

RAC/SPA CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEDITERRANEAN MARINE PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK IN COASTAL AND OPEN SEA WATERS

PRISPEVEK RAC/SPA K RAZVOJU OMREŽJA SREDOZEMSKIH ZAVAROVANIH OBMOČIJ V OBREŽNIH VODAH IN NA ODPRTEM MORJU

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Key words: RAC/SPA, marine protected areas network, MedMPAnet project, SPAMIs in open seas project

Ključne besede: RAC/SPA, omrežje morskih zavarovanih območij, projekt MedMPAnet, SPAMI-ji v projektu odprtih morij

ABSTRACT

In 2009, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted a regional working programme for the coastal and marine protected areas in the Mediterranean, including the high sea.

Through two main projects, the MAP/RAC-SPA provides technical and financial support for the countries to undertake the activities of this regional work programme:

- A "Project for the Development of a Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Protected Areas Network through the boosting of Mediterranean MPAs creation and management in areas within national jurisdiction of eastern and southern Mediterranean countries" (MedMPAnet Project), which consists in enhancing the effective conservation of regionally important coastal and marine biodiversity features in areas under national jurisdiction. This will be achieved through a series of demonstration activities and targeted capacity-building exercises that will be conducted in the countries involved in the project.
- A project for facilitating the establishment of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) in open seas, including the deep seas. Its working methodology aims at enhancing the governance of the areas that lie in the open seas using a sub-regional or local approach, organizing skills networks between the neighbouring Parties concerned or making use of existing networks and initiatives.

The two projects pursue the same overall objective of creating an ecologically representative marine protected areas network in the Mediterranean region.

IZVLEČEK

Leta 2009 so države podpisnice Barcelonske konvencije sprejele regionalni delovni program za obrežna in morska zavarovana območja v Sredozemlju, vključno z odprtim morjem.

Prek dveh glavnih projektov, MAP/RAC-SPA zagotavlja tehnično in finančno podporo državam, ki bodo sodelovale pri dejavnostih v okviru tega regionalnega delovnega programa:

- „Projekt za razvoj omrežja sredozemskih morskih in obrežnih območij s pospeševanjem ustanavljanja morskih zavarovanih območij in upravljanjem v območjih znotraj nacionalne jurisdikcije vzhodnih in južnih sredozemskih držav“ (Projekt MedMPAnet), ki zajema pospeševanje učinkovitega varstva

regionalno pomembnih obrežnih in morskih biodiverzitetnih posebnosti v območjih pod nacionalno jurisdikcijo. To bo doseženo skozi niz nazornih predavanj in vaj za dvigovanje kapacitet, organiziranih v državah, sodelujočih pri projektu.

- Projekt za omogočanje ustanavljanja sredozemsko pomembnih posebno zaščitene območij (SPAMI-jev) na odprtem morju. Delovna metodologija projekta je načrtovana tako, da bo pospeševala upravljanje območij, ki ležijo na odprtem morju, in sicer s sub-regionalnim ali lokalnim pristopom, z organizacijo omrežij veččin med sodelujočimi sosednjimi državami ali z uporabo že obstoječih omrežij in pobud.

Oba projekta želita doseči isti skupni cilj, to je ustvariti ekološko reprezentativno omrežje morskih zavarovanih območij v Sredozemlju.

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 highlighted the need to promote ocean conservation and called for the establishment of representative networks of marine protected areas by 2012 (United Nations 2002).

In 2004, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a programme of work on protected areas with the objective to establish, by 2012, comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of marine protected areas (UNEP/CBD 2004).

In 2010, at the Nagoya Conference of the Parties, the Parties to the CBD, other Governments and relevant organizations were invited to cooperate, as appropriate, collectively or on a regional or subregional basis, to identify and protect ecologically or biologically significant areas in open-ocean waters and deep-sea habitats in need of protection, including by establishing representative networks of marine protected areas in accordance with international law and based on scientific information (UNEP/CBD 2010).

On the Mediterranean scale, the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) and the Regional working programme for the coastal and marine protected areas in the Mediterranean including the high seas are the main tools the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention possess for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNEP/MAP 1995, 2009a).

By implementing two complementary projects, the MAP-RAC/SPA supports the Parties to the Barcelona Convention with technical and financial assistance to undertake activities, which contribute to develop a Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas network in coastal and open sea waters.

2. INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The political and legal frameworks to address conservation matters at the Mediterranean level exist within the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), thanks to the Barcelona Convention adopted by 21 riparian countries and the European Commission.

