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Videoconference, 2 October 2024

Agenda Item 4: Ecosystem Approach Policy in the Mediterranean: Main Directions, Elements and Timeline

Revised Ecosystem Approach Roadmap: Main Elements, Process and Timeline

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2024

Note by the Secretariat

The Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) was agreed in the framework of UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System in 2008 and since then a number of important Decisions have been adopted by the Contracting Parties (CPs) to the Barcelona Convention as a roadmap for its implementation:

During COP 23 (Portoroz, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023), the Contracting Parties called, through Decision IG.26/3, for a renewed Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) policy for the Mediterranean, taking into account, but not limited to, the outcomes of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR); the findings of the independent evaluation of the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and other related work of the Secretariat as per the CORMONs and Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group meeting conclusions, and giving due consideration to the most recent relevant developments at global and regional level, including the expected MFSD evaluation and revision.

In this regard, the Secretariat has prepared two (2) documents for the 11th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group (UNEP/MED WG.595/4 and UNEP/MED WG.595/Inf.3), presenting a first proposal for updating Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Roadmap and its timeline, including specific proposals to: (a) move from a 7-step implementation approach to a 6-step implementation approach; (b) revise EcAp vision, in alignment and coherence with the vision of the UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategy for 2022-2027; (c) revise the strategic goals to encompass the concept of Good Environmental Status (GES), climate change, and ecosystem restoration actions; as well as (b) revise accordingly the operational objectives, indicators, GES definition and targets.

The present document is submitted to the 11th Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Coordination Group for review, consideration and further guidance.

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1. Introduction

1. The Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) was agreed in the framework of UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System in 2008 and since then a number of important Decisions have been adopted by the Contracting Parties (CPs) to the Barcelona Convention as a roadmap for its implementation:

- 2008 – COP15 | Decision IG.17/6: "Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to the management of human activities that may affect the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment".
- 2012 – COP17 | Decision IG.20/4: *"Implementing MAP ecosystem approach roadmap (Mediterranean Ecological and Operational Objectives, Indicators and Timetable for Implementing the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap"*.
- 2013 – COP18 | Decision IG.21/3: *"Ecosystem Approach including adopting definitions of Good Environmental Status (GES) and Targets"*.
- 2017 – COP20 | Decision IG.23/6: *"2017 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR)"*.
- 2019 – COP21 | Decision IG.24/4: *"Assessment Studies"* (Annex V: Roadmap and Needs Assessment for the 2023 MED QSR)
- 2021 – COP22 | Decision IG.25/3: *"Governance"* (Annex I: Governance Mechanism for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean).
- 2021 – COP22 | Decision IG.25/10: *"MAP Data Policy"*.
- 2023 – COP23 | Decision IG.26/3: *"The 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR) and a Renewed Ecosystem Approach Policy in the Mediterranean"*.

2. Whereas a well elaborated information document has been prepared for the needs of this meeting (UNEP/MED WG.595/Inf.3), the present document aims to present the main aspects considered for updating EcAp Roadmap.

2. The 7 Steps of Implementation of EcAp

3. The provisions of Decision IG.17/6 (COP15) created 7 steps for the implementation of EcAp in the Mediterranean:

Step I:	Definition of an ecological vision for the Mediterranean.
Step II:	Setting of common Mediterranean strategic goals.
Step III:	Identification of important ecosystem properties and assessment of ecological status and pressures.
Step IV:	Development of a set of ecological objectives corresponding to the Vision and strategic goals.
Step V:	Derivation of operational objectives with indicators and target levels.
Step VI:	Revision of existing monitoring programmes for ongoing assessment and regular updating of targets.
Step VII:	Development and review of relevant action plans and programmes

4. Whereas the 7 steps are still relevant and considering that Step-III has been completed, it is therefore proposed to proceed with the 6-step approach.

3. Proposals for a Revised EcAp Roadmap for the Mediterranean

3.1 Updated Vision

5. The EcAp vision agreed and adopted in 2008 remains still valid, however a number of new elements are proposed for inclusion, including the following:

a) The actual vision does not refer to the aspects of climate change (CC);
b) The sustainability and/or sustainable development aspects are discreet; and
c) A time span could be integrated in the EcAp Roadmap vision as it is the case for example, for the Post-2020 SAPBIO .

6. The vision of the UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2027 (Decision IG.25/1) fulfils these requirements and thus is proposed as the new vision also for EcAp:

"Progress towards a healthy, clean, sustainable and climate resilient Mediterranean Sea and Coast with productive and biologically diverse marine and coastal ecosystems, where the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its SDGs are achieved through the effective implementation of the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development for the benefit of people and nature."

