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Progress Report on RAC/SPA Activities

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Mediterranean Action Plan

Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)

Boulevard du leader Yasser Arafat

B.P.337 – 1080 Tunis Cedex

E-mail : car-asp@rac-spa.org

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Progress Report on RAC/SPA's Activities since the Eighth Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs (1 April 2007 – 15 May 2009)

Introduction

The present report was drafted by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) to inform its Focal Points (FPs) for Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) at their Ninth Meeting (Floriana, Malta, 3-6 June 2009) about the activities carried out by RAC/SPA since the Eighth Meeting. The report covers the period from 1st April 2007 to 15th May 2009. As well as information on RAC/SPA's activities, the document includes: (i) achievement indicators, (ii) expected outputs, and (iii) recommendations which will be proposed to the forthcoming MAP Focal Points and Contracting Parties meetings for the biennium 2010-2011.

Main Goal

To facilitate the effective implementation of the 1995 Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) taking into account the global and regional orientations and policies, such as the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development (MSSD), the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity (SAP BIO) in the Mediterranean region, the 2012 CBD target, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the European Marine Strategy, the mainstreaming of the Ecosystem Approach into the MAP System activities.

During the biennium, this goal was achieved in conformity with the Programme of Work adopted during the last ordinary meeting of the Contracting parties (Almeria, January 2008) and detailed in the five following objectives.

Objective 1	Inventorizing, mapping and monitoring of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean
Expected outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reference state regarding the distribution of key habitats - Broad use of the Standard Data-entry Form (SDF) and a better availability of technical guides - Strengthening synergy with other regional systems (e.g. Natura 2000 Network, Emerald Network, MedWet)
MAP Components and/or other partners involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAC/SPA - RAMOGE - GIS Posidonia, Okianos, Seagrass 2000, University of Corsica
Indicators/ achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of compiled SDFs - Technical guidelines edited - Surface area of key habitats identified
Final Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15 compiled and updated SDFs (cumulative number since 2000) - 1 technical guideline on the conservation of Posidonia meadows (edition underway) - 39% of coastlines (18 000 km) investigated to identify key habitats (mainly coralligenous and seagrass beds, evaluation based on bibliographic data; the surface area of key habitats is not used because it does not take into account the efforts made to fulfill the objective 1)
Total Budget spent or committed / towards approved budget (in %)	88 % (in terms of commitments, only on the basis of the MTF budget for 2008-2009)

Main achievements

1. Inventory of available data

RAC/SPA undertook an updating and feeding of its Mediterranean Geographical Information System (MedGIS) in order to make it accessible online. RAC/SPA FPs participated actively in this process by providing available national georeferenced data on marine and coastal biological diversity features (e.g. protected areas, key-habitats distribution). In order to assist RAC/SPA and the Contracting parties, two Mediterranean partner organizations collaborated in the elaboration of bibliographical databases as well as GIS layers to be integrated into the MedGIS, about seagrass meadows (GIS Posidonia; UNEP(DEPI)MED WG.331/Inf.5) and coralligenous habitats (ISPRA, former ICRAM; UNEP(DEPI)MED WG.331/Inf.6). This bulky task is in progress and debugging and the updated geographical database will be finalized by end of June 2009.

A field survey was carried out in mid-October 2008 in the Kuriates Islands (Tunisia), in collaboration with the Tunisian environmental authorities. This assignment aimed at the identification of main biotopes and the proposal of management actions. A proposal for accurate zoning for the protection of this area has been prepared and is being finalized with the concerned persons.

2. Improvement of inventory tools and standardization of mapping and monitoring approaches

Concerning this issue, RAC/SPA is collaborating with RAMOGE and Okianos in the translation into English and editing of the Guide on the protection and conservation of *Posidonia oceanica* meadows. This Guide's version will be ready by end of June 2009.

In this context also, RAC/SPA will also be supporting the convening of the Mediterranean Seagrass Workshop 2009 to be held in Hvar Island (Croatia) from 6-10 September 2009. It will actually support the participation of scientists from Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries in this regional workshop. RAC/SPA will also take advantage of this gathering by organizing within it a half-day roundtable in order to discuss seagrass monitoring approaches in the Mediterranean and to produce guidelines.

Constraints and Lessons learnt

Due to intellectual property and copyright issues, a certain amount of data might not have been provided to RAC/SPA by Mediterranean institutions or scientists.

Draft Recommendations

In order to evaluate the status of the biodiversity at the regional level, efforts made by all the users (Parties, RAC/SPA, partners, scientific community, etc...) must be reinforced to update the available information concerning the distribution and the monitoring of marine and coastal biodiversity.

Objective 2	Conservation of the habitats, species and significant sites
Expected outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing SPAMIs better managed - New SPAs and SPAMIs created - SPA/BD Protocol Annexes II and III amended - Cooperation with partners strengthened - Protection of species and habitats concerned by the Action Plans strengthened in the targeted countries - Characterization and monitoring of seagrass meadows strengthened - Better adoption of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Approach - Representative SPA network in place and operational - Implementation of priority actions of the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean region (SAP BIO) initiated
MAP Components and/or other partners involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAC/SPA - MEDU, Blue Plan, MED POL, REMPEC - SAP BIO Advisory Committee members - High Seas Steering Committee members - GFCM - ACCOBAMS, Bern Convention, CMS - AECID, EC, FFEM - Total Corporate Foundation - IUCN-Med - AEWA, BirdLife, MEDASSET, MedMarAvis, MedPAN, WWF MedPO - CNFE (Algeria) Corsica University (France), ISPRA (Italy), Istanbul University & METU/IMF (Turkey), INSTM (Tunisia)
Indicators/ achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreements to propose at least one multiparty SPAMI and one high seas SPAMI in 2009 to the Sixteenth Contracting Parties Meeting, from three initial candidate areas of each category - Number of species proposed for addition to the SPA/BD Protocol Annexes II and III lists - Number of joint activities with partners - Activities listed in the Action Plans for the conservation of species achieved - Marine meadows surface area mapped - Number of Posidonia beds monitored - Biodiversity section finalized in CAMPs reports - Number of joint activities with existing MPA networks - Project proposals timely preparation, approval by supervisors - Number of Donors - Commitments undertaken by the Donors - Total funds committed by the Donors