Seven Protocols addressing specific aspects of Mediterranean environmental conservation complete the MAP legal framework, in particular the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) adopted in 1995 (UNEP/MAP 1995).

The SPA/BD Protocol is the main tool the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention possess for implementing the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, as regards the *in situ* sustainable management of coastal and marine biodiversity.

It envisages three main lines in order to ensure the safeguarding of biological diversity in the Mediterranean:

- The creation, protection and management of Specially Protected Areas (SPAs),
- The establishment of a list of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs),
- The protection and conservation of species.

The Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) is one of the 6 Centers responsible of respective components of MAP. Its specific objective is to contribute to the implementation of the SPA/BD Protocol by providing assistance to Mediterranean countries in the implementation of their commitments under the Protocol, especially in regard to developing and promoting Specially Protected Areas, with a particular focus on Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) as a tool to reduce the loss of marine and coastal biodiversity.

Taking into consideration the CBD decisions, the Mediterranean Parties to the Barcelona Convention decided in 2008 to promote measures for the establishment of a comprehensive and coherent Mediterranean network of coastal and marine protected areas by 2012 (UNEP/MAP 2008).

Furthermore, in the 2009 Marrakech Declaration, the States were called to continue the establishment of marine protected areas and to pursue the protection of biodiversity with a view to establish, by 2012, a network of marine protected areas, including on the high seas, in accordance with the relevant international legal framework and the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (UNEP/MAP 2009b).

In 2009, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention also adopted the “Regional working programme for the coastal and marine protected areas in the Mediterranean including the high seas”, which aims to support the establishment of a comprehensive and coherent Mediterranean network of coastal and marine protected areas (UNEP/MAP 2009a).

To achieve that objective, the regional working programme provides a three-step hierarchical planning approach:

1 - At the widest scale, that of the Mediterranean basin, the first stage recommended when designing an ecological network is the identification of large-scale ecological units. The aim is to recognise the ecological distinctions between the different parts of the Mediterranean Sea.

2 - At the next level, priority conservation areas must be identified within each ecological unit; these areas do not constitute MPAs as such, but are focal areas for networks of individual MPAs. These areas can present high biodiversity or marine species of conservation concern

(vulnerable or rare species or species with high marine value) or can offer a unique or unusual combination of marine habitats.

3 – Once these priority conservation areas have been identified, it is possible to start the task of identifying sites to develop real ecological networks. The individual MPAs within these networks must protect what is ecologically most important, and must highlight habitats in which a concentration of ecological processes leads to high species diversity. To become a network, it is not only necessary to create MPAs to protect these key areas, but also to maintain the ecological links between them.

Within this framework, MAP-RAC/SPA's activities of its biennium programme of work consist in: (i) assisting the countries to create MPA(s), (ii) organizing training activities, and (iii) supporting the inventories of sites conservation interest.

Moreover, through two complementary projects, the MAP-RAC-SPA provides technical and financial support to the development of a Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas network in coastal and open sea waters:

The MedMPAnet project, which aims to develop Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Protected Areas network through the boosting of Mediterranean MPAs creation and management,

The project for supporting the creation of SPAMIs in open seas, including the deep seas.

3. THE MEDMAPNET PROJECT

3.1 CONTEXT

The MedMPAnet project is part of the MedPartnership GEF full size project “Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Ecosystem” led by UNEP. The objective of the MedPartnership project, which includes 4 components, is to leverage reforms and investments to address marine and coastal biodiversity conservation priorities for the Mediterranean.

Component 3 specifically addresses the decline of biodiversity and the decline of fisheries in the Mediterranean and further branches off in 2 subcomponents: sub-component 3.1, conservation of coastal and marine diversity through the development of a Mediterranean MPA network and sub-component 3.2: Promotion of the sustainable use of fisheries resources through the application of ecosystem-based management approaches.

Specifically, the component 3.1 is implemented through two complementary projects, the MedMPAnet project led by UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA and the MedPAN South Project led by WWF Mediterranean Programme.

3.2 OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the MedMPAnet project, which starts by the end of 2009 and will last 5 years, consists in enhancing the effective conservation of regionally important coastal and

marine biodiversity features, through the creation of an ecologically coherent MPA network in the Mediterranean region, as required by Barcelona Convention's Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol).

This will effectively provide assistance to the country partners to implement several prioritized elements of the Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity (SAP BIO) in the Mediterranean Region (UNEP/MAP/RAC-SPA 2003) through the provision of a series of enabling activities at the national, sub-regional and regional levels and will also expand the existing Network of MPA managers in the Mediterranean to include the rest of the Mediterranean.

