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Third Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project

Videoconference, 7 June 2022

Agenda item 3: Report of the Second Steering Committee of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project

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Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project

Videoconference, 24 March 2021

Report of the Meeting

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2021

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Introduction

1. The Second Steering Committee meeting of the Project "Towards achieving the Good Environmental Status of the Mediterranean Sea and coast through an ecologically representative and efficiently managed and monitored network of Marine Protected Areas" (hereafter referred to as "IMAP-MPA Project"), took place via videoconference, on 24 March 2021, at the kind invitation of the United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) and its Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC). The IMAP-MPA project is funded by the European Union's (EU) Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).

2. The overall objective of the IMAP-MPA Project is to contribute towards the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Mediterranean Sea and along its coast. In doing so, the Project proposes to consolidate, integrate and strengthen the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) process for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) management and their sustainable development. This will be achieved through the monitoring and assessment of environmental status in the Mediterranean Sea and its coast, including MPAs, in a comparative and integrated manner.

3. The Project Steering Committee reviewed: the progress achieved, revised workplan and budget, updated communication and visibility plan, and potential synergies with other projects and initiatives.

Participation

4. The IMAP-MPA Project Steering Committee Meeting was attended by representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the European Commission DG NEAR, DG ENV and the EU Delegation of Israel, UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit including SPA/RAC and MED POL, as well as UfM Secretariat and regional thematic experts/consultants.

5. The full list of participants is attached as **Annex I** to the present report.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting and Adoption of the Agenda

6. The Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project was opened on Wednesday, 24 March 2021 at 10:00 (Eastern European Time), by the UNEP/MAP Deputy Coordinator, SPA/RAC Director and European Commission DG NEAR Programme Manager in charge of the Project.

7. Ms. Tatjana Hema, UNEP/MAP Deputy Coordinator, welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of the IMAP-MPA Project. She thanked the European Commission for the continuous support and contribution provided on issues related to Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) implementation and strengthening MPA sustainability in the Mediterranean. She stressed the expectations for an instrumental role of the IMAP-MPA Project in introducing the integrated implementation, at country/pilot level, of IMAP coupled with enhanced MPA management, as well as creating the first experience on the integrated implementation of IMAP and delivering to the extent possible integrated assessments. Ms. Hema also emphasized the Secretariat's efforts in overcoming the problems and delays attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic. She stressed the importance of having all beneficiary countries attending as members of the Project Steering Committee, contributing with detailed feedback, and streamlining the countries' specific needs and priorities which should be tackled by the Project.

8. Mr. Khalil Attia, SPA/RAC Director, welcomed the meeting participants and recalled that the current meeting represents an opportunity to promote the protection of the Mediterranean Sea by making concrete choices and taking efficient actions towards achieving the Good Environmental Status and the establishment of a comprehensive and coherent network of MPAs. While highlighting the relevance of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) implementation in the framework of the MAP/Barcelona Convention system, he commended the full engagement of the concerned Contracting Parties to reach the Project objectives during the first year of the IMAP-MPA Project, despite the restrictions due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. He also recalled the Secretariat's commitment to guide and harmonize the efforts towards the delivery of quality assured data useful for the publication of a robust 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2023 MED QSR) and the development of a comprehensive and coherent network of well-managed MPAs to achieve Aichi Target 11[1] in the Mediterranean.

9. Ms. Sylvie Fontaine, Programme Manager at the EC DG NEAR, thanked UNEP/MAP and SPA/RAC for organizing and hosting the meeting, and welcomed the broad participation irrespective of the constrains attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic. She stressed on the importance of the IMAP-MPA project for the region, as it targets at a cleaner Mediterranean which will have a positive impact for the citizens in all countries around the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the project is fully in line with EU priorities as stated in the EU Green Deal and its Biodiversity Strategy. She insists on the fact that the project supports the UfM priorities in terms of preservation of the biodiversity. In line with the Barcelona convention, IMAP-MPA will allow for further implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and support the countries in the preparation of the databased quality status report of 2023. Globally, the project will help the region to meet the goals of the 2030 agenda and the preparation of the post-2020 global biodiversity target. Ms. Fontaine also stressed the fact that the project is co-steered by DG NEAR and DG ENV and welcomed the progress achieved until now, even with the current difficult situation. The EC's Programme Manager welcomed the progress made on the IMAP-component of the project and stressed the important milestone linked to the organization of the national kick-off meeting and the establishment of the IMAP National Committees for the majority of the beneficiary countries. Ms. Fontaine closed her welcome remarks by inviting all participants to discuss as openly as possible about the project while seeking their feedback and advice on the way forward.

