

**REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY RAC/SPA SINCE THE SIXTH
MEETING OF THE NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS FOR SPAs
(June 2003 - April 2005)**

INTRODUCTION

The present Report was elaborated by RAC/SPA in order to inform the National Focal Points for SPAs at their Seventh Meeting (Seville, 31 May-3 June 2005) about the activities RAC/SPA has carried out since the Sixth Meeting. This Report covers the period from June 2003 to April 2005. As well as information on RAC/SPA's activities, the document includes the recommendations that should be suggested at the next Meetings of Focal Points of MAP and of the Contracting Parties for the coming financial biennial (these recommendations appear in the grey boxes).

The main activities are described in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Crossover activities (data management, transfer of knowledge) can appear throughout the Report or are described in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

1. IMPLEMENTING THE ACTION PLANS

1.1. Implementing the Action Plan for the management of the Mediterranean monk seal

Following recommendations made by the Parties to implement actions related to the experts' document prepared for RAC/SPA in the previous biennium, efforts have been focused on basic needed activities – owing to budget limitations regarding the cost of the proposed actions – described in that document, where RAC/SPA could play a catalysing role: capacity-building through training of national experts and identification of still suitable habitats in areas where knowledge of the species status is still weak, i.e.: Algeria, Cyprus, Libya, Morocco, Syria.

Within the framework of the MedMPA project, a survey of the Syrian coast where monk seal habitats may exist, based on a preliminary partial survey done in 2002 (from its northern frontier to Lathakia) was undertaken. Only a cave very close to the border, suitable for resting, was considered adequate for the monk seals, although a small trench within the area prospected could not be surveyed because of maritime traffic regulations. In any case, data collected during the mission, together with a survey through interviews carried out by the Syrian High Institute of Marine Research, show the sporadic presence of monk seals, possibly dispersal individuals coming from the nearby Turkish area, which is known to have a resident monk seal population.

RAC/SPA carried out an expedition to northern Morocco with a local team to train them on monk seal population monitoring and to assess status and evaluate habitats in the area between the Al Hoceima National Park and Cap de l'Eau, a historical area of seal distribution in northern Morocco. Well preserved breeding caves were identified both within the Park and in the very pristine area of Cap des Trois Fourches. The activity was coordinated with an ICRAM-IFAW project to collect

information and sensitise local people while training the same local team in the same area during not overlapping dates. A poster designed by ICRAM on the monk seal, and printed in Arabic by RAC/SPA, was distributed during both missions. A bigger, trilingual version (English/ French/ Arabic) has been produced.

The present existence of monk seals in western Cyprus was confirmed by field work done by a RAC/SPA-University of Alicante team in collaboration with the local authorities within the framework of the MedMPA project team in autumn 2003. A similar expedition to the one designed for Morocco is being sent to the Akamas area, in western Cyprus, at the end of summer 2005 in collaboration with the Cypriot authorities.

After a field mission carried out on land in spring 2002 identified the presence of the Mediterranean monk seal in the Cyrenaica coastal region in Libya, a MoU with the Libyan authorities (EGA Libya) and the Italian Institute ICRAM defined further activities for monk seal conservation along the Libyan coasts for the present biennium. A training expedition to Libya is being organised in spring 2005 to implement a field survey, beginning in July 2005, with the collaboration of the Tajura Marine Biological Research Centre, to identify resting and breeding habitats for the species and decide on the future conservation needs of these areas.

Collaboration with the Algerian authorities to update knowledge on the species in the area by appointing a consultant is planned for the second half of 2005.

With regard to the general status and future chances for the species's survival, a monk seal status report was prepared (UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.3) to scientifically ascertain the possibility that the species may become extinct in the Mediterranean. For this purpose, a population and habitat viability analysis was done on the biggest population remaining in the region. Results show that in the present situation, the population will be extinct in a few decades, if clear steps related to fisheries and habitats are not taken.

As is already known, the Parties to the Barcelona Convention included among their priority targets to be achieved by 1995 the protection of the Mediterranean monk seal (Genoa, 9-13 September 1985). The Mediterranean monk seal population has declined rapidly and drastically in the almost 20 years since then. Further international cooperation is needed to address the issue. A high-level meeting was recommended to the Parties at the last NFP meeting to address the issue but, up to the date of preparation of this Report, no country has proposed organising such an event.

