently than the second part is evaluated. If a RAP Working Group is created, it could decide when these parts need to be evaluated and/or updated. Otherwise, it is suggested to update Part 1 every 10 year, and that Part 2 (action plan table) be evaluated and updated every 5 years.

58. When defining the short-term actions to be implemented, it is recommended to propose as much as possible actions which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART). This will facilitate their implementation as well as their evaluation.

59. The more a RAP is specific, the easiest it is to implement at national level because the object of conservation is clear. Also, species or habitats can be grouped under a same RAP if they have numerous common points and threats or are found in same ecosystems. This is not the case of deep-sea habitats and caves. Therefor it is recommended that these two types of habitats be separated in two RAPs.

60. If a RAP Working Group is created, it is recommended to discuss the creation of a RAP only on rhodolith/mäerl beds (currently this habitat is regrouped with the coralligenous habitats). This was suggested by one Focal Point in the questionnaire.

I. National implementation of the RAPs

61. It is recommended to suggest a list of priority RAPs for each CP (the most relevant species/habitats for the CP) in collaboration with the SPA/BD Focal Points and taking in account scientific knowledge.

62. At national level, it is recommended to search for further integration and connections with other relevant policies e.g. Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management ICZM.

63. Actions requested by RAPs are more likely to be implemented at national scale if supported by a project. It is recommended to pursue support through projects for RAP implementation at national scale.

J. Regional aspects

64. For each species or habitat considered, it is recommended to spatially identify a regional network of MCPAs which contribute effectively to their conservation. This could contribute to identify spatial/functional gaps in conservation of the species or habitat at regional scale (for reproduction, gene flow, feeding etc.). This could be a task for the RAP Working Group.

K. Connecting and cooperating

65. It is recommended to maintain and develop relations between CPs and international organisations. Further, developing connections with other Protocols such as Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol would be fruitful for the RAPs implementation.

66. It is recommended to elaborate a list of regional/international collaborators and indicate to which RAP they contribute and in what way (simple table).

67. It is recommended to make clear reference to relevant IMAP indicators in all RAPs.

68. The creation of a RAPs Working Group could also be in charge of enforcing the relations RAPs-IMAP also by identifying RAP needs in terms of assessment and monitoring which could be covered by IMAP indicators.

L. Evaluation and updating process (see Annex IV)

69. It is recommended to suggest a common structure for the evaluations especially in the presentation of the national implementation evaluation.

70. It is recommended to inform whether results of the national implementation should be presented by CP or more globally to assess the global implementation of the action evaluated.

71. It is recommended to keep the format of reporting which is well known and accepted by CPs. However, reporting needs to be more systematic and enhanced.

72. It is proposed to consider replacing in the reporting format, “under development” by more precise choice such as “under project”, “implemented at 1-25%”, “26-50%”, “51-75%”, “76-100%”.

73. It is recommended to integrate a RAP expert Working Group (WG) in the updating process as presented in Annex B which could contribute e.g. to increase relations between RAPs, evaluate the need to update and/or evaluate a RAP, suggest priorities to the updating RAP process, identify the network of MCPAs contributing to the conservation of species/habitats for each RAP, and identify spatial gaps by sub-region for an efficient network of MCPAs to conserve the species/habitat within its distributional range.

Annex I
Questionnaire on Regional Action Plans Approach addressed to Focal Points and resource persons

Questionnaire

On the regional Action Plans Approach for the conservation of selected species and habitats

In the framework of the evaluation of the regional Action Plans Approach for selected species and habitats adopted under the SPA/BD Protocol, a questionnaire was submitted to SPA/BD Focal Points and resource persons to collect their point of view on the successes and the weaknesses of the AP Approach and identify recommendations for the way forward.

Time estimated to answer the questionnaire: about 15 mn.

- Please indicate country Focal Point or resource person and contact
- Please tick the boxes you consider as pertinent or answering the question
- For one question, several boxes may be ticked.
- To untick, click it a second time. **Be aware that boxes are sensitive to ticking/unticking**
- When ticking the box “Other” please detail.

Focal Point/Resource person:

Contact (email):

Which Action Plans are you the most familiar with?

Questions regarding the approach of all the Action Plans/Strategies

1/ Several regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats have been adopted since many years and updated (e.g. on conservation of monk seals, marine turtles, cetaceans, marine vegetation etc.). This gives the possibility to take a step back and consider the effects of these regional Action Plans.

- Do you consider that generally the Action Plans/Strategies coordinated by SPA/RAC have:
 - ☐ Contributed to the conservation of species and habitats
 - ☐ Developed cooperation between Member States on conservation actions
 - ☐ Contributed to increase cooperation between entities at Mediterranean scale to better conserve threatened and vulnerable species and habitats
 - ☐ Helped mainstream conservation concerns at national level
 - ☐ Helped mainstream conservation concerns at regional level
 - ☐ Contributed in the identification and creation of MPAs
 - ☐ Contributed to the development of MPAs (e.g. management plan, training courses, enlargement of MPA)
 - ☐ Participated or supported other national legislation concerning the protection of species/habitat
 - ☐ Helped the acquisition of knowledge on species/habitats at national level
 - ☐ Helped funding efficient programmes of conservation

☐ Helped build a bridge between international/regional policies and national policies

☐ Helped develop national capacity building

☐ Other (please develop):

2/ Although efforts have been done to present Action Plans in a same way, differences persist in structure and content. This is also the case for the evaluations documents which can differs significantly.

- Would Action Plans and Evaluations benefit of a same format (e.g. preformatted general plan)?
 - ☐ Yes, between the Action Plans concerning the conservation of **habitats** (marine vegetation, coralligenous and calcareous bio-concretions, dark habitats)
 - ☐ Yes, between the Action Plans concerning the conservation of **species or groups of species** (all the others, except the Restoration Plan on *Pinna nobilis* and the AP on introduced and invasive species)
 - ☐ Yes, between all the Action Plans
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Other:

3/ Currently, the implementations of the Action Plans are evaluated and updated at different dates (every 5 years normally but at different years).