10. The Project Steering Committee reviewed and adopted the provisional agenda. The meeting Agenda appears as **Annex II** to the present report.

11. The working languages of the Meeting were English and French. Simultaneous interpretation was available during the Meeting.

Agenda item 2: Introduction of Members of the Steering Committee:

12. Recalling the Terms of References (ToRs) and relevant mandate of the Steering Committee Meeting included in the project document, the MAP Deputy Coordinator invited all participants for a *tour de table* which allowed all participants to briefly introduce themselves and the organizations which they represent.

[1] By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes.

Agenda item 3: IMAP-MPA Project: Progress; Annual Workplan and Budget:

Progress:

13. The IMAP-MPA Project Manager, Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, presented the documents UNEP/MED WG.489/2 "Progress Report" and UNEP/MED WG.489/3 "Annual Work Plan and Budget", and informed the Project Steering Committee of the progress achieved since the First Steering Committee Meeting in March 2020, mainly focusing on the following activities:

a) Organization of the project's national kick-off meetings in Israel (30 July 2020), Tunisia (7 October 2020) and Libya (28 October 2020) within the reporting period, but also beyond that in Morocco (25 February 2021) and Algeria (2 March 2021).
b) Recruitment of 9 Regional Experts/Consultants on Pollution, Marine Litter, Coast & Hydrography, Biodiversity and Non-indigenous Species, after taking into consideration gender balance aspects.
c) Recruitment of National Experts for the elaboration of an integration strategy of the existing national monitoring programmes on biodiversity & non-indigenous species (NIS) with the pollution & marine litter, and coast & hydrography in Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Tunisia.
d) Preparation of Small-Scale Funding Agreements (SSFAs) with the beneficiary countries.
e) Organization of the 2020 Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean to pave the way for the post-2020 MPA agenda process in the Mediterranean.
f) Development of a strategic document on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean (OECMs), in line with the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework through a participatory process.
g) Support for the development of a National MPA Network Strategy for the Mediterranean coast of Egypt.
h) Elaboration of an MPA management plan of Tyre Coast Nature Reserve in Lebanon and Gulf of Sirte marine in Libya, including provision of support for its effective implementation.
i) Preparation of a classification study and elaboration of MPA management plan of Rachgoun Island in Algeria and provision of support for its effective implementation.
j) Improvement of MPA management through capacity building and initiation of management plan implementation.

14. The IMAP-MPA Project Manager, recalled the main project activities on the IMAP component including a detailed elaboration at national and sub-regional levels as follows: (i) in depth identification at country level of the capacities required to enable IMAP implementation and facilitate the provision of reliable and quality assured data for the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR); (ii) capacity building and exchange of best practices at the national, sub-regional and regional level through specific training sessions and meetings; and (iii) integrated/joint monitoring in MPAs and high-pressure areas carried out in identified pilot sites for agreed common indicators.

15. The IMAP-MPA Project Manager and Mr. Mehdi Aissi (SPA/RAC IMAP Officer), presented the IMAP-related component of the Project which aims at contributing towards the achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Mediterranean through the implementation of the IMAP and the delivery of reliable data for IMAP indicators on three clusters: (i) pollution & marine litter; (ii) biodiversity and non-indigenous species (NIS); and (iii) coast & hydrography by the seven eligible Contracting Parties.

16. Mr. Atef Limam, SPA/RAC MPA Officer, recalled that the MPA-related component of the Project aims at strengthening and further developing the Mediterranean network of ecologically representative, effectively managed and monitored MPAs, and presented the progress made so far, as follows:

- At regional level: the project has started (i) supporting the organisation of the 3rd edition of the Mediterranean MPA Forum, and (ii) contributing to the elaboration of an active and transformative Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean. While the face-to-face 2020 Forum, initially planned for late-2020, has been postponed to the end of 2021 due to the Pandemic, the elaboration of the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for MPAs and OECMs in the Mediterranean, in line with the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the CBD, and the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the conservation of Biological Diversity (SAPBIO), is currently under preparation for timely submission to the 15th Meeting of the Specially Protected Areas/Biodiversity (SPA/BD) Focal Points (end of June 2021) for review and endorsement, and subsequently for consideration by COP 22, through the MAP Focal Points meeting.
- At national level: (i) The project has already undertaken the specific technical and administrative-related activities such as technical discussions and coordination, and development of ToRs to hire national consultants to pave the way to execute the elaboration of the national strategy in Egypt upon receiving the national authorization.; and (ii) Management plans have been elaborated for existing or future MPAs in Algeria, Lebanon and Libya, where three (3) complementary ecological and three (3) socio-economic assessments have been prepared, respectively at Rachgoun Island future MPA in Algeria, Tyre Coast Nature Reserve in Lebanon and Gulf of Sirte future MPA in Libya, to pave the way for the elaboration of the management plans and the provision of support for their effective implementation, as well as (iii) the development and implementation, starting from this year, of a regional capacity-building programme for improving Mediterranean MPA management and ensuring their sustainability, covering key aspects related to MPA effective management and sustainable financing, and socio-economic sustainability of MPAs, with specific post-training implementation activities concerning Morocco and Tunisia.

