UNITED NATIONS

EP

UNEP/MED WG.626/6

UN environment programme | Mediterranean Action Plan Barcelona Convention

30 April 2025
Original: English

Joint Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Pollution and Marine Litter Monitoring

Anavyssos, Greece, 27 -28 May 2025

Agenda Item 3: **IMAP Update:**
b. IMAP Marine Litter Ecological Objective and Indicators

IMAP update for Ecological Objective 10

UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2025

Note by the Secretariat

The Integrated Monitoring Programme for the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) was established in 2016 during COP19 (Decision IG.22/7), containing elements pertinent to its principles and structure, integrated monitoring and assessment, integrated data and information system, as well as monitoring and assessment requirements for 11 Ecological Objectives (EOs) and the corresponding 27 Common and/or Candidate Indicators (CIs). All these information was further detailed in the IMAP Guidance (UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.22/Inf.7).

IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10), having a focus on Marine Litter was developed on the basis of 2 Common and 1 Candidate Indicators. The implementation of IMAP EO10 has advanced significantly since 2016, resulting into national IMAP-based monitoring programmes, development of assessment criteria, and most importantly the preparation of dedicated chapters in the framework of the 2017 and 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Reports (MED QSR).

Based on the experience gained from IMAP implementation at national, sub-regional and regional levels, and the assessment finding of the recent 2023 MED QSR; the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, through Decision IG.26/3 of COP23, called for revising Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and IMAP, and in particular the enhancement of IMAP implementation and strengthening of national monitoring and assessment capacities, with the view to delivering and reporting quality assured data and undertake reliable related assessments.

In this regard, the Secretariat and its MED POL Programme undertook preliminary work and prepared a preliminary proposal for updating IMAP EO10 – Marine Litter, which was presented during the CORMON Marine Litter Meeting held online in January 2025.

This document has been prepared along the same basis, in particular further elaborates proposals for GES Definitions and Proposed Targets for the 2 new/updated Common Indicators with the aim to be included in the updated Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Policy and is submitted to the present Joint CORMON Pollution-Marine Litter Meeting for review and endorsement, for further submission to the Meeting of the MED POL Focal Points (June 2025, tbc).

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1. Introduction

1. The Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Marine Litter Monitoring (Online, 29 January 2025) agreed on the following structure of the 10th Ecological Objective (EO10) of IMAP on Marine Litter:

Marine Litter (EO10):	'Marine and coastal litter do not adversely affect coastal and marine environment.'
Common Indicator 22:	Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (EO10).
Common Indicator 23:	Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and on the seafloor (EO10).
Common Indicator 23 (bis):	Trends in the amount of litter coming from riverine sources (EO10).
Common Indicator 24:	Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles (EO10).

2. Updates and Developments with regards to Monitoring and Assessment of IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10) - Marine Litter

2. Contracting Parties established national IMAP-based monitoring programmes in relation to Common Indicators 22 and 23 (in particular on beach macro-litter, seafloor macro-litter, and floating microplastics), and have been encouraged to also consider in their monitoring programmes the candidate indicator related to ingestion and entanglement of marine litter from sea turtles and to undertake pilot monitoring activities on the latter. In this regard, a number of countries (e.g., Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco etc.) have piloted the establishment of IMAP-based national monitoring programmes also for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24.

3. Furthermore, Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD) have been developed and agreed region-wide for Common Indicators 22 and 23 (i.e., beach macro-litter, seafloor macro-litter, and floating microplastics), including the establishment of Threshold Values (TV) and updated Baseline Values (BV).

4. A considerable number of citizens, communities (NGOs, civil society initiatives), and environmental protection associations and institutes across the Mediterranean are already taking part in activities to tackle marine litter. Contracting Parties are encouraged to further engage them in the implementation of IMAP and empower them to help improve the evidence base needed for marine litter monitoring.

5. Regarding beach litter, cost-efficient and easy to follow monitoring and sampling methodologies and techniques are well established, as described in the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Guidance, with at least two surveys per year in spring and autumn recommended and ideally 4 surveys per year in spring, summer, autumn and winter.

6. An updated list of beach litter categories and related items has been approved at regional level and integrated into the respective DS-DD.

7. Further alignment with the EU/MSFD joint list can be considered once this list is finalized and its ongoing update is completed.

8. Regarding monitoring of marine litter at the sea (Common Indicator 23), due to the low occurrence of litter in midwater, the common indicator focuses mostly on floating and seafloor litter, including microplastics.

9. Regional guidelines detailing the monitoring of floating microplastics have been developed by UNEP/MAP MED POL and agreed at regional level.