<p>Indicators/ achievements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planned SAP BIO Advisory Committee and National Correspondents meetings held timely and successfully - Outputs and preparatory activities for sub-regional projects on the conservation of threatened species and habitats presented in 2009 to the Sixteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties and approved
<p>Final Results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 national SPAMIs proposed for listing to the Sixteenth Contracting Parties Meeting - 34 macrophytes species proposed for addition to the SPA/BD Protocol Annex II - 30 Cartilaginous fish species proposed for either addition to the SPA/BD Protocol Annex II or Annex III or listing upgrade - 10 bird species proposed for addition to the SPA/BD Protocol Annex II - 1 Regional programme on MPA established with ACCOBAMs, IUCN, MedPan, WWF - 2 Framework agreements with partner organisations signed (1 MoC with GFCM, and 1 MoU with Conservatoire de l'Environnement Littoral et des Rivages Lacustres (CELRL)) - 9 co-organised events (1 conference organised with MedPAN & WWF on MPA Network - October 2007; 3 meetings co-organized with IUCN on governance on High-seas – December 2007, July 2008, April 2009; 2 meeting co-organized with GFCM on MPAs – May 2007 - and by-catch – September 2008; 1 conference co-organised with Bonn and Berne Convention Secretariats on turtles – October 2008; 1 Experts 'meeting organised with IUCN – January 2009; 1 Symposium co-organised with RAMOGE and Okianos on Coralligenous – January 2009; 1 meeting co-organised with CELRL on Albatros species – April 2009). - 68 % of the expected RAC/SPA activities concerning the implementation of the Action Plans for the biennium achieved (e.g. Bird, Cartilaginous fish) or in progress (Cetacean, Coralligenous, Monk seal, Turtle, Vegetation) - 100 Km² of marine meadows mapped (MedPosidonia project) - 7 Posidonia beds monitored (MedPosidonia project sites) - Biodiversity section finalized in CAMP Cyprus report - 2 Specific events with MedPAN network (Almeria – January 2008, Barcelona –October 2008) - 4 project proposals timely prepared and approved by supervisors (High Seas phases I and II, Ecosystem approach -merged with the previous one-, MedMPANet) - 4 Donors (EC, AECID, FFEM, Total Foundation) - Commitments undertaken by the Donors: Support to four groups of activities: Seagrass meadows inventories, mapping and monitoring, coastal MPAs, MPAs in open seas, Ecosystem approach

<p>Final Results</p>	<p>- Total funds committed by the Donors: 198 000 € from Total Foundation (project MedPosidonia 2006-2009); 200 000 € (project High seas Phase 1 -2008 - 2009) + 685 000 € (project High seas phase II + Ecosystem approach – 2009 - 2011) + 1 040 000 € (MedMPANet project 2009 - 2013) from EC; 1 750 000 € (MedMPANet project 2009 - 2013) from AECID; 100 000 € (MedMPANet project 2009 - 2013) from FFEM</p> <p>- 2 regional output projects on High seas and Ecosystem Approach, one sub-regional output for a cartilaginous fish project, 3 regional, 3 sub-regional and 18 national outputs on impact of climate change on biodiversity, 2 RAC/SPA sections of a MAP medium term programme concept note on Climate Change (CC) and on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), 1 sub-regional project for the mapping and monitoring of seagrass meadows achieved.</p>
<p>Total Budget spent or committed / towards approved budget (in %)</p>	<p>38 % (in terms of commitments, only on the basis of the MTF budget 2008-2009)</p>

Main achievements

1. Assistance to countries to create SPAMIs and SPAs, including on the high seas

New SPAMIs

In accordance with the 15th CoP Meeting (Decision IG 17/13), the Secretary informed all the partners concerned of the inscription of four Italian SPAs on the SPAMI List. In addition, during the biennium, four new proposals for sites have been received for inclusion. These sites are:

- The Bouches de Bonifacio Nature Reserve (France)
- The Marine Protected Area of Capo Caccia - Isola Piano (Italy)
- The Marine Protected Area of Punta Campanella (Italy)
- The Al-Hoceima National Park (Morocco)

The suitability of the four proposals to qualify as SPAMI was evaluated and endorsed by RAC/SPA in the four cases (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/5).

Ordinary evaluation of the existing SPAMIs

In order to implement the decision of the last CoP meeting (Decision IG 17/12), the Focal Points of France, Italy, Monaco, Spain and Tunisia have made an ordinary assessment of their SPAMIs, created in 2001. The results are detailed in Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.3. Even though the situation of the SPAMIs appears to be satisfactory in general; these assessments highlight the common difficulties encountered and the need for an increase in resources (human, financial and technical) and cooperation between the SPAMIs.

Proposal for a common approach on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas

Within the framework of the implementation of the SAP-BIO, RAC/SPA developed joint activities with its partners to promote the idea of a common approach to push for a regional network of representative and well-managed SPAs (e.g. common side events during the 15th CoP Meeting and the World Congress for Conservation). With the same objective, the Secretary organised a meeting with its partners, in Tunis, on 1-2 April 2008, for drafting a common Programme of Work on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas in the Mediterranean region. Based on the meeting discussions and the partners' inputs, this programme has been finalized and will be submitted for adoption to the Ninth meeting of FPs for SPAs (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/7), as a platform of collaboration with the aim of helping countries to reach the 2012 target for a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

Within this context, RAC/SPA pursued the updating of the database on the SPAs under the umbrella of the Barcelona Convention with 842 SPAs (and a surface area estimated at least at 144 878 km²), and initiated, in close relation with the National Focal Points, an evaluation of the representativity of the MPAs (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.4).

Three workshops were organised by IUCN, with the support of RAC/SPA on the governance of the High seas. The goal of these informal meetings was to promote the idea of creating

SPAs partly or entirely in areas beyond national jurisdictions through discussions with experts on legal issues. During the last meeting the creation of a permanent working group on this topic was agreed by the participants and considerable involvement of the countries proposed.

Assistance to countries in selecting, establishing and managing SPAs

The Joint Management Action of the European Community with the United Nations Environmental Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan aiming to promote the establishment of a representative ecological network of protected areas in the Mediterranean, under the implementation of the action entitled: "Identification of possible SPAMI in the Mediterranean Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ)" was delineated, two proposals prepared and funding warranted by the EC (see for details Document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.7, and UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.8). The action envisages a process developed in two phases, with the support of an international Steering Committee. The first phase of the initiative includes a feasibility assessment to identify areas beyond national jurisdiction in the Mediterranean Sea that qualify as SPAMIs, on the basis of sound science. In this phase, which started in 2008, the effort would help the Contracting Parties through the following key elements: i) a general overview and analysis of the existing information on the presence of important elements of marine biodiversity on the Mediterranean High seas - Open seas areas, including deep seas -, ii) the definition of operational criteria for the site selection process, harmonized with SPAMI selection criteria, and the scientific criteria for identifying significant areas to be declared as MPAs beyond national jurisdiction (criteria adopted by the CBD - COP9), iii) the preparation of a shortlist of potential sites on the High seas which could be protected as SPAMIs and iv) the drafting of a roadmap for the elaboration of further proposals to be presented to the Contracting Parties for adoption. This first phase will lead in 2009 to a second one, in which the list of SPAMIs in ABNJ that qualify as prospective SPAMIs will be established, based on ecological, economic, social and political criteria, so as to better integrate an ecosystem approach in the process.

In connection with this topic, RAC/SPA participated with REMPEC in a meeting on the risks of maritime traffic to biodiversity. This meeting organised by IUCN, made it possible to identify the threats and discussed the means available to improve the protection of the biodiversity. The processes to create SPAMIs and PSSAs have been discussed by the participants. The conclusions show that the PSSA process is not the only solution in view of other available possibilities, but it appears that it will be useful to have a view of the biodiversity at the regional level, to better characterise the threats, linked to maritime traffic.