On support for further international cooperation regarding endangered species, the Mediterranean Action Plan stipulates that links should be made with other bodies responsible for Action Plans dealing with one or more species found in Annex II to the Protocol on SPAs and Biological Diversity, to strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication of work.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Take note of the recommendations made by an inner working group formed at the 7th Meeting of the National Focal Points for SPAs and indicating the views of the National Focal Points for SPAs on the situation of the monk seal in the Mediterranean and on the actions deemed necessary to compensate for the decline of the species.

Recommendations to the (RAC/SPA) Secretariat

Invite the (RAC/SPA) Secretariat to:

- Continue the field prospecting to assess the presence of isolated groups
- Envisage, for groups that would possibly be discovered, promoting conservation actions similar to those undertaken for the Atlantic colonies of this species.

1.2. Implementing the Action Plan for the conservation of Mediterranean marine turtles

During the period covered by the present Report, RAC/SPA's activities mainly concerned the following:

- (I) increasing scientific knowledge on certain aspects of the biology of marine turtles, particularly the dynamics of Mediterranean populations and nesting,
- (II) circulating information, awareness and training, by publishing technical documents and by organising training courses,
- (III) cooperation and the exchange of experience by participating in or organising conferences and workshops.

Increasing scientific knowledge

At the request of Tunisia, RAC/SPA gave its backing to a scientific study, starting in 1996, in order to carry out monitoring, management and research activities on the Kuriat Islands in 2003 and 2004.

In response to a request by Tunisia and Lybia, RAC/SPA supported a programme of monitoring the migration of marine turtles by satellite transmitter, in collaboration with the Naples zoological station, in March 2005. In Tunisia, the programme included fishermen's awareness activities and reports broadcast on Tunisian television. In Libya, the programme included a small information and awareness workshop for actors concerned by marine turtle conservation.

A turtle stranding network, equipped with a mechanism to allow quick reporting of live stranded, ill, injured or dead animals (a 24 hour telephone service) was established in Tunisia through a MoU with the INSTM. Emergency task forces were set up to

attend to reports of stranded animals in four different sub-regions embracing the whole Tunisian coastline, with organised and standardised data collection and reporting procedures. The network collaborates with the Monastir turtle rescue centre to transport live turtles located by the response teams. It will shortly set up a facility for the effective necropsy of dead animals by trained personnel. Every tissue sample obtained will be made available to the two existing Mediterranean tissue banks (Barcelona and Padua).

In order to address key points for the conservation of these reptiles, identified by the First Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, support for research needs focused on genetics, to know the size and structure of populations and baseline studies and to approach the impact of different fisheries on different fishing grounds, to help identify critical habitats. Cooperation with Barcelona University has given important results for conservation purposes (UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf21).

Both nuclear and mitochondrial markers were applied to the analysis of Mediterranean loggerhead turtles and genetic structuring in the nesting sites of the eastern Mediterranean was found. Particular haplotypes were found in Greece and Israel. Furthermore, some females nesting on Turkish beaches carried a haplotype not found anywhere else in the Mediterranean, although it had been previously reported from Atlantic nesting beaches. Thus, the subpopulations in the eastern Mediterranean cannot be considered as a single management unit.

Analysis of mitochondrial DNA revealed deep genetic structuring in the western Mediterranean, revealing that the foraging grounds of the North African coast and the Gimnesies Islands (Majorca, Minorca) are inhabited mainly by turtles of Atlantic stock, whereas the foraging grounds off the European shore of the western basin, and those in the eastern basin, are inhabited mainly by turtles from the eastern Mediterranean nesting beaches. Turtles from all the considered eastern Mediterranean breeding beaches have been found in the foraging grounds off the European shore of the western Mediterranean. Finally, the foraging grounds off Lampedusa Island and the Pitiüses Islands (Small Balearics) are thought to be inhabited by specimens of both origins. This structuring is explained by the pattern of sea surface currents and water masses. As the foraging grounds off the European shore of the western Mediterranean and those in the eastern Mediterranean contain almost entirely individuals from the highly endangered eastern Mediterranean breeding sites, conservation plans should make it a priority to reduce the mortality caused by incidental by-catch in these areas.

Dissemination of information, awareness and training

RAC/SPA funded the participation of trainees from Israel (4), Albania (1), Tunisia (1) and Malta (1) at the training course on marine turtle conservation that took place at the Lara station in Cyprus. This initiative was successfully completed thanks to the cooperation of the Cyprus Wildlife Society and the support of the Fishing and Marine Research Department (DFMR, Cyprus). These training courses, lasting some ten days, were organised in summer 2003 and 2004 and will be repeated in 2005.

