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Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Marine Litter Monitoring (CORMON Marine Litter)

Videoconference, 30 March 2021

Report of the Meeting

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Introduction

1. In the framework of the UNEP/MAP Programme of Work 2020-2021, the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups on Marine Litter Monitoring (CORMON Marine Litter) was held via videoconference on 30 March 2021, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan - Barcelona Convention Secretariat (UNEP/MAP) and its Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean (MED POL).

Participation

2. The following Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention were represented at the Meeting: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, European Union, France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey.

3. The following United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, convention secretariats and intergovernmental organizations were represented as observers: the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP/WCMC).

4. The following non-governmental organizations and other institutions were also represented as observers: the Center for Energy, Environment and Resources (CENER21), the Centre de documentation, de recherche et d'expérimentations sur les pollutions accidentelles des eaux (CEDRE), the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles (MEDASSET), the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPAN), the Mediterranean Programme Office of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Med), the University of Siena, and the INDICIT project (Implementation of Indicators of Marine Litter on Sea Turtles and Biota in Regional Sea Conventions and Marine Strategy Framework Directive Areas).

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

Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting

6. The Meeting was opened on Tuesday 30 March 2021 at 9.45 a.m. by Mr. Gaetano Leone, Coordinator, UNEP/MAP, Barcelona Convention Secretariat.

7. The UNEP/MAP Coordinator welcomed the participants and recalled the main objective of the Meeting, which was to:

- a) Address the interrelation of pressures impacts of marine litter and the status of marine ecosystem components as provided for from the methodology that has been developed in the framework of IMAP and the expert judgment received by several Contracting Parties after the CORMON Marine Litter Meeting in April 2019 (Podgorica, Montenegro);
- b) Analyse the potential complementarities and synergies between IMAP and the European Commission new GES Decision (2017/848/EU) for marine litter;
- c) Review the regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 prepared in collaboration with SPA/RAC in the framework of the EU-funded Marine Litter MED Project (2016-2019);
- d) Agree in updating the MED POL List for Beach Marine Litter Items and their Data Standards and Data Dictionaries to include to new Covid-19 related single-use plastic items (i.e. masks and gloves);
- e) Review and approve for submission to the upcoming MED POL Focal Points Meeting the revised Monitoring Guidelines for Floating Microplastics; and I would like to warmly thank all members of the OWG-ML for their substantive and expert contribution; and

- f) Ensure synergies between the relevant EU-funded projects, and beyond, dealing with IMAP implementation (e.g. EcAp MED III, IMAP-MPA, Marine Litter MED II).

8. UNEP/MAP Coordinator also referred to the progress made in the implementation of the Roadmap for the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR) and of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) in relation to Marine Litter, as well as on the effect of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the occurrence of marine litter in the marine and coastal environment of the Mediterranean. He also recalled the importance of the preparation of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (MED QSR) as a significant milestone in the implementation of IMAP.

Agenda item 2. Organizational matters

UNEP/MED WG.490/1/Rev.1; UNEP/MED WG.490/2/Rev.1; UNEP/MED WG.490/Inf.1/Rev.2

a) Adoption of the Agenda

9. The Meeting adopted its agenda on the basis of the Provisional Agenda and Provisional Annotated Agenda, including the proposed timetable, circulated in documents *UNEP/MED WG.490/1/Rev.1* and *UNEP/MED WG.482/2/Rev.1*, respectively.

10. The agenda is attached as **Annex II** to the present report.

b) Election of officers

11. The Meeting agreed that the rules of procedure for Meetings and conferences of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols (UNEP/IG.43/6, Annex XI) would apply mutatis mutandis to their deliberations.

12. Subject to Rule 20 of the rules of procedure mentioned at para. 2(a), the Meeting unanimously elected the following officers from among the representatives of the Contracting Parties:

Chairperson: Ms. Ivana Stojanovic (Montenegro)

Vice-chairpersons: Ms. Aslı Sezer Topalak (Turkey)
Mr. Sameh Ayoub (Egypt)
Ms. Carme Alomar Mascaró (Spain)

Rapporteur: Ms. Jamila Al Hadi (Lebanon)

13. The discussions were held in line with the agenda. Simultaneous interpretation in English and French was provided during the Meeting.