Following the elaboration, within the framework of the MedMPA Project (2002-2005) of an outline of the national plan for the development of marine and coastal protected areas along the Syrian coasts, RAC/SPA was requested by the Syrian Ministry of Environment to assist it in organising a presentation and consultation Workshop on the National Plan, convening all national stakeholders concerned. The workshop was held on 23-24 April 2008, in the premises of the High Institute of Marine Research of Latakia. A number of important recommendations at national level resulted from this workshop.

According to the implementation of the new Action Plan for the conservation of marine turtles (Decision IG/11 of the 15th COP Meeting), RAC/SPA prepared draft guidelines on creating and managing Marine Protected Areas for marine turtles in the Mediterranean (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/8). The main recommendation is to create two types of SPAs, one devoted to the protection of nesting sites and the second for the conservation of foraging marine areas.

2. Implementation of the SAP BIO Operational Plan

The draft outline for the SAP BIO Operational Plan supported by the 8th meeting of SPA Focal Points for adoption by the Contracting Parties Meeting was re-adapted to fit the budget to the amounts and donors' share agreed at that meeting (Palermo, Italy, 6-9 June 2007), but instructions by MAP regarding the reduction of budgets proposed for 2008-2009 did not make it possible to retain the proposal for the adoption of such an activities funding document which included a total budget which is not available. The resources were spent on vis-a-vis exchanges with donors to rise funding (which was successfully granted for the MedMPANet and open seas SPAMIs projects) and on a thorough review, with the Parties' participation in updating SAP BIO on climate change issues in accordance with the Almeria Declaration. Furthermore, RAC/SPA's contribution was to prepare two MAP concept notes for medium term programmes on Climate Change and on Sustainable Consumption/Production.

3. Support existing MPA networks (e.g. MedPAN)

Within the framework of the SAP BIO Programme implementation, RAC/SPA and WWF MedPO have jointly prepared a project for the development of a Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MPAs) Network. It constitutes a part of the project "Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem" specifically the component regarding the conservation of the marine and coastal biodiversity and the establishment of a network of MPAs in areas under national jurisdiction in the Mediterranean Sea. The target groups and beneficiaries of the project are MPA managers, practitioners and relevant authorities of the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

The project is structured in two components: (i) a component under RAC/SPA's responsibility, aiming at promoting the establishment of new MPAs; and (ii) a component under WWF MedPO's responsibility, aiming at improving the management of existing MPAs.

RAC/SPA's component (MedMPANet project) consists of enhancing the effective conservation of regionally important coastal and marine biodiversity features in areas under national jurisdiction through the creation of an ecologically coherent MPA network in the Mediterranean region. This will be achieved through a series of pilot projects in Albania, Croatia, Libya and Montenegro. Further activities and targeted capacity-building exercises (twelve countries) will be also undertaken to enable coastal nations to contribute to the overall conservation and sustainable use of the Mediterranean Sea ecosystem and its resources through a Mediterranean MPA network.

In order to achieve its funding, further contacts and meetings took place with the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AECID) and the FFEM. 1.75M Euros were allocated by AECID and 0.1M Euros allowed by FFEM for RAC/SPA's share of the project. Also the EC included within the priorities of its Thematic Programme for Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (ENRTP), a budget to support the Biodiversity activities in the Mediterranean. The ENRTP Action Programme 2007 (approved on December 2007) allowed a "*contribution of 2 million Euros to the Barcelona Convention's Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean*". RAC/SPA applied through MAP for that funding. MAP/MEDU finally requested from EC roughly half of the funds for RAC/SPA and the other half for WWF.

The project starts in 2009 for a maximum of five years duration. Some RAC/SPA preparatory activities (planning, terms of reference drafting, personnel call for applications, etc.) are underway. At country level a pilot field activity in Montenegro for a rapid initial evaluation of natural habitats management needs in that country have already started. Furthermore RAC/SPA provided its assistance to the Syrian Environment Ministry in order to prepare a National Workshop for the Presentation of an outline of the National Plan for the Development of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas along the Syrian Coast.

RAC/SPA co-organised with WWF-France, the MedPAN Network, the Port-Cros National Park, the Network of Natural Protected Areas of Andalusia and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, the First Conference of the Mediterranean Marine Protected areas network. The objective of the conference was to promote the development of a comprehensive, ecologically representative and effectively managed marine protected areas network in the Mediterranean by bringing together the managers of marine protected areas and the competent institutions and organisations to share their experiences and consolidate the momentum created by the project to re-establish the MedPAN network, extending it to the Mediterranean region as a whole.

One hundred and ten experts from eighteen countries have adopted a common declaration at the end of the conference to further promote collaboration and action for the creation of a coherent, representative and effectively managed ecological network of MPAs in the Mediterranean Sea by 2012, to halt the loss of biodiversity, and to achieve a set of conservation objectives. Marine protected areas are proven to be an effective tool in providing lasting protection, enabling recovery, and encouraging a more careful exploitation of this natural heritage.

To increase the efficiency and the sustainability of the MedPAN, the previous association has been disbanded and a new one created. RAC/SPA will be active in this new association as a partner.

4. Strengthening of partnerships for the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol

Two agreements were signed by RAC/SPA with respectively GFCM and Conservatoire de l'Environnement Littoral et des Rivages Lacustres (CELRL – France) in order to formalize the cooperation with both these institutions.

A joint meeting between RAC/SPA and IUCN-Med took place in early April 2008 in Malaga (Spain) and a joint programme of work was finalized by both organizations.

RAC/SPA also participated in 14 scientific and technical meetings organised by partners (ACCOBAMS, CBD, CMS, CELRL, GFCM, EEA, IUCN-Med) and contributed with inputs and collaboration proposals.

RAC/SPA actively contributed to common activities with MEDU to carry out the first phase of the project on the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach within the MAP System and to create a proposal for a second phase. The work on partnership of RAC/SPA MEDPoL and Blue Plan was planned and included in the new proposal, which is now endorsed by the EC.

5. Evaluate the status of the species listed in Annexes II and III to the SPA/BD Protocol, with a view to submitting a new amended version to the Sixteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties

According to the request of the 15th CoP Meeting (Decision IG17/14) to RAC/SPA to evaluate the status of the species listed in Annexes II and III to the Protocol, the Secretary focused this work on three groups of species : macrophytes, cartilaginous fishes and birds (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/6). In this context RAC/SPA:

- Convened an ad-hoc expert meeting in collaboration with IUCN (Tunis, 12-14 January 2009) in order to assess the regional status of the endemic marine species and to propose their inclusion in Annex II. Based on their endemism, their role as engineer species, their rule, 34 new threatened macrophytes (out of 250 species studied), have been selected.
- Engaged elasmobranches experts to verify the status of cartilaginous fish species found in the Mediterranean, worthy to be analysed to eventually figure in the Annexes II or III, and undertook with those experts a consultation with an ad-hoc group of experts. Three species already listed where considered worthy to be kept in their actual listing; other four ones were proposed for listing in Annex II and other 26 were proposed to be added to the annexes.
- Asked MedMarAvis, according to the requests made during the First Mediterranean Symposium for the Conservation of Marine and Coastal Bird Species, to fulfil the approved format to add a complementary list of ten marine and coastal threatened bird species in Annex II.