17. Detailed discussion took place regarding the engagement of research vessels and national teams for the needs of implementation of integrated national monitoring programmes. A number of countries took the floor and clearly expressed their willingness to use to the extent possible, national monitoring infrastructures for the implementation of this set of activities. In response, the Secretariat expressed its readiness to accommodate this request, as well as to facilitate all administrative-related processes to include this set of activities in the under-development legal agreements (i.e. Small-Scale Funding Agreements (SSFAs).

18. The IMAP-MPA Project Steering Committee while recalling the instrumental role of the IMAP-MPA Project in introducing the integrated implementation, at country/pilot level of IMAP, coupled with enhanced MPA management, as well as creating the first experience on integrated implementation of IMAP and delivering to the extent possible an integrated assessment, acknowledged the progress achieved during the reporting period despite the constrains mainly attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Annual Workplan and Budget:

19. The Secretariat presented the detailed, revised annual 2021 workplan and budget as reflected in the document UNEP/MED WG.489/3 “Annual Work Plan and Budget”.

20. The revised workplan and budget were approved by the Project Steering Committee emphasizing the need to accelerate some of the activities to ensure the project activities are implemented in a smooth manner.

21. Several Contracting Parties took the floor and raised a number of issues, including the following:

- Israel requested from the Project Steering Committee to adapt the project support to accommodate the specific country needs, securing at the same time the delivery in line with the project requirements.
- The beneficiary countries expressed their willingness to use national monitoring infrastructures (i.e. research vessels, relevant equipment etc.) for the needs of the integrated implementation of IMAP.
- It was brought to the attention of the Project Steering Committee that potential savings may arise from travel restrictions attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

22. In response to this request the Project Steering Committee:

- Approved Israeli's request for adapted support;
- Approved Secretariat's proposal for reallocating funds from UMOJA Class 120 "Contractual Services" (Budget Lines 120-01, 120-04 and 120-05) to UMOJA Class 140 "Grant to IP"; in line with UNEP and Donor financial rules, under the understanding that this will be only an administrative-driven reallocation without altering the scope and character of the corresponding activities.
- Took note of the potential need to re-allocate savings from travel funds to other activities or budget classes mainly attributed to the travel restrictions that are in place because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. To this aim flexibility in line with UNEP and Donor financial rules could apply.
- Requested the Secretariat to add to the package of the capacity building activities a provision for technical support focusing on the population of the IMAP Information Standards in-line with the IMAP InfoSystem requirements.

23. The MAP Deputy Coordinator drew the attention on the importance of a regular and coordinated effort at country level for IMAP implementation among different institutions responsible for different aspects of national IMAP implementation.

24. The Meeting's final conclusions and recommendations concerning this agenda item are presented in **Annex III** to this report.

Agenda Item 4: Updated Project Communication Plan

25. The Secretariat presented an updated version of the project communication and visibility plan including specific information on its objectives and target groups, the regular communication activities, and the required resources. Special attention was provided by the Secretariat on the proposed innovative communication activities.

26. Several Contracting Parties took the floor, welcomed and endorsed the updated communication and visibility plan and commended the Secretariat's efforts towards introducing innovative communication activities and streamlining project's aspects and goals into simple-language communication messages.

27. The Meeting's final conclusions and recommendations concerning this agenda item are presented in **Annex III** to this report.

Agenda Item 5: Synergies and Cooperation with other Projects and Initiatives

28. The Secretariat briefly presented the links with the EU-funded Projects, EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II which are coordinated by UNEP/MAP and MAP Components.

29. The Project Steering Committee welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to coordinate and enhance the synergies between the projects in an effective manner.

Agenda Item 6: Any Other Business

30. No other business was raised under this agenda item.

Agenda Item 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

31. The Meeting reviewed the draft conclusions and recommendations and adopted them as revised and presented in Annex III to the present report.

Agenda Item 8: Closure of the Meeting

32. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the Meeting was declared closed at 17:00 on Wednesday, 24 March 2021 by the MAP Deputy Coordinator.