- Would it be beneficial to align temporally the evaluations and updates of certain Action Plans?
 - ☐ Yes, between **habitat** Action Plans
 - ☐ Yes, between the following species Action Plans:
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Other:

4/ Currently, Action Plans refer and rely at different degrees on Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) indicators and IMAP's guidance for monitoring actions.

- Should Action Plans and IMAP be further interconnected?
 - ☐ Yes, by referring more explicitly to IMAP indicators and guidance (when existent), in the Action Plans' monitoring requests
 - ☐ Yes, by connecting to IMAP documents (guidance, factsheets, scales of assessment etc.) on the web page dedicated to the Action Plan?
 - ☐ No, it is satisfactory as it is

Comments:

5/ Currently, for the great majority of the Action Plans, evaluations show that the actions in the timetables are often not achieved within the 5 years (*still in process* or *not implemented*). Further, they are generally not measurable, not time-based and appear as goals rather than defined actions.

- Would Action Plans be more effective if the actions requested were:

- ☐ More specific
- ☐ Measurable
- ☐ Time-based
- ☐ More achievable
- ☐ None of the above, actions requested are satisfactory
- ☐ Other:

6/ Currently, only the monk seal strategy benefits of a long-term vision and goals and specific shorter-term actions requested.

- Would Actions Plans be clearer and more efficient if each had
 - (i) an overarching long-term roadmap or framework defining a vision and goals (which would include a current state of the art on knowledge, gaps, threats, conservation status, legislation and monitoring tools available) (e.g. similar to Post 2020 SAPBIO). This part could be updated every 10 years.
 - (ii) **and** a short-term priority Action Plan (Targets/Actions) with more precise, limited in number and as much as possible measurable actions to be evaluated and updated every 5 years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

Comments:

7/ In several Action Plans, the role of each actor is not always clearly defined. The actions are often to be accomplished by "SPA/RAC and Contracting Parties" without designing a party "in charge" of the action, except for one Action Plan that designs a "responsible" for each action.

- Do you believe that the role of each actor of the Action Plan (e.g. SPA/RAC, regional institutions or CPs) needs to be better defined with regard to each action?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

- Do you believe that defining an entity "in charge" for each action would contribute in increasing efficiency of Action Plans?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

8/ Countries are requested to report on the Action Plans every biannual through the national reports by indicating for each point/action requested:

Changes in the information provided in the previous report (Yes/No)

Status of implementation (Yes/No/Under development/Not applicable)

Comments

Difficulties/Challenges (policy framework, regulatory framework, financial resources, administrative management, technical guidance capabilities)

Comments

- Do you consider the reporting format appropriate?

☐ Yes

☐ No (If not, please detail in “Comments”)

Comments:

Questions regarding specific Action Plans/Strategies

9/ Currently, certain Action Plans cover the conservation of several habitats vulnerable to different types of threats and which can be localised in very different environments (e.g. Deep-sea habitats and caves).

- Would it be more efficient to:

☐ Separate deep-sea habitats and submarine caves and integrate caves in the Coralligenous Action Plan?

☐ Separate deep-sea habitats and submarine caves and create a Action Plan for caves

☐ Separate Rhodolith/maerl beds from coralligenous assemblages and integrate rhodolith/maerl beds with marine vegetation?

☐ None of the above

☐ Other:

10/ Currently, Action Plans do not invite to share assessment or monitoring methods and means between Action Plans although some could probably use same means or be accomplished simultaneously (e.g. assessment of by-catch by fishing gear of turtles, birds, cartilaginous species or centralise by-catch data or assess sea birds at the same time as cetaceans).

- Do you believe that further efforts can be done to interconnect between Action Plans?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Comments:

- Should grouping Action Plans or part of Action Plans be considered?

☐ Yes (please develop under comments)

☐ No

☐ I don't know

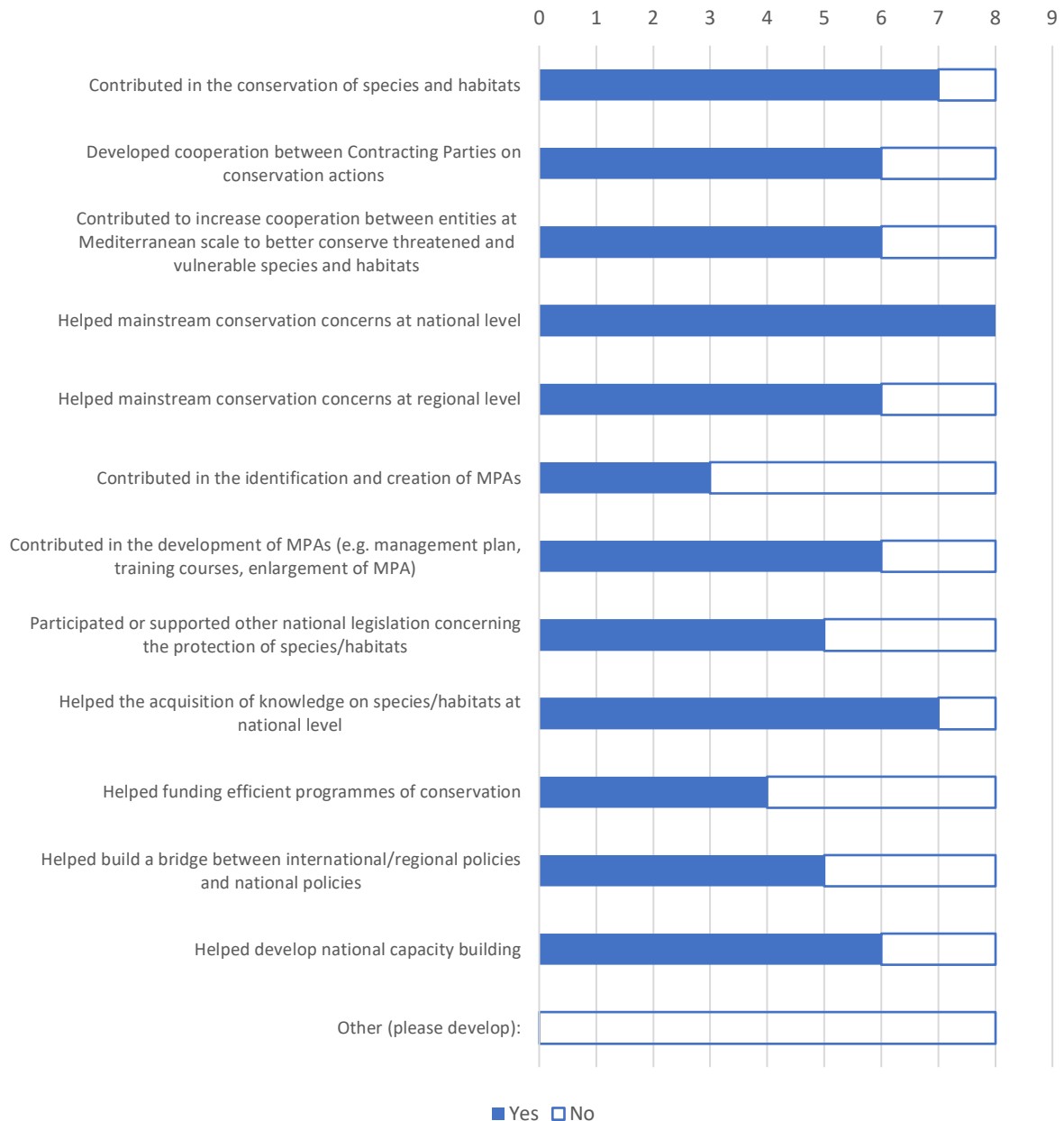
Comments:

Please share any successes and weaknesses of the Action Plans **Approach** that has not been covered by the questionnaire:

Annex II
Synthetic table and graphics of answers to the questionnaire on Regional Action Plans
Approach.

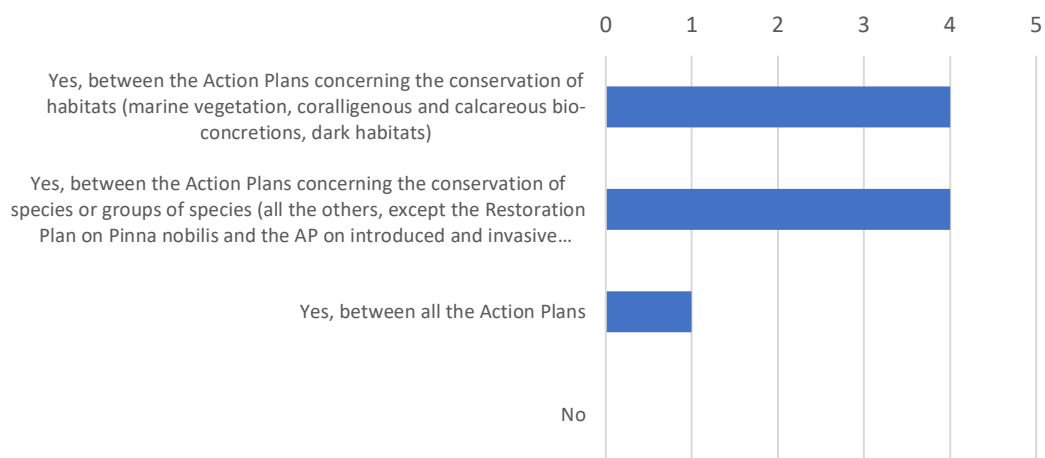
Answers to the questionnaire on the Approach of the Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats from the SPA/BD Protocol.

Question 1: Do you consider that generally the Action Plans/Strategies coordinated by SPA/RAC have:



No other proposition

Question 2: Would Action Plans and Evaluations benefit of a same format (e.g. preformatted general plan)?

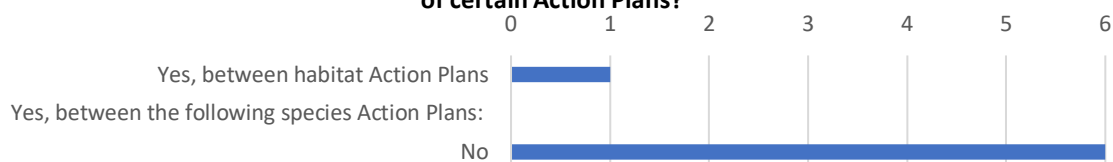


Comment 2.1⁵: A format could be highly recommended for species and habitats but not obligatory. It is not always easy to address information in the same way due to differences between species and variability/heterogeneity among habitats (or even within “habitats” – e.g. dark habitats).

Comment 2.2: Yes, for example, there could be a minimum content that each Action Plan should incorporate (e.g. 1) assessment of status and trends, 2) threats and pressures, 3) state of implementation of conservation measures, 4) vision, goals and activities)

Comment 2.3: AP should as much as possible be homogeneous and integrated with the Post-2020 SAPBIO format so that national action plans can be comparable also

Question 3: Would it be beneficial to align temporally the evaluations and updates of certain Action Plans?

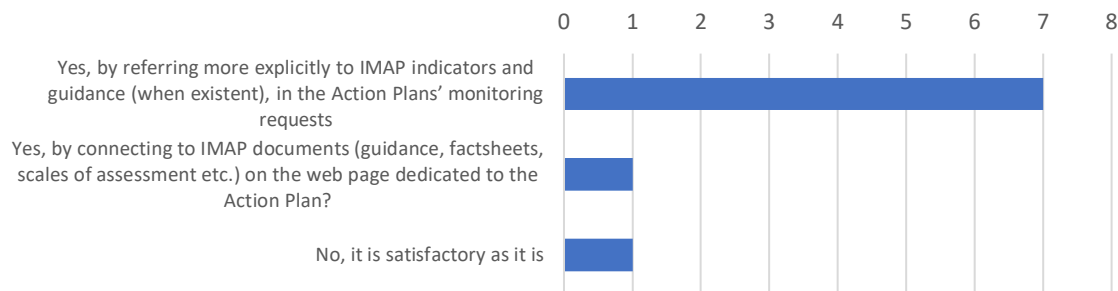


Comment 3.1: A cyclic consideration of the AP by experts and FP could define the necessity to update the AP or not

Comment 3.2: It would represent an enormous effort on one year, and advantages are not evident

⁵ Comments are those of the questioned people.