A day of information and awareness on marine turtle conservation was organised in Tunisia on 29 July 2004. At this event, an Arabic version of the 'Fishermen's handbook for handling marine turtles' was presented and handed out to the fishermen.

Since reduction of marine turtle mortality needs the voluntary collaboration of fishermen, it is vital to provide them and their communities with proper awareness material and tools. In that context, RAC/SPA translated the Sea Turtle Handling Guidebook for Fishermen and the corresponding Teachers' Manual into Spanish to facilitate their use by sizeable fishing communities that speak this language in Spain and parts of North Africa.

At the request of the Contracting Parties, the 'Fishermen's handbook' was translated and adapted in several other languages:

- Turkish, presented at the First National Symposium on Marine Turtles, and circulated in Turkey
- Greek, circulated with the collaboration of MEDASSET in Greece. Given the document's success, the Ministry of the Environment and Land Use Planning printed and circulated almost 5,000 copies
- Croat and Maltese.

RAC/SPA published the following documents (which are available by downloading from RAC/SPA's internet site at the following address: www.rac-spa.org):

- guidelines for establishing laws and rules regarding the conservation and management of marine turtle populations and their habitats, in English and French
- guidelines for improving the involvement of care centres for marine turtles, in English.

A poster, kindly offered by ICRAM (Italy), has been printed in a trilingual version (Arabic, English, French).

In accordance with the recommendations made at the Thirteenth Ordinary Meeting of Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA contacted the IUCN's Centre of Cooperation for the Mediterranean (Malaga) in order to set up an internet site on protecting marine turtles in the Mediterranean, in partnership with the group of specialists on marine turtles in the Mediterranean region. The site is expected to be set up by the second half-year of 2005.

Cooperation and the exchange of experience

RAC/SPA participated in the Spanish workshop on the standardisation of scientific tagging of sea turtles (Malaga, 31 March-1 April 2004), where important issues concerning the soundest stocks tagged at sea in the Mediterranean were addressed.

Among the main important decisions were the following :

Turtles under 20 cm. will not be tagged;

Titanium tags from the Spanish Ministry of the Environment will be used on the forelimbs, and microchips placed on the skin of the neck. Since some scientific documents recommend putting the microchip into muscle, for turtles with a very thin

skin, the matter will be further reviewed. For the tagging of small turtles; plastic tags should be avoided in the Mediterranean, given the possibility of entanglement in gill-nets and their short duration;

It was recommended that tags should always show the address of the tagging country.

On RAC/SPA's suggestion, a unique institution, the Spanish Herpetological Society, was made responsible for accrediting aptitude permits for tagging in Spain, issued by the Ministry of the Environment. Participants underlined the need to consider the adjacent Atlantic coast in any future Mediterranean database developed by RAC/SPA, to allow data on the movements of turtles between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic to be recorded.

RAC/SPA took into account the above decisions on the workshop which was held in Turkey in May 2005.

In accordance with the recommendations made at the Thirteenth Ordinary Meeting of Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA organised a workshop on standardising tagging and centralizing information in the Mediterranean area. To take advantage of the presence of Mediterranean experts, the workshop was organised just before the Second Conference on Marine Turtles (Antalya, Turkey), on 2-3 May 2005. The results are presented as an information document, as UNEP (DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.5.

After the success of the First Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, RAC/SPA, acting jointly with the Secretariats of the Bonn and the Berne Conventions, organised a Second Conference on Marine Turtles (Antalya, Turkey, 4-7 May 2005). The Turkish Government, acting through the Ministry of the Environment and Forests and the WWF Turkey, provided the logistical requirements for the Conference. Participants from the Mediterranean and from other regions took part in the work of the Conference. The recommendations made by the Conference appear in Document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.4.

In accordance with the priority actions of SAP/BIO, RAC/SPA decided to address the question of the impact of fishing on marine turtles as a problem affecting marine and coastal biodiversity generally (all species taken together) and not just in isolation as part of the Action Plan. This work will be done in partnership with the FAO/GFCM.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Take note of the recommendations made by the Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles.
- Take note of the results of the workshop on standardising marking and centralizing information, and promote marking programmes that comply with the established norms.