3.2 Strategic Goals for the Mediterranean

7. A similar updated is needed for the strategic goals of EcAp for the Mediterranean, taking into consideration the need:

a) To be aligned and in coherence with the concept of "Good Environmental Status" (GES);
b) To include passive or active ecosystem restoration actions; and
c) To integrate climate change and its impacts.

8. A first proposal for formulation of updated strategic goals is provided hereunder:

a) To protect, ~~allow recovery~~ **enhance environmental conditions allowing natural recovery** and, where practicable, restore the structure and function of marine and coastal ecosystems thus also protecting biodiversity, in order to achieve and maintain ~~good ecological status~~ **Good Environmental Status** and allow for their sustainable use.
b) To reduce pollution in the marine and coastal environment so as to minimise impacts on and risks to human and/or ecosystem health and/or uses of the sea and the coasts.
c) To prevent, reduce and manage the vulnerability of the sea and the coasts to risks induced by human activities, **including climate change** and natural events.

3.3 Operational Objectives, Indicators, GES Definitions and Targets

9. The present proposal for revising the Ecosystem Approach includes a number of revisions and updates pertinent to the operational objectives, indicators, GES definition and targets, originally included under Decision IG.21/3 (COP 18), reflecting the lessons learnt and gained experience since the inception and implementation of Ecosystem Approach, as well as taking into consideration as appropriate the developments under the European Union – Marine Strategy Framework Directive (EU-MSFD).

10. An important element to be considered for EcAp Policy update is Climate Change. The initial consideration is for climate change to be considered in both EO7 and EO8. In the case of the EO7 having a focus on hydrography some hydrographic parameters such as salinity, temperature, waves and currents are changing rapidly due to climate change and such alterations may have much stronger impacts on marine habitats and ecosystems than those monitored by Common Indicator 15.

11. With regard to the terrestrial ecosystems related to EO8, and in particular for some specific coastal ecosystems such as wetlands and estuaries, dunes, coastal forests and woods that are threatened by climate change impacts, monitoring efforts should be put in place and further enhanced in order to have a holistic approach for their sustainable use, protection and restoration as appropriate. According to the ICZM Protocol (Art. 10), measures to protect their characteristics, allowing for the provision of goods and services should be put in place.

12. As all these ecosystems are under climate stress and changes happen relatively quick monitoring and assessment of impacts by climate change would allow for adopting measures to mitigate and adapt to such changes so to maintain the diversity and integrity of coastal ecosystems and landscapes. The upcoming CORMON Meeting on Coast & Hydrography, planned to be organized on 17 October 2024, will further discuss these aspects and will provide relevant guidance to the Secretariat. In the present document, no particular revision is introduced.

13. For Ecological Objective 1 (EO1), the 4 operational objectives are maintained with a number of adjustments in the arrangement, wording, as well as regarding the respective indicators, GES definitions and targets:

a) Operational Objective 1.1 “Key coastal and marine habitats are not being lost”: no change/update is introduced on the GES definition and targets.
b) Operational Objective 1.2 “Species distribution is maintained (marine mammals, birds and reptiles)”: focus is given on the 3 species distributional range. Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced for all indicators, with specific updates for cetaceans.
c) Operational Objective 1.3 “Population size of selected species is maintained (marine mammals, birds, reptiles”: focus is given on “Population abundance”. Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.
d) Operational Objective 1.4 “Population condition of selected species is maintained (marine mammals, birds, reptiles)”: Proposal to update/revise the GES definition and targets for monk seals and cetacean.

14. For Ecological Objective 2 (EO2), there is a proposal to delete the operational objective on “Impact of NIS on ecosystems is limited” and to keep the one on “Invasive non-indigenous species introductions are minimized”:

a) Operational Objective 2.1 “Invasive non-indigenous species introductions are minimized”: focus is given on the abundance, temporal occurrence, and spatial distribution of non-indigenous species (NIS) particularly invasive, non-indigenous species notably in risk areas. No change/update is introduced on the GES definitions and targets.

15. For Ecological Objective 3 (EO3): substantive updates are proposed with 4 new operational objectives and significant revision of the existing two (total 6 operational objectives):

a) Operational Objective 3.1 “The Spawning Stock Biomass is at a level at which reproduction capacity is not impaired”: Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.
b) Operational Objective 3.2 “Total catch of commercial species does not exceed the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and the bycatch is reduced”: Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.
c) Operational Objective 3.3 “Fishing mortality in the stock does not exceed the level that allows

MSY (F≤ FMSY)": Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.

d) Operational Objective 3.4 "Fishing effort should be reduced by means of stocks a multi-annual management plan until there is an evidence for stock recovery": Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.
e) Operational Objective 3.5 "Stable or positive trend in CPUE Declines in CPUE may mean that the fish population cannot support the level of harvesting. Increases in CPUE may mean that a fish stock is recovering and more fishing effort can be applied": Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.
f) Operational Objective 3.6 "Populations of selected commercially exploited fish and shellfish are within biologically safe limits, exhibiting a population age and size distribution that is indicative of a healthy stock": Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets is introduced.