Question 4: Should Action Plans and IMAP be further interconnected?

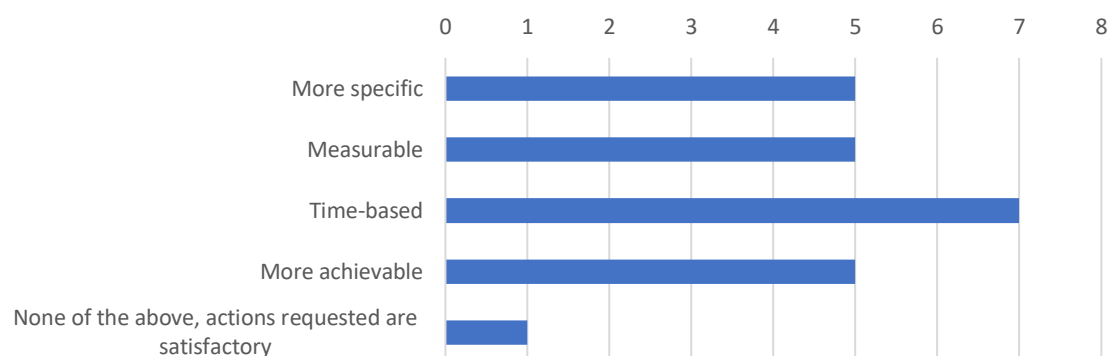


Comment 4.1: IMAP data should be useful also for AP. The needs of assessment of AP should be clear so that IMAP can adapt as much as possible to the needs of the AP.

Comment 4.2: Be careful though not to lose the specificity of AP assessments and the associated guidelines.

Comment 4.3: IMAP data collected by countries should also be used for Action Plans

Question 5: Would Action Plans be more effective if the actions requested were:

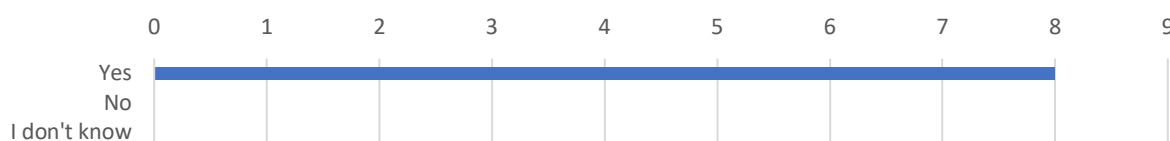


Comment 5.1: Certain objectives/actions are difficult to implement depending on the countries. It could be wise to propose specific actions (with a time limit) associated to technical support for the different countries (enforcement of capacities, field work) and an evaluation of the action at national level (SPAMI model).

Comment 5.2: Yes, they should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)

Comment 5.3: The problem remains in the implementation of the action at national level. Often actions can be implemented when there is a corresponding programme but will not necessarily be maintained because of lack of funds. The problem remains, how to increase implementation of the actions at national level.

Question 6: Would Action Plans be clearer and more efficient if each had an overarching long-term roadmap and a priority short term Action Plan? (see developed question in questionnaire)



Comment 6.1: If possible

Comment 6.2: Why not

Comment 6.3: Yes, for monk seal, sea turtles and cetaceans

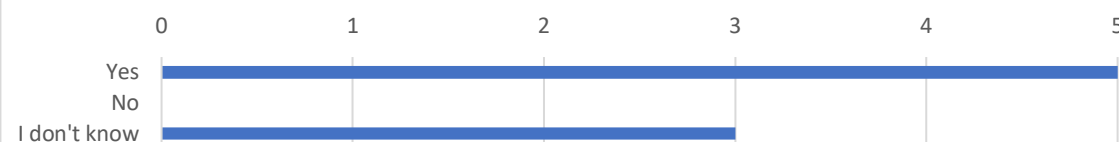
Comment 6.4: Should be homogeneous with Post-2020 SAPBIO. AP should be a transposition of SAPBIO at species or habitat level.

Comment 6.5: The most important is to foster national actions.

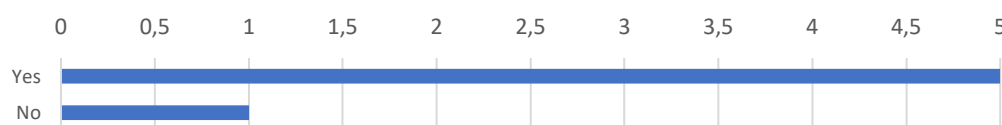
Question 7a: Do you believe that the role of each actor of the Action Plan (e.g. SPA/RAC, regional institutions or CPs) needs to be better defined with regard to each action?



Question 7b: Do you believe that defining an entity "in charge" for each action would contribute in increasing efficiency of Action Plans?



Question 8: Do you consider the reporting format appropriate?

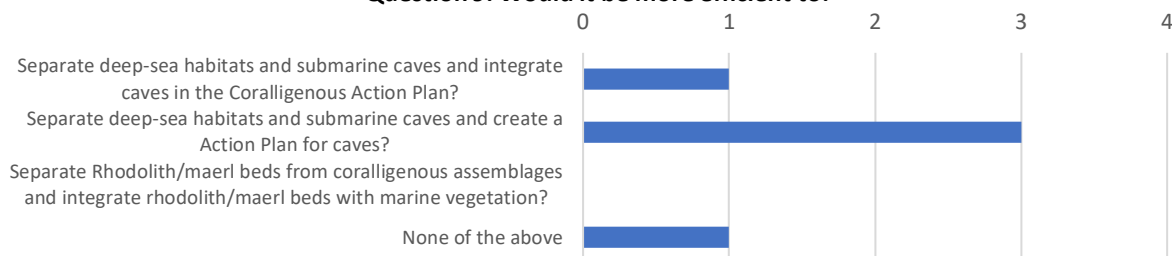


Comment 8.1: Biannual reporting is fine and putting results on webpage.