- Use the database to centralize information from the various tagging programmes of seaturtles.org.
- Ensure legal protection to known nesting sites that do not yet come under a protection system.
- Have the ban on turtle watching enforced in reproduction areas at sea.
- Promote the use of rounded hooks to reduce incidental catch.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Evaluate the situation of *Dermochelys coriacea* and *Trionyx triunguis* in the Mediterranean and present a report on the state of the two turtle species at the Eighth Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs
- Strengthen programmes to study the population and migration dynamics for *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas*.
- Promote studies on the evaluation of fishing/marine turtle interactions and back the promotion of the use of rounded hooks to reduce incidental catch

1.3. Implementing the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Mediterranean Sea

Actions undertaken in the field of cetacean conservation concerned the following:

- improving knowledge on species status and actions for using strandings of species to gain a better understanding of cetacean conservation problems and possible solutions
- optimizing coordination with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat by harmonising the Barcelona Convention Parties' recommendations to the maximum extent possible with the Agreement's needs.

Within the above framework, the following actions were implemented :

Increasing scientific knowledge

To acquire a baseline for clarifying and addressing the real level of competition among Mediterranean cetaceans and the commercial exploitation of the Mediterranean fisheries resources, a contract was signed with an expert from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes of Montpellier, France, to produce a report on the exploitation of Mediterranean marine trophic chains by cetaceans and the overlap with target fisheries. The study comprises an exhaustive analysis of the diets of the main species in the region and includes the issue of marine debris ingestion (UNEP (DEC)/ MED WG.268/Inf.17).

To fill the gaps on priority cetacean species in the Aegean Sea (an important area for such animals in the Mediterranean), RAC/SPA has supported the local organisation ARION in order to identify the most critical areas, with up-to-date information, for the

endangered species (the short-beaked common dolphin, and the bottlenose dolphin) in the northern Aegean Sea; and especially to ascertain whether the rare common porpoise still inhabits that part of the Mediterranean. The organisation will analyse mortality factors affecting these species as background knowledge needed for their conservation. In addition, it will make contact with fishing communities in the northern Aegean and the concerned national authorities to develop incentives urging these stakeholders to protect marine mammals via alternative economic schemes, such as fishing boat trips with tourists.

Support has been granted to the Tethys organisation, which jointly with local institutions, several universities (Thessaloniki, Padua, Barcelona, Vancouver) and cetacean conservation NGOs is developing the following task:

- Data on the Amvrakikos Lagoon dolphin community collected since 2003 will be analysed and results reported. This will provide the first information on local dolphins' community size, individual habitat use and movements, social organisation and reproductive biology, all basic knowledge needed to address their conservation. Photo-identification will allow the mark-recapture analyses needed for a reliable estimate of the size of the bottlenose dolphin community
- Fishing gear depredation and gear destruction (including fish farms) will be evaluated in 2005 through field observations and interviews with fishermen. Data on diet and feeding behaviour will be used to investigate ecological interactions between dolphins and the local fisheries
- Tissue samples will be appropriately stored and sent to Mediterranean tissue banks to allow pollutant levels and health status to be assessed.

RAC/SPA expertise and/or economic support for the development of National Action Plans for the Conservation of Cetaceans as well as cetacean stranding networks was offered to several riparian countries. The response was uneven; such support from RAC/SPA was accepted by Tunisia and Libya. Other countries have started such network development, thanks to the support of ACCOBAMS. In the case of Libya, apart from elaborating the country's first Cetacean Action Plan, the work supported included identifying the available means and further needs for developing the national network on cetacean strandings. Tunisia has set up a stranding network divided into four sectors that take in all the country's coasts.

RAC/SPA supported, as previously, the Fifth European Seminar on Marine Mammals: Biology and Conservation, organised by the Menendez Pelayo International University and the University of Valencia, from 13 to 17 September 2004. In addition, it offered three full grants to three Mediterranean students who asked for support to attend the gathering. IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation contributed to the granting of travel expenses. Only one of the three grantees finally attended the seminar.

The Mediterranean Database on Cetacean Strandings (MEDACES), set up at the University of Valencia (Spain) through an agreement with RAC/SPA, continued to be supported by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment.

The existing MEDACES website (English version) has been translated into French. The form for entering MEDACES was reviewed and finalized by several specialists from ACCOBAMS and RAC/SPA. Once the corrections and suggestions were included, the form was made accessible at the MEDACES web page: <http://medaces.uv.es>.

Data input from the Mediterranean countries was promoted by RAC/SPA; data from Greece, Turkey and Tunisia are integrated. The linking of the MEDACES GIS module with the Dynamic Atlas on the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Protected Areas was in its final stage when this Report was being written. This connection will allow cetacean spatial data to be integrated with other biological and anthropogenic data collected in MedGIS.