Agenda item 3. Interrelation of Pressures Impacts of Marine Litter and the Status of Marine Ecosystem Components

UNEP/MED WG.490/3

14. Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, UNEP/MAP Secretariat, presented the document UNEP/MED WG.490/3 “Addressing Interrelation of Pressures-Impacts of Marine Litter and the Status of Marine Ecosystem Components”, which provides information on the interrelation of pressures-impacts of marine litter and the status of marine ecosystem components with the aim to progress towards integrated GES assessment, and in particular to:

- a) Harmonize monitoring and assessment methods;
- b) Further clarify definition of links between assessment scales, pressures and cumulative impacts on ecosystem components;

- c) Improve long time series of quality assured data to monitor the trends; and
- d) Improve data management and data accessibility through the MAP Info-System for all the IMAP Marine Litter Common Indicators.

15. The Meeting participants were asked to provide the Secretariat with their feedback on this document and were also informed for the Secretariat's intention to upscale from now-on the work pertinent to integration/aggregation aspects, also for marine litter, at the level of IMAP Cluster (Pollution-Marine Litter). The Secretariat also informed the Meeting participants that the relevant experience from the marine litter work and the CORMON Marine Litter Meetings in 2019 and 2021, will be used and feed-into the overall effort for integrating IMAP Implementation in the Mediterranean.

16. The Meeting welcomed the progress realized to date on the integrated GES Assessment, and requested the Secretariat to continue this work at the level of IMAP Cluster (Pollution – Marine Litter).

17. Several participants raised the attention of the Meeting to the need to include in this work a more quantitative analysis providing a direct link between monitoring and measures focusing on the various sources generating marine litter. In response, the Secretariat confirmed that this aspect has been taken into account while integrating this work at the level of IMAP Cluster (Pollution – Marine Litter) which will be presented during the upcoming CORMON Pollution Meeting in April 2021.

18. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the Interrelation of Pressures Impacts of Marine Litter and the Status of Marine Ecosystem Components are presented in **Annex III** to this Report.

Agenda item 4. Comparative Analysis IMAP and the European Commission New GES Decision 2017/848/EU for Marine Litter
UNEP/MED WG.482/4

19. Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, UNEP/MAP Secretariat presented a comparative analysis between the UNEP/MAP Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) and the European Commission (EC) New GES Decision 2017/848/EU for Marine Litter. In this context, the Secretariat undertook a comparative analysis and identified as appropriate actions for a more coordinated implementation, of IMAP and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). This analysis also aims at supporting further elaboration of the Methodological Approach for Mapping the Interrelations between Sectors, Activities, Pressures, Impacts and State of Marine Environment.

20. Following the discussions, several representatives stressed the importance of collaboration among the monitoring and assessment framework of IMAP and MSFD and thanked the Secretariat for progressing in this regard. Several participants raised the attention of the Meeting to the need for IMAP to: integrated specific targets; define the methodology for calculating trends; have comparable data across the region with a particular focus on the need to update the minimum size class for beach marine from 0.5 cm to 2.5 cm and to ensure that relevant discrepancies are not in place while reporting the data into the IMAP InfoSystem; further elaborate on the spatial scale of the IMAP assessment products. In response, the Secretariat provided a number of clarifications regarding the architecture of IMAP for its Common Indicator 22 (Beach Marine Litter) and how the sizing matter is tackled during the reporting of data from Contracting Parties into the IMAP InfoSystem as well as that any future update of IMAP should tackle this matter, as well as on the spatial sub-division of IMAP for all clusters.

21. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the comparative analysis between IMAP and EC's New GES Decision 2017/848/EU for Marine Litter are presented in Annex III to this Report.

**Agenda item 5. Regional Operational Strategy for Monitoring IMAP
Candidate Indicator 24**
UNEP/MED WG.490/5

22. Ms. Lobna Ben Nakhla (SPA/RAC) and Mr Christos Ioakeimidis (UNEP/MAP Secretariat) presented the regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24, one important outcome of the EU-funded Marine Litter MED Project (2016-2019) scoping to advance the knowledge, and institutional/technical framework to support an agreement at regional level for upgrading this indicator amongst the common ones. The Secretariat presented this document's aim which is to provide:

- a) Practical guidelines to the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention to support them in designing and developing monitoring programmes for IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 in order to collect standardized data on marine litter ingested by sea turtles and to assess how GES can be achieved; and
- b) Details concerning the necessary steps and methods to implement a monitoring programme.