3.3 BENEFICIARY COUNTRIES AND TARGET GROUP(S)

12 Mediterranean riparian countries are involved in the project, namely Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Montenegro, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. The Palestinian Authority is also intended to be involved.

The main target groups are MPAs managers, practitioners and relevant authorities in the above-mentioned beneficiary countries.

3.4 MAIN ACTIVITIES

A set of activities will be implemented around 4 action categories:

- Demonstration projects on MPAs creation, financial analysis and sustainability mechanism in Albania, Croatia, Libya, Tunisia and Montenegro,
- Establishment of priority activities to create MPAs, identification of stakeholders & potential partnership required and characterization of marine sites suitable to become MPAs,
- Exchange of experience and training to improve new/existing MPAs management,
- Communication on the results and achievements of the project and public awareness.

3.5 EXPECTED RESULTS

- Implementation of several actions prioritized by the SAP BIO project.
- Existing and proposed MPAs will coalesce to form part of a coherent and geographically balanced network that exists at both institutional and ecological levels.
- Greater representation of the Mediterranean's vulnerable and critical coastal and marine habitats brought under statutory protection.
- Tools and capacity for the management of recognized Mediterranean coastal and marine biodiversity sites improved.
- Permanent coordination, monitoring, evaluation and support mechanisms for regional coastal and marine biodiversity conservation.
- Innovative approaches to the funding of regionally important existing and future coastal and marine biodiversity conservation initiatives in place.

4. THE PROJECT FOR SUPPORTING THE CREATION OF SPAMI IN OPEN SEA, INCLUDING THE DEEP SEAS

4.1 PRESENTATION

The long term objective of this project implemented since 2008 is to assist the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to promote, through the SPAMI system, the setting-up of a representative network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean open seas, including the deep seas.

The implementation of the project is under the guidance of a Steering Committee consisting of international and regional organizations:

- UNEP's Division for Environmental Policy Implementation - Regional Seas, Programme (UNEP/DEPI) and Division for Environmental Law and Conventions (UNEP/DELIC),
- Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan (MEDU, UNEP/MAP),
- European Commission,
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO),
- General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),
- Secretariat of the OSPAR Convention,
- International Maritime Organization (IMO),
- Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC),
- Secretariat of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS),
- Secretariat of the Pelagos Sanctuary,
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN Med),
- Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM),
- World Wide Fund for Nature's Mediterranean Programme Office (WWF MedPO).

The project is financially supported by the European Commission and the Mediterranean Trust Funds (MFT) according to a two-phase process.

4.2 FIRST PHASE - IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREAS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN OPEN SEAS, INCLUDING THE DEEP SEAS (2009-2010)

The first phase was completed in 2009 and included an assessment based on the available scientific knowledge to identify priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep seas, likely to contain sites that could be candidates for the SPAMI List.

The identification of the areas was conducted through different studies taking into consideration the geological features of the seabed (seamounts, mud volcanoes, dries, canyons, hydrothermal vents), oceanographic features (fronts, upwelling), ecological features of certain

habitats (coralligenous facies, white coral communities) and biogeographic features of certain species.

An Extraordinary Meeting of the SPA/BD Focal Points, held on the 1st June 2010 in Istanbul (Turkey), revised a list of priority conservation areas located in the open seas, including the deep seas, and retained 12 areas (Figure 1) as likely to contain sites that could be candidates for the SPAMI List (UNEP/MAP/RAC-SPA 2010).