Further extension of MEDACES coverage to the ACCOBAMS area is being promoted within the framework of RAC/SPA-ACCOBAMS collaboration, pending a concrete accord document between the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Spanish Ministry of the Environment.

The illustrated guidelines on cetacean stranding networks presented at the last NFP Meeting were printed and distributed in collaboration with ACCOBAMS.

Collaboration with ACCOBAMS

An exhaustive world review document on whale-watching, elaborated by RAC/SPA in the previous biennium, was harmonized to be included in an Annex to the Whale-watching Guidelines finalised by ACCOBAMS and jointly published.

RAC/SPA contributed to the Second ACCOBAMS Scientific Committee Meetings (Istanbul, 18-23 November 2003), providing assistance and Secretarial support, and participated in the Second MOP to ACCOBAMS as the Mediterranean Sub-regional Coordinating Unit (Palma de Mallorca, 9-12 November 2004).

An international meeting on cetacean conservation was organised in Tajura, Libya, in collaboration with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the Environmental General Authority of Libya, aimed at activating such conservation activity in the country. The Meeting included a training workshop on cetacean tissue sampling and another on setting up and coordinating tissue banks. The EGA gave generous logistic and economic support to make the event a success.

A CD-ROM on marine mammal tissue banks was designed by RAC/SPA and the ACCOBAMS Secretariat to be distributed at the International Meeting in Libya. The CD-ROM is an educative and training tool, and includes 11 movies, hundreds of images and printable documents.

RAC/SPA helped organise a workshop to prepare the Assessment and Mitigation of Cetacean By-catch in the ACCOBAMS Area project. The ACCOBAMS Secretariat has engaged a consultant to work on developing the proposal. A coordinating meeting to develop the objectives and activities of the proposal document was held in Rome, on 29 and 30 April 2004, with contributions by RAC/SPA and ACCOBAMS.

A scientific workshop on harassing acoustic devices was held in Rome on 28 June 2004, with RAC/SPA and ACCOBAMS contributions. Relevant experts attended to discuss developing protocols on their use in the Agreement area (which embraces the entire Mediterranean). The meeting was based on the conclusion and recommendations of the ICRAM workshop on the problems of conflict between dolphins and Mediterranean coastal fisheries (4-5 May 2001).

Regarding Mediterranean fin whale populations, RAC/SPA will promote the organising in 2005 of a meeting of several countries to develop a programme to identify and protect the feeding areas, both on the high seas and in territorial waters in the southern Mediterranean, in collaboration with ICRAM.

A poster on cetaceans, kindly offered by ICRAM (Italy), has been printed in a trilingual version (Arabic, English, French).

An educational toolkit on cetaceans is being prepared by the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and will be translated into Arabic by RAC/SPA when it is ready.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Join the ACCOBAMS Agreement if this has not already been done
- Promote the creation and extension of protected marine and coastal areas that are specifically for cetaceans

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Collaborate with the ACCOBAMS Secretariat and the FAO/GFCM to assess the impact of fishing on cetacean populations and help the Parties to reduce harmful fishing/cetacean interactions
- Support countries that are not parties to ACCOBAMS to help them join this Agreement

1.4. Implementing the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea

Mapping and monitoring

RAC/SPA has, over the period covered by the present Report, directed its activities towards helping those countries which have so requested to map and monitor *Posidonia* meadows.

To this end, RAC/SPA, in collaboration with the University of Corsica's Littoral Ecosystem Team, helped Greece to carry out a study on mapping *Posidonia* meadows in the Zakynthos National Park (for further details, see section 4.1). RAC/SPA also backed setting up a *Posidonia* monitoring network along the Zarzis coastline (in the South of Tunisia).

As well as what is described in the above paragraph, Albanian local experts were given technical and scientific advice on mapping *Posidonia* meadows. Albania is currently implementing a project funded by GEF/small grant, consisting of a number of exploratory dives in the main Albanian ports. A pilot map of *Posidonia* meadows in Saranda Bay and the Durres region was made, as part of the programme. RAC/SPA gave technical and scientific advice on the terms and methodologies of this type of mapping. This project was carried out with the collaboration of the Pisa University.

In order to help the Mediterranean countries comply with the objectives of the Action Plan, and particularly with the objective that recommends they map meadows and all other plant formations that are significant for the marine environment, RAC/SPA elaborated guidelines for the implementation of projects to map the *Posidonia* meadows.