16. For Ecological Objective 4 (EO4): no substantive update is proposed at the level of operational objectives, as well as for the respective indicators:

a) Operational Objective 4.1 "Ecosystem dynamics across all trophic levels are maintained at levels capable of ensuring long - term abundance of the species and the retention of their full reproductive capacity": Yet no proposal for GES definitions and targets (under development).
b) Operational Objective 4.2 "Normal proportion and abundances of selected species at all trophic levels of the food web are maintained": Yet no proposal for GES definitions and targets (under development).

17. For Ecological Objective 5 (EO5): a proposal to delete one[1] (1) out of three (3) operational objectives is introduced, linked with changes to the respective indicators:

a) Operational Objective 5.1: "Human introduction of nutrients in the marine environment is not conducive to eutrophication": no change/update is introduced on the GES definition and targets .
b) Operational Objective 5.2 "Direct and indirect effects of nutrient over- enrichment are prevented": no change/update is introduced on the GES definition and targets .

18. For Ecological Objective 6 (EO6): no substantive proposal for revising the operational objectives and respective indicators is introduced, whereas the GES definitions and targets are under development:

a) Operational Objective 6.1 "Extent of physical alteration to the substrate is minimized": Yet no proposal for GES definitions and targets (under development).
b) Operational Objective 6.2 "Impact of benthic disturbance in priority benthic habitats is minimized": Yet no proposal for GES definitions and targets (under development).

19. For Ecological Objective 7 (EO7): no substantive proposal for revising the operational objectives, respective indicators, GES definitions and targets are introduced, with the exception of indicator 7.2.2:

a) Operational Objective 7.1 "Impacts to the marine and coastal ecosystem induced by climate variability and/or climate change are minimized": no change/update is introduced on the GES definition and targets.
b) Operational Objective 7.2 "Alterations due to permanent constructions on the coast and watersheds, marine installations and seafloor anchored structures are minimized": no change/update is introduced on the GES definition and targets.
c) Operational Objective 7.3 "Impacts of alterations due to changes in freshwater flow from watersheds, seawater inundation and coastal freatic intrusion, brine input from desalination plants and seawater intake and outlet are minimized": GES definitions and targets for 2 out of 3 indicators are under development.

[1] "5.3.: Indirect effects of nutrient over- enrichment are prevented"

20. For Ecological Objective 8 (EO8): editorial proposal for revising the operational objectives and some of the indicators are proposed, however without altering their total number:

a) Operational Objective 8.1: the new title proposed reads as follows: “The natural dynamics of coastal areas are maintained, and coastal ecosystems and landscapes are preserved”. Proposal to update/revise the GES definitions and targets for those indicators that have defined (i.e., 8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.1.4). Yet no proposal for GES definition and target for Indicator 8.1.3 (under development).
b) Operational Objective 8.2 “Integrity and diversity of coastal ecosystems, landscapes and their geomorphology are preserved”: Yet no proposal for GES definitions and targets (under development).

21. For Ecological Objective 9 (EO9): no substantive change is proposed at the level of operational objectives (5 in total), whereas 2 indicators are proposed for deletion (9.4.2 and 9.5.2):

a) Operational Objective 9.1 “ Concentration of priority contaminants is kept within acceptable limits and does not increase”: minor editorial proposal for is introduced for the GES targets, whereas no other revision/proposal is introduced.
b) Operational Objective 9.2 “Effects of released contaminants are minimized”: minor editorial proposal is introduced for the GES targets.
c) Operational Objective 9.3 “Acute pollution events are prevented and their impacts are minimized”: minor editorial proposal is introduced for the GES targets.
d) Operational Objective 9.4 “Levels of known harmful contaminants in major types of seafood do not exceed established standards”: no change/update is introduced.
e) Operational Objective 9.5 “Water quality in bathing waters and other recreational areas does not undermine human health”: no change/update is introduced.

22. For Ecological Objective 10 (EO10): no substantive change is proposed at the level of operational objectives (2 in total), whereas 1 new indicators is proposed on riverine marine litter (10.1.2 bis):

a) Operational Objective 10.1 “The impacts related to properties and quantities of marine litter in the marine and coastal environment are minimized”: no change/update is introduced for GES definitions and targets, and a new indicator is proposed on riverine litter (GES definition and target not yet developed).
b) Operation Objective 10.2 “Impacts of litter on marine life are controlled to the maximum extent practicable”: no change/update is introduced for GES definition and target.

