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Ninth Meeting of Focal Points for SPAs

Floriana, Malta, 3-6 June 2009

**Draft Mandate of the Specially Protected Areas  
Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC)**

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Mediterranean Action Plan

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## ***Background***

The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) was established in Tunis in 1985 by decision of the Contracting Parties (UNEP/IG.23/11), which entrusted it with responsibility for assessing the situation of natural and scenic heritage and assisting countries to implement the 1982 Geneva Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean. In 1993, the Contracting Parties indicated their determination to make the Mediterranean a pilot region for application of the Convention on Biological Diversity through the amendment of the Barcelona Convention and the adoption of the 1995 Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (the "SPA/BD Protocol"), which came into force in 1999, replacing the Geneva Protocol.

## ***Objective and mission***

Within the context of the implementation of the Barcelona Convention, including the related strategies, programmes and decisions, such as MAP Phase II and the MCSD, the specific objective of SPA/RAC is to contribute to the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol.

In this respect, SPA/RAC's mission is to provide assistance to Mediterranean countries in the implementation of their commitments under the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, with particular reference to the SPA/BD Protocol, especially with a view to: developing and promoting Specially Protected Areas (SPAs) in the Mediterranean; and reducing the loss of marine and coastal biodiversity.

## ***Scope of action and key issues***

Biodiversity issues are becoming increasingly complex, which means that whereas SPA/RAC's focus was initially limited to the main species and sites, it has now widened to cover habitats, sustainable ecosystem management and taking account of the ecosystem approach.

With a view to furthering the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol, SPA/RAC developed a Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Biodiversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAP BIO), which was adopted by the Contracting Parties in 2003. The principal objective of the SAP BIO is the establishment of a logical basis for the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol by the Contracting Parties, international and national organizations, NGOs, donors, and all other stakeholders in the protection and management of the Mediterranean natural environment, by setting out principles, measures and concrete and coordinated actions at the national, transboundary and regional levels for the conservation of the Mediterranean marine and coastal biodiversity, within the framework of the sustainable use of natural resources.

Within this context, SPA/RAC pursues the following basic objectives:

- fostering improved knowledge of marine and coastal biodiversity;
- improving the management of existing and facilitating the creation of new marine and coastal protected areas;
- enhancing the protection of endangered species and habitats;
- contributing to the reinforcement of relevant national legislation and national and international capacity-building; and
- contributing to fund-raising efforts.

SPA/RAC's main fields of action to pursue the above objectives, as identified in the SAP BIO, are as follows:

- developing research to complete the knowledge base and fill in knowledge gaps on biodiversity;
- inventorying, mapping and monitoring coastal and marine biodiversity;
- assessing and mitigating the impact of threats on biodiversity;
- conserving sensitive habitats, species and sites; and
- coordinating capacity-building and technical support.

In this regard, taking fully into account of the objectives identified by the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), within the context of the principles and approaches identified in the introductory section covering all MAP components, particular emphasis is placed by SPA/RAC in its work on the responsible fisheries principle, the "no adverse effect" principle and the "prevention better than last minute cure" principle.

### ***Principal activities***

The key elements of SPA/RAC's activities, as defined by the SPA/BD Protocol and the SAP BIO, and other long-term MAP documents, include the following:

#### *Coordination of initiatives and activities for the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol:*

- the implementation of scientific and technical research programmes as defined by the SPA/BD Protocol (Article 20), with priority being given to scientific and technical research related to Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and the species appearing in Annexes II and III to the SPA/BD Protocol;
- the preparation of management plans for protected areas and species;
- the preparation of cooperation programmes in order to coordinate the creation, conservation, planning and management of specially protected areas, as well as the choice, management and conservation of protected species;
- the implementation of the tasks with which SPA/RAC is entrusted by the action plans adopted within the framework of the SPA/BD Protocol; and
- the preparation of educational materials designed for various groups.

In this connection, SPA/RAC formulates recommendations for guidelines and common criteria for the selection of marine and coastal protected areas that could be included on the SPAMI List, common criteria for the inclusion of additional species in Annexes II and III to the SPA/BD Protocol, guidelines for the establishment and management of protected areas and any other technical tool relevant to the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol. SPA/RAC creates and updates databases on specially protected areas, protected species, directories of Mediterranean specialists and organizations in various fields covered by the SPA/BD Protocol, bibliographic databases, and databases on other matters of relevance to the Protocol. SPA/RAC also prepares the reports and technical studies that may be required for the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol.

#### *Assistance to the Parties*

SPA/RAC provides technical assistance to Contracting Parties which so request, in particular to help them:

- identify, establish and manage specially protected areas, including the preparation of management plans for their marine parts, within the context of national, subregional and regional programmes;
- prepare and implement National Action Plans for the protection of endangered species and habitats;
- strengthen their capacities to deal with issues relating to the conservation and management of Mediterranean biodiversity; and
- exchange scientific and technical information concerning current and planned national research and monitoring programmes and the results thereof.

#### *Capacity building*

SPA/RAC draws up and implements training programmes, particularly regarding: public environmental education; the training of scientific, technical and managerial personnel; scientific research; the acquisition, utilization, design and development of appropriate equipment; and the transfer of technology on advantageous terms to be agreed among the Parties concerned, through training sessions, courses, study tours, on-the-job training and field missions.

#### *Cooperation with national, regional and international organizations*

SPA/RAC is the lead MAP centre for cooperation with the regional and international governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with the protection of areas and species, in accordance with the specificity of each organization and the need to avoid the duplication of activities. It will also continue to collaborate with the other MAP components and with all relevant partners in the region to ensure synergy and complementarity in relation to action concerning specially protected areas and biodiversity.

In this regard, particular emphasis will be placed on giving effect to specific provisions of the SPA/BD Protocol respecting:

- *Relations with national authorities*, which are provided for by the SPA/BD Protocol through: the appointment of National Focal Points for SPAs, who are the representatives of the Contracting Parties and the point of contact for SPA/RAC (Article 24); the regular organization of meetings which enable the various stakeholders to meet on at least a two-yearly basis (Article 25(b)); and the drafting of regular reports which provide information regarding the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol (Article 23); and



- *Relations with other partners (UN bodies, international and regional conventions and agreements, IGOs, NGOs and the private sector) (Article 25(g)),* which may attend the meetings of the National Focal Points as observers. Some partners are also identified in the Action Plans for the conservation of threatened species and habitats adopted within the MAP framework as being "Partners" or "Associates" to these Action Plans. Finally, where appropriate, memoranda of cooperation may be drawn up between SPA/RAC and its partners to promote the implementation of activities under the SPA/BD Protocol.

### ***Improving the visibility of MAP***

SPA/RAC represents MAP at national, regional and international meetings and fora related to the fields covered by the SPA/BD Protocol and strives to publicize MAP's programmes and activities at the various meetings. SPA/RAC supports several activities aimed at promoting visibility and raising awareness of MAP action to protect the environment and promote sustainable development in the region. SPA/RAC organizes special events, such as United Nations Day, World Biodiversity Day and World Environment Day, with the aim of promoting the visibility of MAP and increasing awareness of the related issues in the media and among the general public, in collaboration with other MAP components. In this respect, efforts will be made to identify synergies among all MAP components to increase the visibility of the Barcelona Convention in line with the MSSD Information and Communication Strategy.

### ***Sources and mechanisms of financing***

The principal recurrent funding for SPA/RAC activities and staffing is provided through the Mediterranean Trust Fund (MTF). Additional funding is sought for actions that are clearly defined in space and time, either in response to international calls for proposals or through spontaneous proposals from sponsors, including volunteer countries, international institutions, donor agencies and the private sector.