6. Pursue the implementation of the Action Plans concerning threatened species

Monk seals:

Following the previous studies (2004-2006), which have provided evidence on the present distribution of monk seals in Cyrenaica and proved that the study area offered suitable habitats for the species, a second mission is scheduled for autumn 2009 and is under preparation by RAC/SPA, EGA and ISPRA in order to:

- Continue the inventorying of monk seal habitats in the North-Eastern coasts of Libya;
- Set up a long term monitoring of the identified caves;
- Organise awareness and information activities.

A workshop on harmonization of Monk seal population estimates techniques was organized by RAC/SPA in collaboration with the European Cetacean Society on February 2009. Among others tools, automatic video cameras were considered by the participants a very practical tool to be used.

To support field monitoring of monk seal habitats and population, automatic camera/traps were bought and will be used during the campaigns planned for 2009 (Libya). Further similar support is envisaged for other countries concerned.

Arrangements are being made to organise a meeting on the monk seal Programme involving the Bern Convention, CMS and RAC/SPA, to launch the preparation of sub-regional recovery plans for the species. In preparation of this joint meeting RAC/SPA initiated a consultation of the NFPs in order to evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan for the conservation of Monk seals at the regional level (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.9).

Cetaceans:

As part of its task as a sub-regional Secretariat for the Mediterranean region of the ACCOBAMS Agreement, RAC/SPA took part in the third Meeting of the Contracting Parties to ACCOBAMS (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 22-25 October 2007), and presented a report on the activities carried out by the RAC/SPA for the conservation of cetaceans since MoP2 as well as a report on MEDACES database progress. A new biennial work plan was elaborated by common agreement with the executive secretary of ACCOBAMS.

With regard to the scarce amount of information included in the Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES), ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA asked the Contracting Parties through an official letter to make these inventorying actions an integral part of their obligations by applying the SPA/BD Protocol and the ACCOBAMS Agreement. In this context a progress report of the MEDACES has been elaborated and presented during the Fifth Meeting of the Scientific Committee of ACCOBAMS (April 2008). It includes an analysis of the stranding data received and proposes a set of recommendations with the aim to improve the MEDACES functioning and efficiency at management and participation levels. An update of these data is presented in the document UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.10

Within the framework of the Ionian Dolphin Project, a long-term research and conservation programme conducted by the Tethys Research Institute in the coastal waters of Western Greece, RAC/SPA expressed its interest to collaborate in this project and is providing its support to: (i) ensure its continuation and (ii) build upon existing knowledge to turn the available scientific information into management proposals, conservation action and increased appreciation of the natural heritage in this part of Greece.

RAC/SPA provided its assistance to Syria and Lebanon for the elaboration of their National Action Plan for the conservation of cetaceans, in close collaboration with ACCOBAMS. These action plans have been elaborated on the basis of consultation meetings held with the concerned actors.

RAC/SPA offered its financial and technical support to the Istanbul University for the organization of a scientific cruise in the Eastern Mediterranean -Turkey, Syria and Lebanon- focused on the observation and identification of cetaceans.

Within the framework of the celebration of the "Year of the Dolphin, 2007" event coordinated by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the two agreements for the conservation of cetaceans: ACCOBAMS; ASCOBANS, RAC/SPA supported the translation into Arabic of the booklet "Our friends the Dolphins", carried out on a volunteer basis for educational purposes, in order to disseminate it among the countries concerned during the awareness campaigns.

Marine turtles:

RAC/SPA organized from 20 to 23 October 2008, in Hammamet (Tunisia), the Third Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles in collaboration with the Secretariats of the Bern and Bonn conventions and the INSTM (Tunisia).

A study of the migration routes of marine turtles is underway in Malta. An awareness campaign was also conducted through dedicated press conferences and national mass media.

RAC/SPA provided its assistance to Albania, Tunisia and Libya in order to undertake activities related to the collection of data on sites including key habitats for turtles with a view to establishing protected areas.

Draft guidelines for developing marine turtles stranding networks and for data collection protocols" (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/9) are being elaborated as provided for by the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Turtles. It was proposed to implement this network in parallel with other stranding networks (cetaceans, elasmobranches..)

Marine vegetation:

Within the framework of its assistance to countries in making inventories, carrying out

mapping and setting-up monitoring networks of Posidonia meadows, RAC/SPA implemented the MedPosidonia Project in four Mediterranean countries: Algeria, Libya, Tunisia and Turkey, in partnership with the Total Corporate Foundation (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.11).

Inventory activities have been carried out in the following sites in Libya: Tripoli region (the Cliffs and Garaboulli stations) and the Ain Al-Ghazala region (Ain Al-Ghazala Lagoon, Elba Island and Eastern Coasts).

Mapping activities have been carried out in the following sites: Sidi Ali El Mekki, Hergla and the coastline from El Kantaoui harbour to Monastir (Tunisia), the Yildizkoy Bay (Gökçeada Island) and the Babadil Bay (Mersin region; Turkey).

Monitoring activities of the upper and lower limits of Posidonia meadows concern the following sites: Sidi Ali El Mekki, Kerkennah Archipelago (Tunisia), and Yilidzkoy and Babadil bays (Turkey). Preliminary surveys have been made in the El Kala area (Algeria) with a view to the setting-up of a monitoring device of the Posidonia meadow limits. However, the actual marking out of the meadow limits has been left to a post-project phase (June-July 2009).

Training activities were undertaken in the form of practical sessions giving priority to field work and data processing on computer. There were two regional sessions with participants from all partner countries and one national session with participants from only one country (Algeria). It should be noted that in addition to these dedicated training sessions, advantage was taken of most of the field surveys in order to train local teams and get them accustomed to the intervention methods and techniques used.

Awareness actions were mainly through the production of public awareness leaflets, in the partner countries' local languages, about the importance of Posidonia meadows and the services they provide to human beings and their environment. The closure workshop of this project was held in Tunis on 23 April 2009.

Cartilaginous fishes:

A regional overview and technical guidelines to improve national legislations and regulations concerning cartilaginous fish conservation and management has been finalised in both English and French original versions, so as to properly match the legal documents translation needs (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/10).

RAC/SPA promoted the sub-regional implementation of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous Fish in the Adriatic. A support document was prepared for the North and Central Adriatic Sea countries, with international and local experts' participation, analysing the degree of implementation to-date by those countries and supporting the preparation of programmes of work for the elasmobranchs in their waters (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.12).