23. For easy of reference, the revised and updated list of ecological objectives, indicators, GES definitions and targets has been prepared and presented in detail under Annex I of UNEP/MED WG.595/Inf.3.

3.4 Timeline for EcAp Implementation

24. A preliminary proposal for an updated timeline for Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) implementation has been prepared and is presented for further review and consideration (Figure 1). The timeline considers the 2026 – 2035 timeframe, in line with the timelines and end-dates put in place for the implementation and delivery of the respective Regional Plans[2], Post-2020 SAPBIO[2], and MED QSR.

25. The timeline considers the following elements, including a mid-term evaluation: (a) revision of national IMAPs; (b) reporting; (c) preparation of thematic assessments; (d) preparation of the next Mediterranean Quality Status Report; (e) preparation of updated NAPs/PoMs, including their implementation; (f) implementation of RPs/Measures; and (g) implementation of Post-2020 SAPBIO

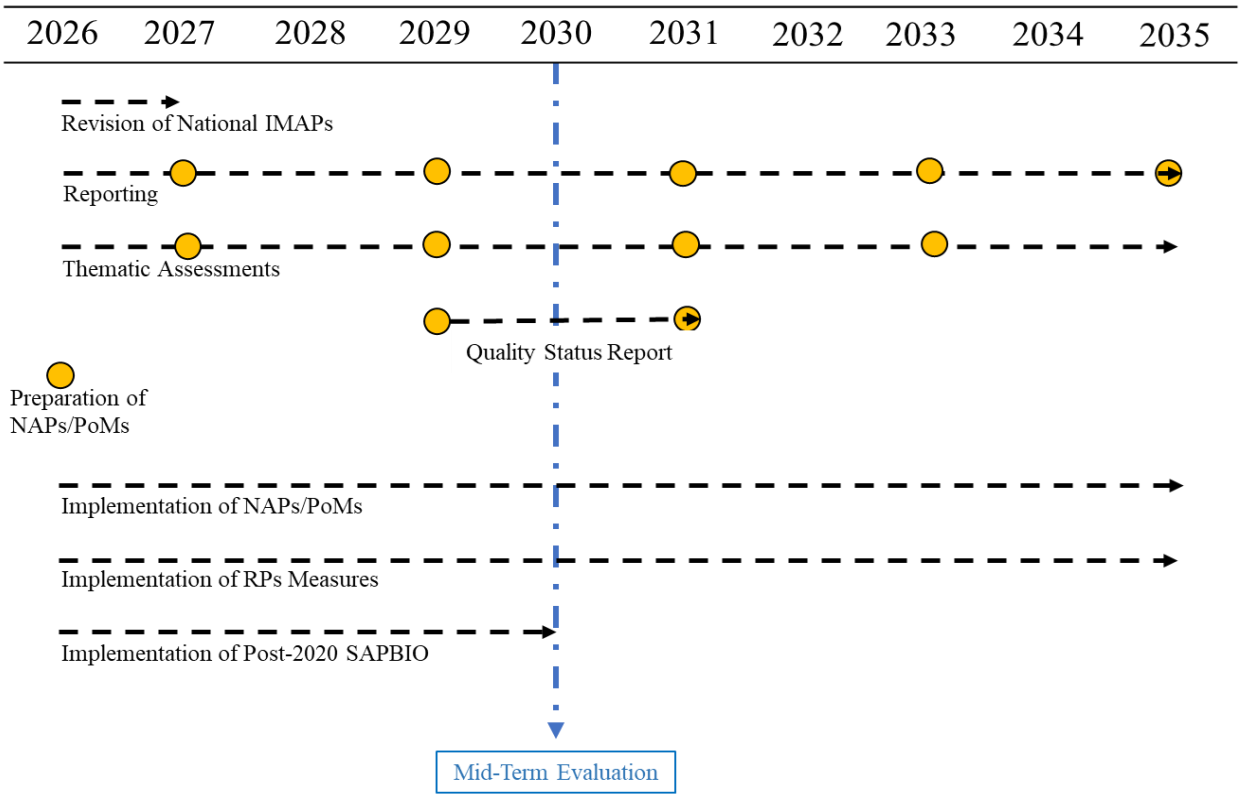


Figure 1: Preliminary proposal for an updated timeline for Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Implementation (2026 – 2035).

26. This proposal will be complemented and completed in the future with all elements, including the setup of the governance mechanism for the implementation of Ecosystem Approach, and will be submitted to the next Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) Coordination Group Meeting, to be held in September 2025 (tbc).

[2] A detailed list of measures including respective deadlines has been prepared and presented under UNEP/MED WG.595/Inf.3.