Comment 8.2: I think that some answers (e.g. Yes/Under development) are very general and that countries should give more detailed information.

Comment 8.3: Reporting is very uneven from one Contracting Party to another, no reporting for certain countries. It is necessary to have more information than simply "in process".

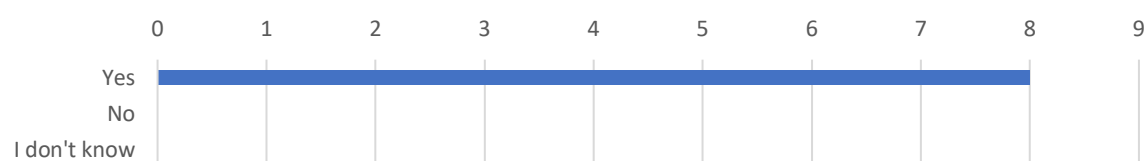
Question 9: Would it be more efficient to:



Comment 9.1: By integrating marine caves in the Coralligenous Action Plan the importance of marine caves would be downgraded, and this could affect their conservation negatively. Although researchers follow similar methodologies to study these habitats, they are often affected by different threats/pressures and different actions should be taken for their management and conservation. Actually, marine caves (as geological formations) can host both coralligenous communities (close to the entrance) and communities resembling those of the deep sea (towards internal dark zones). However, marine caves and deep-sea communities differ largely in terms of monitoring methods, threats/pressures, and management measures. Therefore, I believe that marine caves deserve their own Action Plan (and guidelines, etc.) and could be separated from deep-sea habitats but should not be integrated in the Coralligenous Action Plan. On the other hand, rhodolith/maerl beds could be kept together with coralligenous assemblages for conservation/management purposes.

Comment 9.2: Rhodolith/maerl beds should be in separate Action Plan

Question 10a: Do you believe that further efforts can be done to interconnect between Action Plans?



Comment 10a.1: Proposition of a meeting/symposium between experts to exchange and define which AP needs to be updated and evaluated.

Comment 10a.2: Organizing a meeting between experts who specialize on different habitats and species would greatly benefit interconnection. To some extent, this is achieved in the RAC/SPA symposia but there is never enough time for discussion between experts who contribute to the development and updating of Action Plans.

Comment 10a.3: Yes but few Action Plans are concerned.

Comment 10a.4: Yes when appropriate e.g. between habitat AP and NIS or for assessment methodology

Question 10b: Should grouping Action Plans or part of Action Plans be considered? <table border="1"> <caption>Data for Question 10b Chart</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Count (on scale 0-5)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I don't know</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Response	Count (on scale 0-5)	Yes	4	No	1	I don't know	2
Response	Count (on scale 0-5)								
Yes	4								
No	1								
I don't know	2								
Comment 10b.1:	There is a need of evaluating what each AP needs as assessment to see what could be shared with other PA for an eventual common data acquisition.								
Comment 10b.2:	This could be possibly discussed in a meeting between experts on different species (e.g. megafauna) and another meeting for habitat experts.								
Comment 10b.3:	Common mapping methods for habitat AP for example.								
Comment 10b.4:	Perhaps for legislation?								
Other suggestions and general comments on Action Plan Approach									
1/	Suggest workshop on AP to discuss and exchange between experts the points to evaluate, what can be done in common etc.								
2/	For the Marine Vegetation Action Plan, each country should adopt a national action plan on species which are the most pertinent for the CP.								
3/	Within the Action Plans there is a need of an entity that would centralise, bank and diffuse data. It should be the role of SPA/RAC which is not quite satisfactory these last years. It is finally exterior entities that capitalise on the data acquired by SPA/RAC (ex for vegetation MPN and WCMC). SPA/RAC should have the capacity of centralising, banking and sharing.								
4/	The SPA/RAC reference list of habitats must be used by all the AP to describe the habitats and species denomination should also be common. Very important to be able to conduct comparisons in space.								

Annex III

Table relative to aspects of Regional Action Plans (RAPs) with associated strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for which recommendations are formulated to improve RAPs approach

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
Overall assessment of RAPs					
Protection of species and habitats at regional and national scale	RAPs have: ✓ clear, delimited geographic coverage ✓ common direction for conservation ✓ been adopted by all Mediterranean countries ✓ contribute to the protection of species and habitats throughout the Mediterranean Sea ✓ have helped mainstream conservation concerns and develop capacity building at national and regional level ✓ a good coverage of Mediterranean vulnerable habitats and species.	✓ RAPs are not legally binding ✓ Biodiversity conservation is often not a priority for several CPs	✓ Development of MCPAs with management plans including vulnerable species and habitats ✓ IMAP concerns many of the species and habitats of the RAPs ✓ IMAP should support many assessment and monitoring needs of RAPs ✓ Development of restoration actions under EU restoration Law and UN Decade on ecosystem Restoration and according funds	✓ Increasing impact of climate change affects species and habitats ✓ Increase of massive mortality events ✓ Increasing anthropogenic pressure on the Mediterranean region	The 10 RAPs which have been developed concern the main emblematic vulnerable species, groups of species and habitats and the NIS. It is recommended to focus on the implementation and efficiency of the current RAPs at national and regional level before developing eventual new RAPs on other species or habitats. The fact that RAPs are not legally binding reduces the action implementation at national scale. However, if they were binding, RAPs would be adopted with more difficulties. The role of RAPs is to define an action plan and request participation of CPs to contribute as much as possible. Therefore it is recommended that the actions requested in the RAPs remain not legally binding but be further considered by the CPs as priority conservation actions.
Implementation of RAPs at national scale	RAPS have contributed to: ✓ supporting national legislations concerning the protection of species and habitats	✓ Implementation of RAPs at national scale is limited in certain countries. It needs to be enhanced especially in	✓ CPs can benefit of international and European programmes to support national implementation	✓ Political and economic instability of certain countries ✓ Economic priorities	✓ It is recommended to suggest a list of priority RAPs for each CP (the most relevant species/habitats for the CP) to be implemented by country in collaboration with the SPA/BD Focal Points and taking in account scientific knowledge