RAC/SPA signed an inter-partnership agreement involving eight partner bodies from the western Mediterranean to implement a project on 'consistency, development, harmonisation and validation of methods of evaluating the quality of the littoral environment by monitoring the *Posidonia oceanica* meadow', headed by Ifremer (France). In the context of this project, RAC/SPA will participate in training and information activities, particularly in organising the project's closing seminar, which will aim at reporting the final products and promoting and circulating the results of the project. This project is subject to a call for proposals as part of the MEDOCC Interreg IIIB Programme. The launching of the project, which will last a total 36 months, will depend on the results of the call for projects, known in late May 2005.

Cooperation, exchange of experience and training

RAC/SPA, with the collaboration of the Action Plan Associates and particular support from the Greek National Centre for Marine Research (NCMR), organised the Second Mediterranean Symposium on Marine Vegetation. This symposium took place in the NCMR premises in Athens on 12 and 13 December 2003. Over 65 scientists from 14 Mediterranean countries participated. The Proceedings of the Symposium are being published and will include some forty scientific publications. The main themes of the Symposium were: (i) Inventorying species and communities, (ii) Anthropic impacts on Mediterranean marine vegetation, and (iii) Mapping marine vegetation. In addition, three round tables were held on the fringe of the Symposium, discussing various subjects: (i) the phytobenthos as an element for assessing ecological quality, (ii) the standardisation of mapping techniques, and (iii) the elaboration of taxonomic tools for Mediterranean marine vegetation.

In the context of capacity-enhancement, as provided for by the Action Plan, a training workshop on techniques of mapping *Posidonia* meadows was organised at Vibo

Valentia (Italy) from 28 September to 5 October 2003 (see Item 5.2. concerning training activities).

Evaluating the Action Plan

According to the Contracting parties recommendation, RAC/SPA recruited an independent consultant to carry out the evaluation of the implementing of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation. This evaluation was intended to enable the National Focal Points to look into how far the actions provided for by the Action Plan's implementation schedule had progressed, and to make the necessary recommendations for the follow up (possible revision of the implementation schedule, adoption of a new schedule starting from 2007). The report on the evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan is presented as UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/6.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Adopt the new implementation timetable of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea updated after evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan.
- Take the necessary steps to complete, within the prescribed time, the activities provided for by the implementation timetable of the Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Map and make inventories of the marine meadows and plant formations that can be considered as natural monuments.
- Help the countries that have already started activities on meadows to set up monitoring networks.

1.5. Implementing the Action Plan for the Conservation of Cartilaginous Fishes (Chondrichthyans) in the Mediterranean Sea

Following the recommendations made by the Contracting Parties, the following activities concerning actions to be undertaken or supported by the Secretariat regarding the Action Plan were implemented:

- Establishing a network and directory of collaborators

A Regional List has been prepared of scholars and institutions devoted to research on and conservation of elasmobranchs in the Mediterranean. It will be made

available in electronic form to facilitate updating, given the necessary dynamism related to such information.

- Supporting the defining of Protocols for (I) monitoring commercial landings and discards by species and (II) recording data on rarely observed, endangered and protected species

The protocols were prepared in English, to be offered to fishing fleets in the Mediterranean Sea. Other language versions will be prepared after a scientific consensus is reached in the Symposium organised for 2005.

- Contributing to information campaigns and publishing public awareness material

A poster on threatened elasmobranchs, their problems and possible solutions has been prepared and will be printed in two trilingual versions this year. An identification sheet for the elasmobranch species of main concern has been prepared and discussion is under way with FAO to prepare, using it and FAO material, water resistant printed cards for fishermen and divers. A set of elasmobranch colour drawings has been prepared and copyright for multiple use assured to prepare future awareness material. FAO has kindly allowed a set of ink drawings of species met in the Mediterranean to be attached to sheets at the end of the printed Action Plan.

- Elaborating guidelines for reducing the presence of sensitive species in by-catch and releasing them if caught, prepared and published in the appropriate languages

The guidelines are being elaborated and are expected to be ready by summer 2005.

- Supporting the setting up of, or feeding existing, centralized databases

A database used to record catch, species, active fleet, effort related to such capture, rare catches, etc. has been identified and its possibilities studied. The Secretariat is negotiating the preparation of a more simplified module to be used only for elasmobranchs.