A review took place in spring 2009 to assess the implementation of the Action Plan for the

Conservation of Cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean Sea (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.13). An experts meeting to update the calendar took place in May 2009 (Annex 1).

Marine and coastal birds:

Within its assistance to the Mediterranean countries RAC/SPA supported:

- The organisation of two field missions in Ghara and Elba islands, Libya (1-7 August 2007 and 30 July-9 August 2008) as a second phase to the Lesser Crested terns survey in collaboration with Birdlife Malta and INSF (Italy). A census and ringing of Ghara Island colony were made.
- The water birds winter census carried out in Tunisia and Libya in 2008 and 2009.
- The preparation of the National Action Plan for the conservation of marine and coastal birds in Syria.
- The celebration of the World Migratory Day of Bird in Tunisia by the NGO "*Association des Amis des Oiseaux, AAO*". The event was coordinated by the AEWA.

RAC/SPA elaborated "Guidelines for the creation of legislations and regulations for the conservation and management of bird species and their habitats" in collaboration with CELRL (France; UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/11)

RAC/SPA is taking part in "The Slender-billed Curlew Initiative" which is coordinated by Birdlife International, AEWA and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions:

Following the adoption by the Contracting Parties of the Action Plan for the Coralligenous and other Calcareous Bio-concretions in the Mediterranean (15th CoP Meeting; Decision IG 17/15) an inventory of published literature about coralligenous habitats distribution has been made in collaboration with ISPRA (See Objective 1). The results obtained have been presented during the First Mediterranean Symposium on the Coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions, held in Tabarka (Tunisia), from 14 to 16 January 2009. This meeting organised in collaboration with the RAMOGE Agreement and Okianos, provided opportunities to establish a directory of taxonomists, scientists and research institutions working on these topics as required in the timetable of the Action Plan.

With 122 participants, representing 11 Mediterranean countries, 20 oral presentations and 36 posters, this meeting made it possible to establish a state of the current knowledge concerning this important ecosystem, and to take stock of current research in this area. The conclusions and recommendations stemming from the discussions are summarised in Annex II.

7. Participation in CAMPs

RAC/SPA carried out a second field mission to Cyprus to finish the implementation of the CAMP, together with a multidisciplinary team including officers of the Cyprus Department of

Fisheries and Marine Research, the local NGO CWS as well as an international consultant. The biodiversity report, including the proposals for better management and preservation of biodiversity in the area, has been published.

RAC/SPA is participating in the implementation of CAMP Morocco through the:

- Elaboration of a detailed diagnosis: (i) the inventory of habitats and species using the tools adopted within the MAP (species lists, habitat lists, SDF); (ii) the assessment of the sensitivity of the area with a focus on two sites: Jebha (site of biological and ecological interest) and Rhomara;
- Elaboration of management and conservation measures with special guidance for the management plans of the areas of Jebha and Rhomara;
- Assisting the Moroccan authorities to propose the Al Hoceima National Park for inclusion in the SPAMI List.

Constraints and Lessons learnt

The SAP BIO Operational Plan Outline supported by the Focal Points for SPAs received a Contracting Parties' funding allocation lower than the one needed, so it has been necessary to adapt the actions previously planned to the level of funding available. Supports for actions through meetings of Focal Points for SPAs have limited practical repercussion if the necessary funding for those actions is not forthcoming from the Parties.

The project to promote the creation of SPAMIs on the open seas and MedMPANet project need more time than initially planned, due to administrative timing constraints which are slowing down the start of external donors funded projects. On the other hand, such funding is of extreme added value for the implementation of the Protocol activities and broadly compensates any launching difficulty.

Draft Recommendations

- Parties pursue the ordinary evaluation of the SPAMIs included on the list in 2003 and 2005.
- Parties' support to RAC/SPA to implement the draft working Programme on coastal and marine protected areas and in this framework to further document the elaboration of a draft list of suitable SPAMIs on the High seas - Open seas, including deep seas.
- Parties take into consideration the draft guidelines on creating and managing MPA for marine turtles
- Parties support to RAC/SPA to participate as partner to the MedPAN Association
- RAC/SPA to pursue the enhanced implementation of Regional Action Plans for threatened species through the financial and human support of appropriate associate organisations
- Parties pursues the implementation of regional Action Plans for threatened species and take note of the draft guidelines proposed to increase their efficiency

- Parties' endorsement of Okianos as a new Partner to the Action Plan for the conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea
- Parties' endorsement of a new *Associate Organisation* (Pew Environment Group) and two *Partner Organisations* (The Shark Alliance and IUCN Shark Specialists Group) of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean Sea
- Parties' endorsement of the "Conservatoire de l'Espace Littoral et des Rivages Lacustres" as a new Partner for the Action Plan for the conservation of bird species listed in annex II of the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean
- Parties take note of the recommendations of the First symposium on Coralligenous and other calcareous bioconstructions.

Proposed Decisions

- Proposed sites to be included on the List of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs).
- Draft Work Programme concerning coastal and marine protected areas in the Mediterranean region, including on the High Seas.
- Proposed amendments of Annexes II and III to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol).
- New implementation calendar 2010-2013 of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous fishes in the Mediterranean Sea.

Objective 3	Evaluation and reduction of the impact of the threats to biodiversity
Expected outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impacts of fisheries and aquaculture on sensitive habitats and threatened species reduced and regulation updated - A more effective intervention for the mitigation of pollution impacts on sensitive habitats and species - Reinforcement of legal instruments for the management of ballast waters - Enhancement of national capacities dealing with ballast water issues - Introduced species better known and introduction vectors better controlled - Potential dangers associated with non-indigenous species taken into consideration - Promote the sustainable use of biodiversity in the region
MAP Components and/or other partners involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAC/SPA - RAC/BP, REMPEC, RAC/PAP - UNDP, CBD - GEF - IMO - ACCOBAMS - GFCM - IUCN Med
Indicators/ achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marine Protected Areas important for cetaceans - Fishing Reserves promoted as conservation tools - Sensitive habitats catalogued in three pilot areas - Number of legal instruments enforced - Number of trainees - Activities listed in the Action Plan on Non-indigenous Species fulfilled - Awareness material on risks associated with invasive species available - Number of awareness material beneficiaries (persons/organizations) - Guidelines on the sustainable use of biodiversity in the Mediterranean region elaborated
Final Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Guidelines to reduce impacts of by-catch on seabirds in the Mediterranean region' elaborated - Study document on interactions between fisheries and threatened species (monk seals, turtles) and possible mitigation measures through fishing reserves' elaborated - 94 trainees (RAC/SPA convened Alien species training + GBP training) - 2 Technical guidelines on alien species edited - A regional project for the management of ballast waters in place and underway

	<i>- Two MAP concept notes for medium term programmes to enhance sustainable use of biodiversity through activities on Climate Change and on Sustainable Consumption/Production</i>
Total Budget spent or committed / towards approved budget (in %)	48 % (in terms of commitments)

Main achievements

1. Implementation of appropriate measures for the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture in collaboration with the GFCM and ad-hoc institutions

Considering the importance of fishery reserves in the management of marine resources, RAC/SPA organised with the GFCM Scientific Advisory Committee Sub-Committee on Marine Environment and Ecosystems (SCMEE), a workshop to compile the existing types of MPAs and evaluate their representativeness and the efficiency of their management systems. This meeting was held in May 2007, in Salammbô, Tunis, at the premises of the Tunisian National Institute for Marine Sciences and Technologies (INSTM).