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
		south-eastern Mediterranean ✓ Complexity of RAPs which cover several habitats (less specific) result in an unclear object of conservation ✓ Actions requested can lack specificity ✓ Lack of funds to implement the RAPs at national scale	✓ Funds which will be available for restoration, request a minimum of knowledge on the species and habitats which will contribute to the implementation at national level of several RAPs ✓ Increased interest for ecotourism and nature-oriented tourism	generally do not go in the same way than conservation concerns	✓ At national level, it is recommended to search for further integration and connections with other relevant policies e.g. Marine/Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management ICZM ✓ Actions requested by RAPs are more likely to be implemented at national scale if supported by a project. It is recommended to pursue support through projects for RAP implementation at national scale.
Development of marine and coastal protected areas (MCPA)	RAPs have contributed to: ✓ the development of MCPAs (e.g. management plans, training courses, enlargement of MPAs) ✓ the acquisition of knowledge in MCPA	✓ Some areas of the Mediterranean Sea do not have sufficient MCPAs to efficiently contribute to the conservation of certain species or habitats. ✓ Strictly protected areas need to be more numerous and developed in a regional network. ✓ Existent MCPA do not all have a management plan ✓ RAPs have little contributed to the	✓ Enforcement and creation of MCPAs under restoration policies ✓ The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions (BBNJ adopted in 2023) agreement represent a real opportunity to create MPAs beyond national jurisdiction which concerns a large	✓ Touristic pressure and urbanisation development along the Mediterranean coast increases economic value and artificialisation of coasts hindering the development of MCPAs ✓ Coastal areas are undergoing	For each species or habitat considered, it is recommended to identify a regional network of MCPAs which can strengthen effectively their conservation. This could contribute to identify spatial/functional gaps in conservation of the species or habitat (for reproduction, gene flow, feeding etc.). These gaps should be progressively filled by the development of MPCAs in the network considered.

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
		identification and creation of MCPAs	part of the Mediterranean Sea	significant changes due to climate change impacts (coastal erosion, floods, sea level rise, cumulative anthropogenic impacts)	
Knowledge acquisition	RAPs have: ✓ contributed to knowledge acquisition on species and habitats by supporting national and sub-regional assessment programs ✓ triggered national programs on species and habitat knowledge acquisition	✓ For several species and habitats, geographic and bathymetric distribution but also knowledge on composition and structure as well as population dynamics of key species are not sufficient to ensure conservation efficiently	✓ Development of new technologies which reduce time treatment in data processing (Artificial Intelligence) and field acquisition	✓ Danger of losing habitats spatial extent or even species before having assessed their distribution ✓ Changes in spatial distribution and composition due to climate change impacts which are difficult to track if initial geographic distribution is not known	It is recommended to persist in enforcing knowledge acquisition on species and habitats concerned, starting with geographic distribution and continuing with composition, structure and ecosystem functioning.
Cooperation between CPs and regional and international	RAPs have contributed to: ✓ cooperation between CPs and regional organisms on	The diversity of countries, languages, legal processes and cultures between the CPs and regional organisation can			It is recommended to maintain and even develop relations between CPs and international organisations. Further, developing connections with other Protocols such as Integrated Coastal Zone

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
organisations and policies	conservation actions (GFCM, ACCOBAMS etc.) ✓ building bridges between national and international policies ✓ identifying partners for Action Plans. The role of SPA/RAC as a coordinating regional structure, is crucial to enforce exchanges between regional and national scale.	sometimes limit cooperation with regional organisations.			Management (ICZM) Protocol would be fruitful for the RAPs implementation. It is recommended to elaborate a list of regional/international collaborators and indicate to which RAP they contribute and in what way (simple table).
Connection and cooperation between RAPs	✓ Symposia on Mediterranean Key habitats and NIS every 4 years gives the opportunity to present work and exchange between scientists concerning RAPs on habitats and NIS ✓ The cross-cutting programme <i>By-catch</i> has contributed to consider issues which concern several RAPs ✓ The projects MedKeyHabitat I and II contributed to	✓ No specific meeting is devoted to exchange on needs within all RAPs or methodologies which could be shared or best practices with the objective of increasing connections between RAPs ✓ From a policy point of view SPA/BD Focal Point meetings give the opportunity to consider all the RAPs together. Such a global view could also be useful from a scientific/technical point			To increase scientific cooperation and interconnections between RAPs, the creation of a RAP Working Group (to be defined) that would meet regularly, would be of interest.

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
	strengthen monitoring techniques of several habitats	of view to increase cooperation between RAPs.			
Relation between RAPs and IMAP	✓ Several RAPs pertain to corresponding IMAP indicators for assessment and monitoring ✓ IMAP indicators are backed by monitoring guidelines that can serve the purpose of RAPs as well ✓ Many RAPs habitats/species are, or should be, specifically monitored through IMAP.	✓ IMAP is still poorly implemented at national scale especially in southern countries ✓ Some habitats/species are not yet covered by IMAP ✓ Data management at regional scale concerning IMAP is still a challenge		The implementation of IMAP at national scale is of uneven level depending on the country and the IMAP Ecological Objective. Delays in the national implementation of IMAP should not impede the national implementation of actions requested by RAPs.	It is recommended to make clear reference to relevant IMAP indicators in all RAPs. The creation of a RAPs Working Group could also be in charge of enforcing the relations RAPs-IMAP also by identifying RAP needs in terms of assessment and monitoring which could be covered by IMAP indicators.
Format and structure of Regional Action Plans, evaluation reports and reporting					
Global structure, format and content of RAPs	✓ SPA/RAC has been using a common layout for the recent RAPs which is clear and presents all RAPs with a same layout ✓ The monk seal strategy presents the vision, goals and targets	✓ RAPs can have very different structure/plan and type of content ✓ Short term actions are generally not integrated in a long-term roadmap or strategy specific to the species or habitat concerned (except the monk seal strategy)	✓ Between the report on the evaluation of the implementation of the RAPs and the text of the RAPs, there is generally all the information necessary to inform on the state of	✓ Differences in structure may contribute to confusion and lesser success in national implementation of RAPs ✓ Not including short term actions	✓ RAPs concern very different species and habitats and it is normal to find differences between RAPs. However, it is recommended to suggest a common plan/structure for the following RAP updates so that a same type of content can be found in each RAP. ✓ Further, it is recommended to consider dividing the structure of RAPs in two parts: one general part including a clear list of