- Organising a symposium on Mediterranean chondrichthyan fishes

A symposium is planned for the second half 2005. It is intended to create a network of collaborators to implement the Action Plan, to discuss and consult with Mediterranean scientists the adequacy of the protocols proposed by RAC/SPA, and to work on use of the prepared database. A review on the status of Mediterranean chondrichthyans and an inventory of presently identified critical habitats, now being prepared by the Secretariat, will be discussed at the Symposium.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

Invite the Parties to:

- Work for the implementation of the measures appearing in the Action Plan within the time prescribed by the implementation schedule

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

Work for the implementation of the following measures appearing in the Action Plan within the time prescribed by the schedule:

- prepare directives for observing chondrichthyans
- encourage the strengthening of legal measures aiming at setting up systems for enforcing checks on fishing in international waters.

1.6. Implementing the Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species Listed in Annex II to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean

As part of putting the implementation schedule of the Action Plan as adopted by the Contracting Parties into effect, RAC/SPA started the following actions:

- Preparing a directory of national and international organisations and experts dealing with threatened and endangered bird species in the Mediterranean
- Organising the first Mediterranean symposium on the ecology and conservation of bird species appearing in Annex II to the SPA Protocol in collaboration with MEDMARAVIS and SEO/BirdLife International. The symposium will take place in November 2005.

In order to fill in any gaps in knowledge of threatened species in some Mediterranean countries, two field prospections were done on the coasts and wetlands of Libya and Albania, on 2-18 January 2005 and 24 January-4 February 2005 respectively.

These prospections aimed at:

1. Helping implement the measures provided for by the Action Plan for the Conservation of Species Listed in Annex II and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migrant Waterfowl (AEWA)
2. Investigating the status of the slender-billed curlew in Libya and in Albania
3. Listing wintering waterfowl in Libya and Albania
4. Recommending conservation measures for the sites visited
5. Enhancing national ornithological capacities by creating or promoting National Ornithological Centres.

These assignments were carried out in the context of two Tripartite Collaboration Memoranda between RAC/SPA, the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migrant Waterfowl (AEWA), and the Environmental General Authority (EGA) as regards Libya and the Ministry of the Environment as regards Albania.

As for implementing the other actions anticipated for 2005, particularly setting up a regional network to monitor the populations and distribution of bird species that are threatened in the Mediterranean, and the elaborating of guidelines for monitoring and presentation of management plans, RAC/SPA called on the expertise of SEO/BirdLife in the context of a Memorandum of Collaboration.

RAC/SPA helped organise 'Birds without Borders – linking people and habitats', the 11th PanAfrican Ornithological Congress, and a workshop on pink flamingoes. These took place between 20 and 26 November 2004 in Djerba, Tunisia. The Action Plan for the Conservation of Bird Species was presented at these two events.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

Take the necessary steps to complete, within the time prescribed, the activities provided for by the Action Plan's implementation schedule, particularly :

- Guaranteeing procedures for the legal protection of species
- Setting up research programmes to fill gaps in knowledge on threatened species
- Set up national action plans and implement existing ones
- Identify, map and protect areas at sea that are important for birds.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Rely more on BirdLife International and the other competent international organisations to implement the Action Plan on the Conservation of Bird Species Listed in Annex II to the SPA Protocol
- Prepare a report on progress so far made on implementing the Action Plan.

1.7. Implementing the Action Plan concerning Species Introductions and Invasive Species in the Mediterranean Sea

In the frame of this Action Plan, RAC/SPA started to implement its regional arrangements.

RAC/SPA particularly worked on the directives and phases that were necessary for elaborating a regional project on fouling, and ballast water and sediment. In this context, a RAC/SPA consultant was sent on assignments to the IMO and REMPEC to discuss arrangements currently being implemented at national level in the Mediterranean countries.

RAC/SPA is working on elaborating educational and awareness material, to be circulated as part of the promoting of the Mediterranean countries' national programmes. This educational and awareness material is intended to make the greater public and target groups, including decision-makers, aware of the risks associated with the introduction of non-indigenous marine species into the Mediterranean.

RAC/SPA will organise a regional workshop on non-indigenous species in the Mediterranean in the second half-year of 2005. This workshop will bring together experienced Mediterranean scientists who will look into the data available for the Mediterranean Sea, identify the most important taxonomic and geographical gaps and suggest a programme to fill such gaps. The workshop will also include a session to look into the various vectors of introduction of non-indigenous species and suggest possible preventive measures. It will also examine draft 'Guidelines for controlling the vectors of introduction into the Mediterranean of non-indigenous species and invasive marine species' and a 'Guide for risk analysis assessing the impacts of the introduction of non-indigenous species'. The CBD Secretariat and other relevant inter-governmental organisations will take part in this workshop.