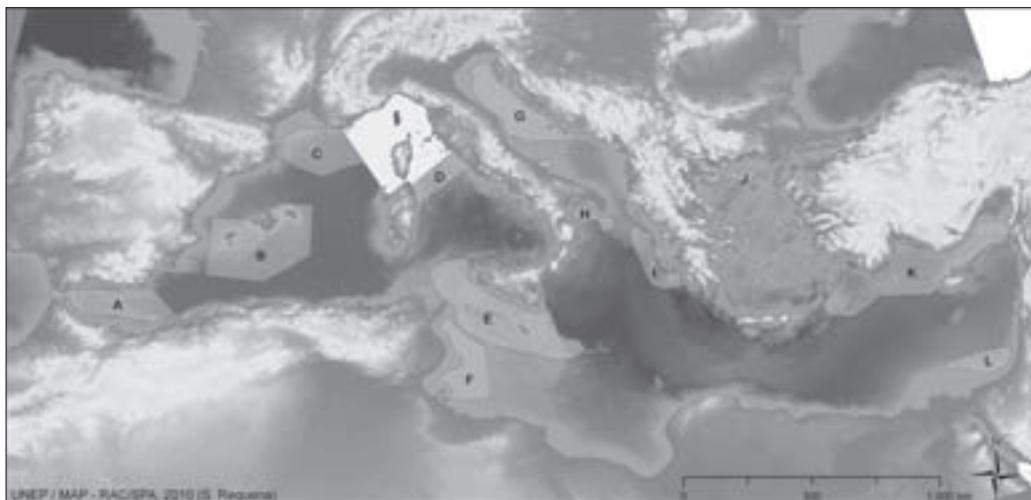


Figure 1: Priority conservation areas in the open seas, including the deep seas, likely to contain sites that could be candidates for the SPAMI List.

A: Alborán Seamounts; B: Southern Balearic; C: Gulf of Lions shelf and slope; D: Central Tyrrhenian; E: Northern Strait of Sicily (including Adventure and nearby banks); F: Southern Strait of Sicily; G: Northern and Central Adriatic; H: Santa Maria di Leuca; I: Northeastern Ionian; J: Thracian Sea; K: Northeastern Levantine Sea and Rhodes Gyre; L: Nile Delta Region (§: Pelagos Sanctuary declared as SPAMI in 2001)

Slika 1: Prednostna naravovarstvena območja na odprtih morjih, ki bi lahko zajemala lokalitete, primerne za vključitev na seznam SPAMI-jev.

A: Alborán Seamounts; B: Southern Balearic; C: Gulf of Lions shelf and slope; D: Central Tyrrhenian; E: Northern Strait of Sicily (including Adventure and nearby banks); F: Southern Strait of Sicily; G: Northern and Central Adriatic; H: Santa Maria di Leuca; I: Northeastern Ionian; J: Thracian Sea; K: Northeastern Levantine Sea and Rhodes Gyre; L: Nile Delta Region (§: Pelagos Sanctuary declared as SPAMI in 2001)

4.3 SECOND PHASE – SUPPORT TO THE PARTIES TO THE BARCELONA CONVENTION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPAMIS IN OPEN SEA AREAS, INCLUDING THE DEEP SEAS (2010-2011)

The Project's second phase begins in 2010 and aims to facilitate the process of designating as SPAMIs sites included in the areas identified in the first phase as areas for conservation interest in the open seas, including the deep seas.

In its Article 9, the SPA/BD Protocol states that proposals for the SPAMI List may be submitted by two or more neighbouring Parties, if the area lies wholly or partially in the high sea and that the neighbouring Parties must consult one another to ensure that the proposed protection and management measures, and means of implementation, are consistent.

Furthermore, the Parties that are making the proposal for the SPAMI List provide the RAC/SPA with a presentation report containing information on the area's geographic location, its physical and ecological features, its legal status, its management plan and the means of implementing this, and a statement justifying the area's Mediterranean importance.

The activities of the Project's second phase aim at accompanying the area's neighbouring Parties in a process of consultation and coordination. Thus, for each considered site, it is suggested that an *ad hoc* work group be set up, made up of representatives from the countries neighbouring on the concerned area, in order to support the preparation of the presentation reports.

The operational aims of these work groups are:

- Ensuring coordination and monitoring of activities to be carried out in order to prepare the SPAMI presentation reports,
- Initiating sustainable consultation dynamics between the concerned neighbouring Parties,
- Developing a pilot experience in the Mediterranean that can be replicated in other priority conservation areas that lie in the open seas and have been identified during the first phase.

On the basis of the declarations made by some countries' representatives during the Istanbul meeting (1st June 2010), the MAP-RAC/SPA works to organize the first consultation meetings with the concerned countries (UNEP/MAP/RAC-SPA 2010).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The two projects implemented by the MAP-RAC/SPA pursue the same overall objective of creating an ecologically representative marine protected areas network in the Mediterranean region, addressing both coastal and open-sea ecosystems.

The MedMPAnet activities would lead to the boosting of Mediterranean MPAs creation and management in the countries involved (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Montenegro, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey). These areas would then benefit national status of protection, whereas the open sea project will require the approval of more than one Party to establish the SPAMI in an open-sea area.

By developing coordination and consultation processes between involved countries, both projects contribute to improve the governance of the Mediterranean Sea in order to ensure the conservation of the biodiversity of these areas and guarantee the sustainable use of their marine resources.

6. LITERATURE

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