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
	similar to Post-2020 SAPBIO	✓ In the majority of the RAPs, there is a lack or unclear long-term vision and goals and targets	knowledge, relevant policies and legislation etc. ✓ Post-2020 SAPBIO has a clear structure with long term vision, goals and actions to be implemented which could serve as a reference or model for species and habitat RAPs	in a long-term roadmap or a more global vision with targets, risks to jeopardize the common conservation actions of the RAPs which could stay short-standing	species or habitats concerned, a state of knowledge and related policies, threats, methods of assessment as well as vision/goals and targets etc. (see Annex B). This part could be reviewed less frequently; a second part containing mainly the short-term action plan which would be evaluated and updated more frequently than the first part. ✓ When updating a RAP, it is recommended to take in consideration the Post-2020 SAPBIO requested actions and expected results for 2027 and 2030.
Format of evaluations	✓ Evaluation reports contain often important information on the state of the art in scientific knowledge but also other important information	✓ Evaluation/update reports have a heterogeneous content ✓ The section on the assessment of the implementation of the actions requested in the RAP are heterogeneous and could be more concise ✓ It is not clear if evaluations should present the implementation by CP or if the evaluation is simply to assess whether actions are globally implemented or not.	✓ This evaluation is an opportunity to suggest common structure to use for the evaluation reports including a concise way of presenting the implementation results	✓ Loss of information in the evaluation reports which are not valued and not present in the RAPs ✓ Unstructured evaluations contribute to a loss of information	✓ It is recommended to suggest a common structure for the evaluations especially in the presentation of the national implementation evaluation ✓ It is recommended to consider whether results of the national implementation should be presented by CP or more globally to assess the global implementation of the action evaluated

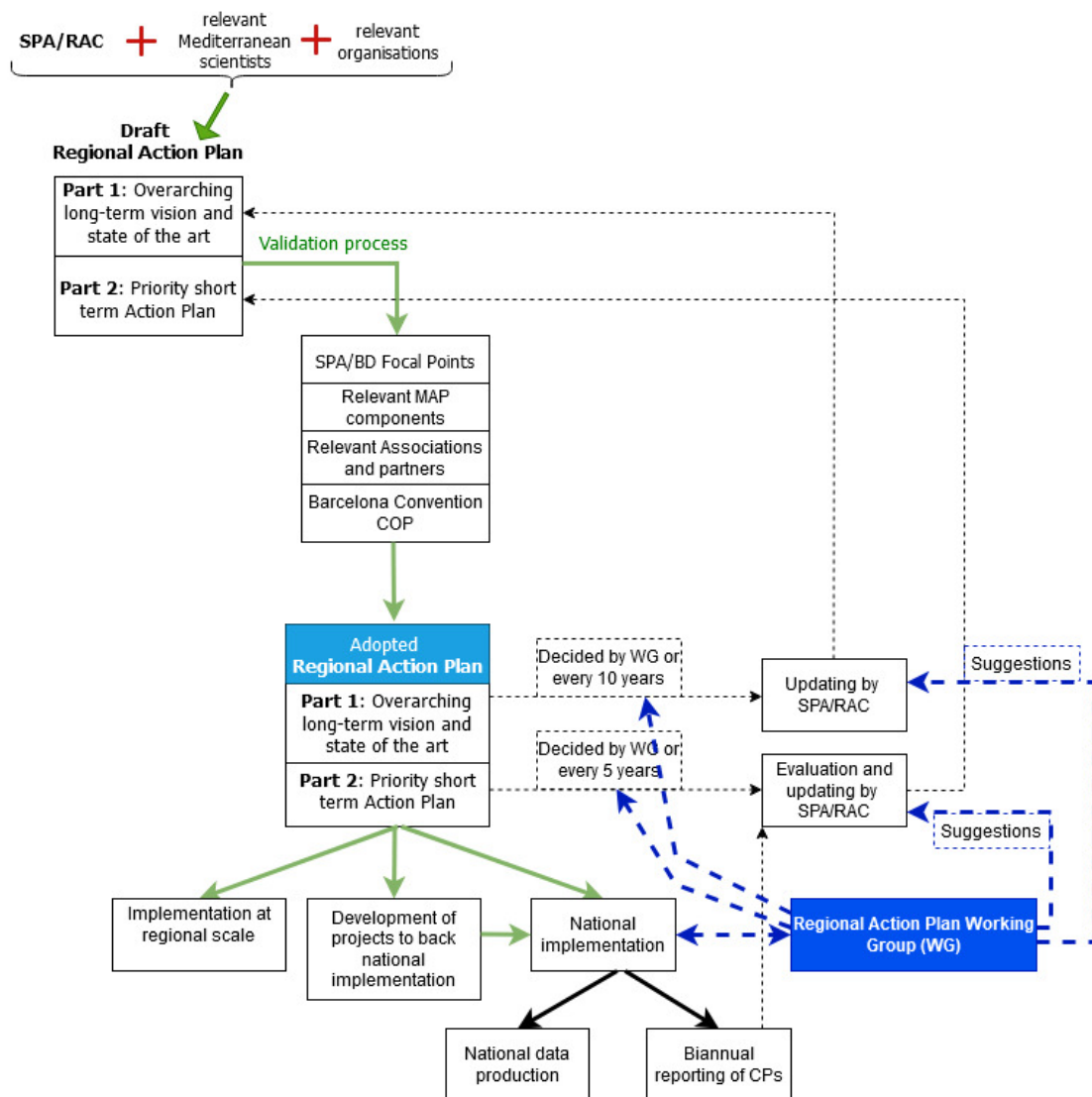
Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
Reporting format and reporting	✓ Common biannual reporting is an appropriate format, included in the Barcelona Convention reporting system well accepted by the CPs.	✓ For some RAPs, only few countries report ✓ CPs do not inform sufficiently in reporting on state of implementation of RAP at national level ✓ The answer “Under development” is not sufficiently precise especially when not backed with further information	✓ Projects devoted to the implementation of the RAPs at national scale should enhance reporting of the beneficiary CPs	✓ The lack of reporting of the CPs on RAPs hinders the evaluation of the action implementation	✓ It is recommended to keep the format of reporting which is well known and accepted by CPs. However, reporting by CPs needs to be more systematic and enhanced. ✓ In the reporting format, it is proposed to consider replacing “under development” by more precise choice such as “under project”, “implemented at 1-25%”, “26-50%”, “51-75%”, “76-100%”.
Process of evaluating implementation and updating RAPs					
Validation process (SPA/BD and MAP Focal Points and BC COP)	✓ SPA/BD Focal Points representing the CPs are consulted during the evaluation and updating process of the RAPs ✓ Several MAP components validate the evaluation report and the updated RAP	SPA/BD and MAP Focal Points get to have a view of all the RAPs, however, there is not an expert group which could have an overall vision of the RAPs and propose e.g.: - interconnections between RAPs, - avoid redundancies, increase interoperability of indices, - help find solution for common scientific difficulties, - discuss programmes which could enhance	✓ If a RAP working group is created, meetings could partly be held by videoconference		It is recommended to integrate a RAP expert Working Group (WG) in the updating process as presented in <u>Annex A</u> which could contribute e.g. to increase relations between RAPs, evaluate the need to update and/or evaluate a RAP, suggest priorities to the updating RAP process.