23. The Meeting welcomed Secretariat's work in this respect and highlighted the importance of this document during the process of preparation of national monitoring programmes for the respective IMAP indicator.

24. Following the discussions, several representatives requested for additional clarifications from the Secretariat regarding the structure and the sustainability in terms of funding of the set monitoring network. In response the Secretariat provided with additional clarification making specific reference that this network consists of rescue centres and competent laboratories to undertake the relevant technical work and is based on MEDSEALITTER project network coordinated by MEDASSET. Moreover, the Secretariat informed the Meeting participants that with this network UNEP/MAP and its Contracting Parties are moving one step ahead to locate competent authorities in each country to undertake this work, with most organizations' mandate focusing solely on the work relevant to assessing the impact of marine litter on sea turtles (i.e. ingestion and entanglement). Special reference was also made to the support (technical and financial) from the EU-funded Marine Litter MED II Project (2020-2023) in the preparation of a number of assessment elements relevant to IMAP Candidate Indicator 24, including the preparation of respective national monitoring programmes for few countries with the scope to pilots their implementation and data generation.

25. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24 are presented in **Annex III** to this Report.

**Agenda item 6. Addendum to the MED POL Beach Marine Litter Item List and their
Data Standards and Data Dictionaries to include Two New COVID-19
Related Items**
UNEP/MED WG.490/6

26. Under this agenda item, the Secretariat and its MED POL programme proposed the addition of two new COVID-19 related marine litter items (i.e. single-use plastic masks & gloves) into the MED POL list for beach marine litter item, after taking into consideration the abrupt changes that the Covid-19 Pandemic has brought to our lives and to our everyday behaviours', including those of littering, as well as the relevant sound scientific evidence.

27. The Meeting welcomed this proposal and endorsed the Secretariat to revise the list in-line with the proposal, including for the respective IMAP InfoSystem Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD).

28. The EU representative also presented to the Meeting the EU MSFD Technical Group Marine Litter (TGML) Joint List of Litter Categories Manual and the respective photo catalogue

29. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the addendum to the MED POL list for beach marine litter item their DS/DD to include two new Covid-19 related items are presented in **Annex III** to this Report.

Agenda item 7. Monitoring Guidelines/Protocols for Floating Microplastics
UNEP/MED WG.490/7

30. Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, UNEP/MAP Secretariat presented the revised version of the Monitoring Guidelines/Protocols for Floating Microplastics, and thanked the informal Online Working Group on Marine Litter (OWG-ML) for their substantive, technical input towards improving the said document which aims to guide the technical personnel of the IMAP competent laboratories for the implementation of the standardized and harmonized monitoring practices on IMAP EO10 (Marine Litter) Common Indicator 23 (Floating Microplastics).

31. The Chair of the Online Working Group on Marine Litter (OWG-ML) for this particular task, Ms Cecilia Silvestri (ISPRA, Italy) was invited by the Secretariat to provide a very brief overview of the technical revisions with a particular focus in improving the: definition of microplastics, the manta net properties, methodology for designing a monitoring campaign and for calculating the surveyed area, sample collection and storage, and the analysis performed at the laboratory.

32. Several participants took the floor highlighting the importance of this document, thanked the Secretariat and the OWG-ML for preparing this document, and endorsed its submission to the Meeting of the MED POL Focal Points in May 2021.

33. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the monitoring guidelines for floating microplastics are presented in **Annex III** to this Report.

Agenda item 8. EU-funded IMAP MPA, EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II Projects to Boost IMAP EO10 Implementation

34. Mr. Christos Ioakeimidis, UNEP/MAP Secretariat delivered a presentation showcasing the complementarities and specific scope of work with regards to marine litter monitoring under the EU-funded IMAP MPA, EcAp MED III and Marine Litter MED II Projects.

35. Several participants took the floor highlighting the importance of coordinating the work pertinent to marine litter monitoring and assessment towards maximising synergies and strengthening the relevant results and thanked the Secretariat for coordinating this work and for providing expert guidance in all aspects relevant to monitoring and assessment of marine litter.