In a second phase, a questionnaire was established in collaboration with GFCM and sent to NFPs for SPAs and GFCM members. Its aim is to identify fishery reserves and fishery restricted zones in the different countries. The preliminary results have been discussed during the GFCM SAC Sub-committee meeting (October 2008).

The aforementioned activities to promote the implementation of the Action Plan for the conservation of cartilaginous fish are also along these lines.

A Scientific workshop on by-catch and incidental catches of threatened species was held by GFCM with contributions prepared by RAC/SPA and ACCOBAMS (Rome, September 2008). RAC/SPA provided studies on interactions between fisheries and threatened species (monk seals, turtles) and possible mitigation measures.

A workshop on the interaction between fisheries and marine turtles was convened during the Third Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles (Tunisia, October 2008).

RAC/SPA elaborated 'Guidelines to reduce impacts of by-catch on seabirds in the Mediterranean region' (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/12).

2. Evaluation of the risks of incidental pollution on identified MPAs and sensitive habitats

For the first phase of the evaluation process, a database on MPAs has been elaborated and will be accessible through the MedGIS tool. In close contact with REMPEC, a selection of a pilot case, and specialists on the impact of incidental pollution on biodiversity are being identified to initiate the second phase.

3. Implementation of the GloBallast Partnerships Project in collaboration with REMPEC and IMO

The MAP collaborated with IMO through its regional activity centres REMPEC and RAC/SPA in the consultation process that led to the elaboration of the second phase of the GEF-UNDP-IMO GloBallast Partnerships project (Building Partnerships to Assist Developing Countries to

Reduce the Transfer of Harmful Aquatic Organisms in Ship's Ballast Water). The GEF Council during its meeting from 12 to 15 June 2007 approved the GEF-UNDP-IMO GloBallast Partnerships (GBP) Project.

GBP will be a five year project (2008-2012). REMPEC has been appointed as the Regional Coordinating Organization for the Mediterranean region. RAC/SPA is technically and financially participating in the project by supporting all regional activities and mainly those of relevance to bio-invasions associated with ballast waters transfer. REMPEC and RAC/SPA collaborated in convening the First Regional Task Force Meeting (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 11-12 September 2008) and the Training Course on Port Biological Baseline Survey (Gebze, Turkey, 21-24 October 2008; UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/4).

4. Implementation of the Action Plan on Species Introductions and Invasive Species

Within this framework, RAC/SPA convened from 3-6 February 2008 in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt), a Mediterranean Training Course on the Management of Marine and Coastal Invasive Species. About thirty participants from fifteen Mediterranean countries participated in this training. The training provided an improved modular course that has been developed by the UNEP Regional Seas Programme and the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP).

5. Raising awareness concerning the risks associated with non-indigenous species

RAC/SPA edited two important technical tools that have been elaborated within the Action Plan context: the 'Guidelines for Controlling the Vectors of Introduction into the Mediterranean of Non-indigenous Species and Invasive Marine Species' and the 'Guide for Risk Analysis assessing the Impacts of the Introduction of Non-indigenous Species'.

6. Setting-up of the working group on the sustainable use of biodiversity and evaluation of direct and indirect threats of climate change

In accordance with the outcomes of the 15th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties and the Almeria Declaration, RAC/SPA presented a state of the knowledge regarding the impact of climate change on marine biodiversity and constituted a working group composed of international experts, complemented by Parties' national experts to develop a detailed insight into vulnerability and impacts of climate change on Mediterranean biodiversity. This activity was developed through a process involving biodiversity concerned ministries of all the riparian countries. For operational reasons, the countries were grouped in three clusters (and sub-groups within them) and activities to be managed by three international consultants as follows: (i) Cluster A: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Italy (Adriatic coastal area; UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.15) ; (ii) Cluster B: Cyprus, Israel, Greece and Turkey, France, Italy (except Adriatic coastal area), Malta, Monaco and Spain (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.16) ; and (iii) Cluster C: Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.17).

Three sub-regional meetings were organized to present and discuss national overviews and to draw up sub-regional syntheses on the issue (Split, Croatia; Tunis, Tunisia; and Santa Pola, Spain; in October and November 2008) and a regional meeting (Vibo Valencia, Italy; December 2008). A final meeting aimed at discussing the final recommendations and conclusions at regional level took place in mid-December 2008 (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.18). The process made it possible to have an update on climate change issues of the SAP BIO Programme (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/13).

Constraints and Lessons learnt

Climate change activities have encountered some budgetary constraints, since they did not received a dedicated budget line in the 2008-2009 MTF budgetary allocations.

Draft Recommendations

To make the best use of the available reports on climate change, to develop activities at countries and region levels to confront and to monitor the impacts of climate change on the Mediterranean marine and coastal biodiversity.

<p>Objective 4</p>	<p>Development of research to improve knowledge and fill gaps with respect to biodiversity</p>
<p>Expected outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Online consultation system available</i> - <i>Regional bibliographical databases accessible</i> - <i>Enhanced RAC/SPA website</i> - <i>Taxonomy reference state available for users</i> - <i>Relevant indicators of the state of biodiversity identified and validated</i>
<p>MAP Components and/or other partners involved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>RAC/SPA</i> - <i>RAC/BP, MED POL</i> - <i>CBD</i> - <i>EEA</i>
<p>Indicators/ achievements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Availability of scientific documents and databases</i> - <i>Number of RAC/SPA website users</i> - <i>Directory of taxonomic specialists and collections</i> - <i>Set of indicators of the state of biodiversity available</i>
<p>Final Results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>5 scientific documents (Climate change, Taxonomy, Coralligenous, Cetacean) published and 1 on going and 3 bibliographic databases available (Climate change, SPAs, Coralligenous and other bioconstructions)</i> - <i>8400 website users and 2 flashnews sent to a panel of 1000 contacts (NFP, partners, associated institutions and scientists)</i> - <i>1 Directory of specialists on Coralligenous species and habitats</i> - <i>Draft set of indicators proposed</i>
<p>Total Budget spent or committed / towards approved budget (in %)</p>	<p>12 % (in terms of commitments)</p>

Main achievements

1. Strengthen the scientific watch and improve the accessibility of information

Three databases on the scientific publications have been elaborated on a regional level on the following topics :

- Climate change on marine biodiversity
- Coralligenous habitats and species
- Mediterranean MPAs

They are accessible through the RAC/SPA website.