Annex I

List of Participants

List of participants

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Annex II

Provisional Agenda of the Meeting

Provisional Agenda of the Meeting

Wednesday 24 March 2021

Agenda Item 1: Opening of the Meeting and Adoption of the Agenda

Agenda Item 2: Introduction of Members of the Steering Committee

Agenda Item 3: IMAP-MPA Project: Progress; Annual Workplan and Budget

Agenda item 4: Updated Project Communication Plan

Agenda item 5: Synergies and Cooperation with other Projects and Initiatives

Agenda Item 6: Any Other Business

Agenda Item 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

Agenda Item 8: Closure of the Meeting

Annex III

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and Recommendations of the

Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project

Videoconference, 24 March 2021

1. The Second Steering Committee Meeting of the EU-funded IMAP-MPA Project took place via videoconference on 24 March 2021 at the kind invitation of UNEP/MAP and its Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC).

2. The IMAP-MPA Project Steering Committee Meeting (PSCM) was attended by representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the European Commission DG NEAR and DG ENV and specific country EU Delegations, UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit, SPA/RAC; as well as the UfM Secretariat and regional thematic experts/consultants as observers.

3. The IMAP-MPA PSCM thanked the European Commission for the continuous support and contribution provided on issues related to IMAP implementation and strengthening MPA sustainability in the Mediterranean.

4. Following the presentation by the Secretariat of the working documents prepared for the needs of the IMAP-MPA PSCM, their review and discussion (i.e. WG.489/2 to WG.489/4), the IMAP-MPA Project Steering Committee Meeting agreed on the following conclusions and recommendations:

Agenda Item 3: IMAP-MPA Project: Progress; Annual Work Plan and Budget

a) The IMAP-MPA PSCM while recalling the instrumental role of the IMAP-MPA Project in introducing the integrated implementation, at country/pilot level of IMAP, coupled with enhanced MPA management, as well as creating the first experience on integrated implementation of IMAP and delivering to the extent possible an integrated assessment; acknowledged the progress achieved during the reporting period despite the constrains mainly attributed to the COVID-19 Pandemic.
b) The IMAP-MPA PSCM appreciated the effort made in the organization of the national kick-off meetings with the scope to establish multi-stakeholder National IMAP Committees and to approve the monitoring plans, including stations.
c) The IMAP-MPA PSCM approved the annual workplan and budget as presented by the Secretariat in document WG.489/3 emphasizing the need to accelerate some of the activities to ensure the project activities are implemented in a smooth manner.
d) The IMAP-MPA PSCM requested the Secretariat to add to the package of the capacity building activities a provision for technical support focusing in the population of the IMAP Information Standards in-line with the IMAP InfoSystem requirements.
e) The IMAP-MPA PSCM took note of the potential need to re-allocate savings from travel funds to other activities or budget classes mainly attributed to the travel restrictions that are in place because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. To this aim flexibility in line with UNEP and Donor financial rules could apply.
f) The IMAP-MPA PSCM took note of the need to adapt the country support for Israel to accommodate the specific country needs, securing at the same time the delivery in line with the project requirements.

Agenda Item 4: Updated Project Communication Plan

g) The IMAP-MPA PSCM reviewed and approved the updated Communication and Visibility Plan (WG.489/4) with some adjustments regarding : (i) strengthening the role of the Regional Seas to the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity which will propose a new action plan till 2030 and then 2050 for the biodiversity conservation; and (ii) organizing a side-event during COP22 showcasing the support and the set of activities provided in the framework of the project.

Agenda Item 5: Synergies and Cooperation with other Projects and Initiatives

h) The IMAP-MPA PSCM welcomed the information provided by the Secretariat pertinent to the approved EU-funded "*Support to Efficient Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach-based Integrated Monitoring and Assessment of the Mediterranean Sea and Coasts and to delivery of data-based 2023 Quality Status Report in synergy with the EU MSFD*" (EcAp-MED III) and *Marine Litter MED II* Projects and pointed out the importance of ensuring full complementarity among those projects and other related project activities with a view to ensuring and providing enhanced and well-coordinated support to the project's beneficiary countries. To this aim the PSCM asked from the beneficiary countries and the Secretariat to pay necessary attention to ensure a high level of complementarities among the three projects at national level to enable the delivery of data sets in line with the Quality Status Report (QSR) Roadmap timeline.

Agenda Item 7: Adoption of Conclusions and Recommendations

i) It was agreed to disseminate the full report of the second IMAP-MPA PSCM report to its members in 3 weeks at the latest (i.e. by 16 April 2021).