36. The Meeting conclusions and recommendations regarding the monitoring guidelines for floating microplastics are presented in **Annex III** to this Report.

Agenda item 9. Any Other Business

37. Ms Cristina Fossi, Siena University, delivered a presentation focusing on the activities carried out and planned in the framework of the Plastic Busters MPA project, including the new challenges to monitor the impact of marine litter on Mediterranean Biodiversity.

38. Mr. Claude Miaud, CEFEC/CNS presented the main outcomes of the INDICIT-II Project (“Implementation of Indicators of Marine Litter on Sea Turtles and Biota in Regional Sea Conventions and Marine Strategy Framework Directive Areas”) focusing the development of the different GES scenarios for the Indicator “Litter ingested by sea turtles”.

39. Several participants took the floor and welcomed the work carried out in the framework of the two projects and invited all concerned parties to coordinate their work and efforts in line with IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10 – Marine Litter).

Agenda item 9. Conclusions and Recommendations

40. Under this agenda item, the participants were invited to review the draft conclusions and recommendations. The Meeting approved the conclusions and recommendations as slightly amended by the Meeting and contained in **Annex III** to the present report.

Agenda item 10. Closure of the Meeting

41. After the expression of usual courtesies, the Chair declared the Meeting closed at 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 30 March 2021.

Annex I
List of Participants

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**REPRESENTATIVES OF UNITED NATIONS SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER
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Annex II
Agenda of the Meeting

Agenda of the Meeting

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Annex III
Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions and Recommendations

On 30 March 2021, the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Group on Marine Litter Monitoring (CORMON Marine Litter) was held by videoconference. The meeting was organized by UNEP/MAP Secretariat (MED POL Programme).

The Secretariat presented an overview of the working documents of this meeting, including the interrelation of pressures, impacts of marine litter and the status of marine ecosystem components; comparative analysis between IMAP and the European Commission's new GES Decision 2017/848/EU for marine litter; the regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24; the addendum to the MED POL list for beach marine litter items and their data standards and data dictionaries; and the updated guidelines for monitoring floating microplastics.

Further to its deliberations, the following conclusions were reached by the Meeting:

1. The Meeting reviewed and endorsed the working document "Interrelation of Pressures Impacts of Marine Litter and the Status of Marine Ecosystem Components" (UNEP/MED WG.490/3). The Meeting agreed to integrate the input and information included in this document into the broader work under preparation by the MED POL programme pertinent to integration/aggregation aspects of the Pollution-Marine Litter Cluster of IMAP. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to include in this work a more quantitative analysis providing a direct link between monitoring and measures focusing on the various sources generating marine litter.
2. The Meeting reviewed and endorsed the working document "Comparative Analysis IMAP and the European Commission New GES Decision 2017/848/EU for Marine Litter" (UNEP/MED WG.490/4). The Meeting agreed to include a clear reference on the need to differentiate marine litter size classes (between meso- and macro-litter of 2.5 cm object length) during the official reporting under IMAP framework, as well as to introduce a target-oriented approach in the documents under preparation for the updated baseline and threshold values related to IMAP marine litter common indicators.
3. The Meeting reviewed and endorsed the working document "Regional operational strategy for monitoring IMAP Candidate Indicator 24" (UNEP/MED WG.490/5). The Meeting highlighted the need to base the development of the future national monitoring programmes for Candidate Indicator 24 in the aforementioned Regional Operational Strategy.
4. The Meeting reviewed and endorsed the working document "Addendum to the MED POL Beach Marine Litter Item List and their Data Standards and Data Dictionaries to include Two New COVID-19 Related Items" (UNEP/MED WG.490/6). The Meeting agreed to proceed with the integration of these two changes into the MED POL list for beach marine litter items including relevant IMAP Data Standards and Data Dictionaries further to revising the respective codes to G252 for single-use plastic gloves and G253 for single-use plastic masks. The use of the joint list of litter categories will be considered for future application.
5. The Meeting reviewed and endorsed the working document "Monitoring Guidelines/Protocols for Floating Microplastics" (UNEP/MED WG.490/7). The Meeting agreed to submit the working document to the upcoming MED POL Focal Points Meeting in May 2021 without any further comment or revision.