An expert has been identified in order to prepare the regional Databank on Biology, Ecology and Conservation of Mediterranean Seagrasses. This database will be available on RAC/SPA's website by the end of summer 2009.

Several scientific documents have been edited or co-edited with the assistance of RAC/SPA during the biennium :

- Impact of Climate change on biodiversity in the Mediterranean (electronic publication)
- Tintinnids of the Lebanese coastal waters – Eastern Mediterranean
- Proceeding of the First symposium on the conservation of coralligenous and other calcareous bioconstructions
- Abstract of the third Mediterranean conference on marine turtles conservation
- Abstract of the 23rd annual conference of the European Cetacean Society

Within the framework of its participation in the Project on the identification of possible SPAMIs in ABJN, RAC/SPA and IUCN will be editing an overview of the knowledge on Pelagic ecosystems (UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG.331/Inf.19). This publication is planned to be available for September 2009

2. Strengthening of the Mediterranean Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, including taxonomy

RAC/SPA set up a prototype of a Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) on Mediterranean marine and coastal biodiversity (<http://medbiodivchm.rac-spa.org>) by adapting the EC CHM Portal Toolkit. Various databases and directories could be consulted from a common web portal.

Due to lack of resources (human and financial), it was decided to develop the functionalities of the regional Clearing House Mechanism by developing RAC/SPA's website. To this end An expert has been contracted to propose ways and means to add those functionalities to the website.

The MedGIS is also being developed in this context, in order to enhance data management and exchange at a regional level. After the elaboration and testing of the MedGIS prototype,

RAC/SPA has launched the elaboration of a fully functional MedGIS (a webmapping application) to be part of the Mediterranean CHM.

Within the context of enhancing communication, the Centre started more regular updating of its website, drafting an information letter (flash news).

3. Identification and testing of indicators on the state of biodiversity

A draft set of indicators has been proposed by RAC/SPA within the framework of the project of Ecosystem Approach that will be managed by MEDU in collaboration with RAC/SPA, Blue Plan and MEDPOL. The indicators search compatibility with existing ones at CBD and EC levels. They are derived from the CBD ones and their respective focal areas, as in the case of the EC for its member countries, taking into account the EEB Malahide discussions (2004) and the EC focal areas adaptations, to provide a comparative idea of current trends in relevant institutions and on the reasoning of the RAC/SPA draft.

Several other indicators have been identified to assess the impact of the actions supported by the RAC/SPA to increase the conservation of biodiversity. Some of them have been used to describe the situation of the ecosystem at the regional level.

Constraints and Lessons learnt

The indicators activity has not been thoroughly addressed and will need further elaboration and discussions at MAP level, notably regarding the topic climate change and biodiversity.

Draft Recommendations

- To boost research activities on links between climate change and marine and coastal biodiversity, as described in the climate change updating of SAP BIO.
- To update the present database and develop one specifically for each action plan
- Parties volunteer reinforcing RAC/SPA with available oceanographic means to implement its oceanographic survey campaigns in suitable candidate SPAMIs on the High Seas - Open seas, including deep seas- during the action phase 2010-2011.

Objective 5	Capacity building to improve coordination and technical assistance
Expected outputs	<i>Strengthened capacity of Parties to integrate biodiversity features</i>
MAP Components and/or other partners involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAC/ SPA - CMCS - CWS, Naples Zoological Station - Okianos - Seagrass 2000
Indicators/ achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of training sessions - Number of trainees
Final Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18 training sessions (+ 1 planned in June 2009) - 181 trainees
Total Budget spent or committed/towards approved budget (in %)	52 % (in terms of commitments)

Main achievements

Implementation of training on techniques for the conservation, monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity

RAC/SPA organized and convened the following events:

- A Mediterranean Training on Seagrass Meadow Mapping (Tabarka, Tunisia, 15-21 June 2007), with the participation of 17 participants from 14 Mediterranean countries;
- A Training session on Posidonia meadows monitoring (Rafraf, Tunisia, 29 October-2 November 2007) part of the MedPosidonia Project;
- A national training session on Posidonia meadows mapping (Algiers, Algeria, 16-19 February 2009) part of the MedPosidonia Project ;
- An on-the-field national training session on the mapping and monitoring of Posidonia meadows (Gökçeada, Turkey, June 2008) part of the MedPosidonia Project;
- A taxonomy course on Mediterranean marine and coastal fauna and reference collections (CIMAR, 17-24 February 2008) in collaboration with the University of Alicante.
- A Training session on the establishment of national CHM and the use of Medbiodiv PTK 28/01/2008 to 1/02/2008 in Rabat (Morocco);
- A Regional Training Session on Alien Species Control and Management (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, February 2008);
- Training sessions on marine turtles nesting beaches conservation techniques and tagging activities (July and August 2007; and July and August 2008) in collaboration with the Cyprus Wildlife Society (CWS) at the Lara Reserve (Cyprus);
- A training session for the identification and census of water bird species (Benghazi, Libya, 27 November - 2 December 2008), in collaboration with EGA and the *Conservatoire du Littoral*.

RAC/SPA has contributed to the organization of:

- The National Training Session on the "Standard Data-entry Form for National Inventories of Natural Sites of Conservation Interest" (SDF) in Wadi Kandil (Latakiah, Syria, 14-16 August 2007), in collaboration with the Syrian Ministry of the Environment;
- A training session on the techniques for rehabilitating marine turtles in collaboration with the Naples Zoological Station (10-14 December 2007);
- The Seventh European Seminar on Marine Mammals: Biology and Conservation (Valencia, Spain, 15-19 September 2008), convened by the International University Menendez Pelayo, which is aiming to improve capacities on cetacean conservation issues in the Mediterranean region;
- The 23rd Annual conference of European Cetacean Society, 1-4 March 2009, convened with TUDAV;
- The workshop "Who are our seals? Moving towards a standardized monk seal population estimate approach" (28 February 2009) in collaboration with TUDAV;
- The training on taxonomy in collaboration with Okianos
- The "Albatros" workshop (Marseilles, 20-22 April 2009) by the *Conservatoire du Littoral*.

Following a request from the Tunisian authorities, RAC/SPA helped with the running of training and research projects dealing with the study of marine meadows and algal flora along the Tunisian coasts, using scuba diving and non-destructive techniques.

RAC/SPA provided its assistance to the Syrian environmental authorities in setting-up a training programme on marine protected areas management plan preparation and implementation. This training programme has been designed to be delivered in three intensive training phases. Two training courses took place already in February and April 2009. The third and final course is planned for late June 2009.

Constraints and Lessons learnt

No specific constraints have been met in the implementation of the listed activities, during the reporting period.