10. Regarding seafloor macro-litter (Common Indicator 23), opportunistic monitoring is the most cost- efficient method for sea-floor monitoring being jointly implementation with national/regional fish-stock assessment survey programmes (e.g., the Mediterranean International Bottom Trawl Surveys (MEDITS), with the use of compatible professional trawling operations. There may be other opportunities to couple marine litter surveys with other regular surveys (e.g., monitoring in marine reserves passenger ships for visual monitoring, etc.) or programmes on biodiversity, with methodologies and technical requirements prescribed in the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Guidance Document.

11. A number of important steps have been also carried also with regards to riverine marine litter and the proposed Common Indicator 23 (bis):

a) The "Guidelines for Monitoring Riverine inputs of Marine Litter" were developed and approved in 2023 (UNEP/MED WG.550/14/Rev.17);
b) Pilot monitoring has been tested in Israel and Morocco during the implementation of the EU-funded Marine Litter MED II Project (2020-2024); and
c) The Meeting "Enhancing Interregional Cooperation for Monitoring and Assessing Riverine Input of Marine Litter" was organized jointly with OSPAR, HELCOM and Black Sea Commission in the framework of MARLICE 2024 (Valencia, Spain, 23 May 2024).

12. Regarding ingestion and entanglement of marine litter from biota, in particular from sea turtles (i.e., proposed Common Indicator 24), a number of actions have been undertaken by UNEP/MAP, which have been reviewed and endorsed by the CPs, and subsequently have substantially improved the level of knowledge and information for this candidate indicator, including the following: (a) development of a report with the most representative species to be used for this indicator, including a short-listing; (b) region-wide protocols for monitoring interactions between marine litter and marine turtles (ingestion and entangling) with a view to harmonizing methods of data collection for monitoring and assessment; (c) assessment of the available data to propose GES targets; (d) assessment reports from the testing of the harmonized protocols (Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon); (e) operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24; (f) guidelines for the design of a regional network for monitoring & assessment of IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 in the Mediterranean; (g) data standards and data dictionaries and related data flow implemented; (h) pilot IMAP-based national monitoring programmes (Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco).

13. Further to the above-stated information, the Secretariat feel that there is sufficient ground to have this candidate common indicator, being transformed into a common indicator and a relevant request from the Contracting Parties should be initiated.

14. Furthermore, it is important to note that while micro-litter and in particular microplastics are considered from IMAP-EO10, further work is still necessary at regional level, recognizing that our understanding of the potential impacts of microplastic on organisms and the environment is still under development. Contracting Parties are thus encouraged also to undertake pilots, further research work in this area (e.g., microplastics on beaches, microplastics on sediment, etc.).

15. The Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Guidance Document, and the Guidance Factsheets include further details and specifications on methodologies, scales of assessment, as well as technical considerations, which can guide the Contracting Parties during the development of their IMAP-based national monitoring programmes for marine litter (IMAP – EO10).

3. IMAP EO10 Marine Litter: Operational Objectives, Indicators, GES Definitions and Targets

16. Table 2 consolidates the list of respective indicators, GES definitions and targets for IMAP EO10, as previously prepared for the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Marine Litter Monitoring (Online, 29 January 2025; WG.601/3), including new elements for the Common Indicator 23 (bis) and Common Indicator 24, highlighted in **bold**.

Table 2: Operational Objectives, Indicators, GES Definitions and Targets for IMAP EO10.

Ecological Objective 10 (EO10): Marine and coastal litter do not adversely affect coastal and marine environment			
Operational Objective	Indicator	GES	Proposed Targets
10.1 The impacts related to properties and quantities of marine litter in the marine and coastal environment are minimized	10.1.1 Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (including analysis of its composition, spatial distribution and, where possible, source)	Number/amount of marine litter items on the coastline do not have negative impacts on human health, marine life and ecosystem services	• Decreasing trend in the number of/amount of marine litter (items) deposited on the coast
	10.1.2 Trends in amounts of litter in the water column, including micro- plastics, and on the seafloor	Number/amount of marine litter items in the water surface and the seafloor do not have negative impacts on human health, marine life, ecosystem services and do not create risk to navigation	• Decreasing trend in the number/amount of marine litter items in the water surface and the seafloor
	10.1.3 Trends in the amount of litter coming from riverine sources	**Number/amount of marine litter items on coastline and water surface in estuaries do not have negative impacts on human health, marine life, ecosystem services and do not create risk to navigation**	• **Decreasing trend in the number/amount of marine litter items deposited on coastlines and in water surface in estuaries**
10.2 Impacts of litter on marine life are controlled to the maximum extent practicable	10.2.1 Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms, especially mammals, marine birds and turtles	**Number/amount of marine litter items entangling or/and ingested by marine organisms do not alter populations of sentinel organisms**	• Decreasing trend in the cases of entanglement or/and a decreasing trend in the stomach content of the sentinel species.