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
		RAP - evaluate the need to update RAPs			
Evaluation/update frequency	✓ RAPs are evaluated and updated generally every five years ✓ The RAPs are not reviewed all together since they have started at different dates	✓ The frequency of RAP evaluation/update is appropriate to evaluate the implementation of the action plan. However, a large part of the action plans (state of knowledge, threats etc.) does not need such a frequent updating			In the case where the proposition of RAP format in two parts as previously suggested is adopted, the first part needs to be updated less frequently than the second part is evaluated. If a RAP WG is created, it could decide when these parts need to be evaluated and/or updated. Otherwise, it is suggested to update Part 1 every 10 year, and that Part 2 (action plan table) be evaluated and updated every 5 years.
Content of RAPs					
Actions requested	✓ Actions requested include regional and national scale actions ✓ These actions guide the CPs towards conservations actions relative to the object of the RAP.	✓ Actions requested tend to be very ambitious and CPs have difficulty implementing them within the given time ✓ Actions requested in some RAPs are quite general and lack precision			When defining the short-term actions to be implemented, it is recommended to propose as much as possible actions which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART). This will favor their implementation and facilitate evaluation of the implementation.
RAPs covering different types of habitats		The habitat RAPs include several habitats each. These can be very different. It is the case of the Dark habitats RAP which includes deep sea habitats and underwater caves. This leads to a RAP which is obviously divided in two, since they	✓ This assessment gives the opportunity to reconsider the associations of habitats and in particular those of the Dark habitat RAP.	✓ If the Dark habitat is split in two, a change in the name of the current Dark habitat will probably be necessary and could create confusion.	The more a RAP is specific, the easiest it is to identify and to implement at national level because the object of conservation is clear. Also, species or habitats can be grouped under a same RAP if they have numerous common points and threats, or are found in same ecosystems. This is not the case of deep-sea habitats and caves. Therefor it is recommended that these two

Approach of Regional Action Plans for the conservation of selected species and habitats					
Current Action Plans approach aspects	Strengths and remarks	Weaknesses and gaps	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations
		are few common concerns.			types of habitats be separated in two different RAPs. If a RAP Working Group is created, it is also recommended to discuss the creation of a RAP only on rhodolith/maerl beds (currently this habitat is regrouped with the coralligenous habitats). This was suggested by one Focal Point in the questionnaire.

Annex IV

RAP evaluation and update process including a RAP Working Group and a RAP format in two parts



Annex V
Proposed common format/pattern for Regional Action Plans on selected species and habitats
under the SPA/BD protocol

Regional Action Plan document

Part 1

I. Introduction

- a. UNEP/MAP policy context
- b. RAP history

II. Definition of the conservation object

- a. List of habitats concerned using UNEP-SPA/RAC reference list of habitats (see Interpretation manual of Marine Habitat types in the Mediterranean Sea)
- b. List of species concerned exhaustive in the case of RAPs on species or list of key taxa in the case of RAPs on habitat.

III. Relevant international, European, regional policies and legislation presented in a table emphasising the appropriate elements.

IV. Current state of the art in terms of knowledge on species or habitats

- a. Geographic distribution. *Summarise knowledge from previous RAP and list with references the knowledge acquired since then.*
- b. Composition and structure
- c. Population dynamics of typical/key species

V. Main anthropogenic threats

Describe the impact of each main threat on species or habitat.

VI. Methods and indices used and eventual “best practices” with a list of relevant documents

VII. Needs, gaps and challenges

- a. In knowledge
- b. Relative to specific or new anthropogenic threats

VIII. Long-term vision, goals and targets

The Post-2020 SAPBIO hierarchical pattern and terminology can be used as a model.

IX. Priorities at regional, sub-regional and national scales

X. Action Plan active partners

A list of key Mediterranean organisms contributing to the implementation of the RAP and their contribution could be useful.

XI. Evaluation and update process

Short paragraph on the process which can be common to all RAPs or not.

Part 2

- Present Vision, goals, targets and actions in a diagram.
- Role of each partner and of CPs should be clearly defined for the implementation of the RAP.
- Any sub-regional specificities for the implementation of the actions should be specified.
- Table of actions requested. *Actions should be limited in number (e.g. no more than 15) and as much as possible Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Time-based (SMART).*