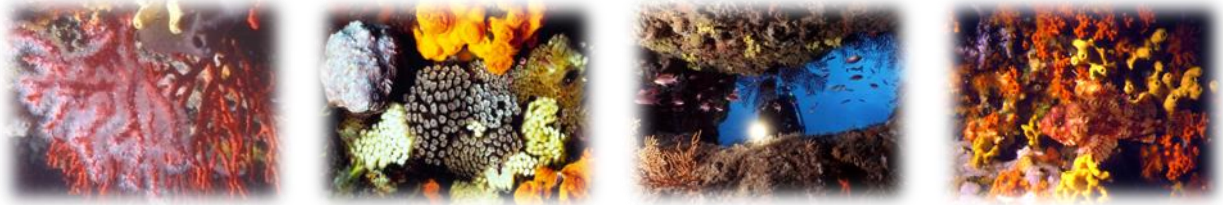
Draft Recommendations

To support with national involvement and sub-regional collaboration frames the RAC/SPA training activities on MPAs creation and management planned within the MedMPANet project (2009-2013).

**Annex I: Proposals for a new Actions and Implementation Timetable, 2010
to 2013 of the Cartilaginous Fish Action Plan**

Action	Deadline	By whom
Tools		
1. Establish directory of national, regional and international experts on chondrichthyan fish taxonomy, biology, stock assessment, conservation and management, supported by an external panel of experts.	1 year after adoption	RAC/SPA, advised by IUCN Shark Specialist Group, ICES & ICCAT Shark Working Groups
2. Develop, print and distribute regional and national field identification guides and sheets, highlighting diagnostic characteristics, for improved monitoring of elasmobranches fisheries and landings by government bodies and fishermen. Priority areas: i) Southern and eastern Mediterranean (in Arabic, French, Spanish); ii) Adriatic, Aegean, Ionian (in Croatian, Albanian, Italian, Greek, Turkish); iii) North western Mediterranean (French, Spanish).	1 year after adoption (basic ID sheets) 2–3 years (more detailed guides)	GFCM/FAO National scientific and management bodies Regional cooperation agencies
3. Promote use of existing standard monitoring protocols and forms (RAC/SPA, FAO) for landings, discards and observations of threatened species;	Immediate & continuous	National scientific and management bodies, Regional cooperation agencies, GFCM and FAO
4. Develop protocols and programmes for improved compilation and analysis of data, for contribution to regional stock assessment initiatives.	1 year after adoption	
5. Formalise/reinforce synchronous submission of catch, bycatch and discard data to both scientific and management bodies, and annually to the GFCM.	Immediate & continuous	
6. Add further information on elasmobranches bycatch to national reports to GFCM, for incorporation in GFCM database, as recommended by GFCM workshop on by-catch (Rome, 2008)	1 year after adoption	Contracting Parties, GFCM
7. Undertake information campaigns, improve the provision of materials for publication, and disseminate more widely existing RAC/SPA, FAO and other products (e.g. the RAC/SPA <i>Guidelines for reducing the presence of sensitive species in by-catch</i>). These activities should target managers, researchers and the general public.	2 years after adoption	AP Partners, Associates and donor agencies
8. Develop guidelines and/or a code of conduct for the management of shark and ray sport/recreational fishing. These will promote catch and release, describe protocols for handling catches in order to minimise stress and improve survival, and encourage reporting of such catches.	1 year after adoption	RAC/SPA, GFCM Scientific Committee
9. Promote a shift in focus of shark and ray sport/recreational fishing towards catch and release, contributions to research activities (for example through engagement in tag and release programmes), and improved reporting of catches.	2 years after adoption	Contracting Parties

Action	Deadline	By whom
<i>Monitoring and data collection</i>		
10. Promote existing research proposals developed under the RAC/SPA Action Plan (Eastern Adriatic, Balearics, Gulfs of Gabes and Sirta) by adapting them to funding proposals for the consideration of potential funding bodies, partners and Contracting Parties.	1 year after adoption	RAC/SPA
11. Initiate comprehensive programme/campaign to support data collection efforts in: i) Gulfs of Gabes and Sirta, Levantine basin (areas of highest biodiversity importance for chondrichthyan fishes in the Mediterranean and a high priority for development of precautionary management measures); and ii) Eastern Adriatic (an important region for demersal fisheries and for large rare Mediterranean elasmobranches).	2 years after adoption 3 years after adoption	National scientific bodies/institutes, Regional cooperation agencies, GFCM
12. Promote input to the MEDLEM database under the appropriate protocol, to ensure shared access to information on chondrichthyan fishes across the Mediterranean.	Immediate, continuous	Contracting Parties, GFCM
13. Complete and disseminate inventories of critical habitats (mating, spawning and nursery grounds)	2 years after adoption	Contracting Parties
14. Increase efforts to comply with obligations to collect and submit species-specific data on commercial chondrichthyan fish catch and by-catch to FAO and GFCM, including through increased use of observers on fishing vessels.	Immediate & continuous	Contracting Parties
15. Comply with obligations under existing ICCAT/GFCM Recommendations to collect and submit data on pelagic shark catches.	Immediate	Contracting Parties
16. Improve programmes for the collection of data from coastal fisheries.	Immediate	Contracting Parties
17. Support the participation of relevant experts in the conservation of cartilaginous fishes in RFMO (e.g. ICCAT, GFCM) meetings and workshops, in order to share expertise and improve capacity to undertake data collection, stock assessment and by-catch mitigation.	Immediate	Contracting Parties, RFMO, RAC/SPA



Annex II: First Mediterranean Symposium on the conservation of Coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions - Conclusion & Recommendations



In the light of:

The importance of the coralligenous populations on a regional scale in terms of biodiversity, landscape interest (natural monuments) and the economy (halieutic resources, exploiting of live species, scuba-diving, etc.)

The lack of knowledge and information, particularly due to disparities at regional level, weak knowledge of the biology of the species that form it (distribution, dispersal, growth, etc.) and the lack of vital data to determine the origin of certain regressions that have been observed

The threats that hang over these populations, threats attested to by the highlighting of a generalised regressive trend in the sectors studied (extreme events, trends),

It is proposed that:

- ➔ A network of experts be set up to share their knowledge and their experience and thus optimise the protection of the coralligenous on a Mediterranean scale
- ➔ Data be acquired on the coralligenous populations and long-term sets (reference states) be started
- ➔ Monitoring networks be set up, locally managed and coordinated at regional or sub-regional level
- ➔ Species that can act as biological indicators and record environmental changes (temperature, nutrient increase, stable contaminants, etc.) be identified, and also parameters that can establish the quality (good or worst) of these populations and ensure that they are monitored in response to specific human impacts: temperature, use of live resources (fishing, aquaculture), diving, invasive species, pollution, etc.
- ➔ Protocols for studies that can be applied to the entire Mediterranean (cost, material, etc.) be sought for and standardised
- ➔ Sanctuary areas' be increasingly set up, by taking these populations into account when creating MPAs
- ➔ Legislation on these populations at national level be strengthened; promote their being taken into account by international bodies
- ➔ Specific guidelines be laid down to have them taken into consideration in impact study procedures and in the context of managing the exploitation of live resources
- ➔ Special effort be directed to making the public and decision-makers more aware.