RAC/SPA also started work on the terms of reference and directives necessary for setting up a regional mechanism to gather, compile and circulate information on invasive non-indigenous species. This mechanism should dovetail with the Clearing House Mechanism currently being developed by RAC/SPA in collaboration with the CBD Secretariat (Convention on Biological Diversity).

The said regional mechanism will consist particularly of:

- procedures to notify the sighting in the Mediterranean Sea of non-indigenous marine species
- a database on invasive marine species (taxonomy, ecology, ecosystems or species affected, means of fighting against this, specialists, etc.)
- systems to circulate information on the impacts due to the introduction of species and on preventive, management and risk assessment approaches
- a procedure for the rapid circulation of information on new introductions of species
- links of cooperation and exchange with the main relevant world or regional initiatives.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Take the necessary steps to complete the actions provided for at national level by the Action Plan in accordance with its implementation timetable.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

- Carry out the actions provided for by the Action Plan in accordance with its implementation timetable.

- Prepare the report on how far implementation of the Action Plan has progressed, to be submitted to the Eighth Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs.
- Help countries to carry out the actions provided for in the Action Plan at national level.

2. ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES IN SELECTING, ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING SPECIALLY PROTECTED AREAS

2.1. Implementing the Regional Project for the Development of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Region (MedMPA Project)

RAC/SPA's activities in the field of developing and managing protected areas have, in the period covered by the Report, been mainly directed to going ahead with implementing the Regional Project for the Development of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Region (MedMPA). Actually, the European Commission and RAC/SPA, which had originally signed a 30-month contract, had to extend this period, because of some difficulties encountered in putting the Project into effect, by six further months, to enable it to attain its goals. Thus the MedMPA Project, which had started on 1 February 2002, ended on 31 January 2005. The concerned countries were Algeria, Cyprus, Israel, Malta, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia.

RAC/SPA's partners in implementing the Project were:

- Istituto Centrale per la Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica Applicata al Mare (ICRAM), Italy
- Unidad de Biología Marina (UBM) of the Instituto Universitario del Agua y de las Ciencias Ambientales, University of Alicante, Spain
- Atelier Technique des Espaces Naturels (ATEN), France.

The main activities carried out as part of the Project were:

Elaborating management plans for marine areas

This activity concerned elaborating management plans for the following marine areas:

- The Al Hoceima National Park (Morocco)
- The protected area between Rđum Majjiesa and Ras ir-Raheb (Malta)
- The National Park of Zembra and Zembretta (Tunisia)
- The Rosh Haniqra Nature Reserve (Israel)
- The protected area between Oum Toyour and Ras El Bassit (Syria)
- The El Kala National Park (Algeria)

The teams that have worked on the different sites of the Project are usually made up of experts from the Project's partners, national consultants, the national staff of the concerned authorities, international consultants and RAC/SPA staff.

- Elaboration of the management plan for the marine area of the Al Hoceima National Park (Morocco)

To elaborate this management plan, a preliminary assignment was carried out in Morocco from 27 May to 2 June 2002, to establish contact with the concerned authorities and make the necessary preparations for field prospecting.

Two main field missions were then carried out, the first from 3-21 September 2002 and the second from 1-12 July 2003. A supplementary field mission to study monk seal habitats took place from 4-14 October 2004. This field prospecting plus a socio-economic study of the park area enabled a management plan of the marine part of the Al Hoceima National Park to be drawn up.

A provisional management plan was validated at a presentation and consultation meeting that brought together all the actors and socio-professional bodies concerned. This public meeting took place on 14 July 2004 at Al Hoceima. The final version of this management plan was elaborated on the basis of the discussions and observations gathered during the consultation process.

After this, to be able to start implementing the management plan, a study on promoting public access, information and environmental education in the Park was elaborated as well as a sketch for posters and a leaflet displaying the Park's main features.

- Elaboration of the management plan for the marine part of the protected area between Rdum Majjiesa and Ras ir-Raheb (Malta)

Elaboration of the management plan for the marine area between Rdum Majjiesa and Ras ir-Raheb was based on a field study and the recommendations made by the CAMP Malta. After a preliminary contact-making mission (16-20 June 2002), the project team proceeded directly to drafting the provisional management plan, after gathering some supplementary information and finalizing the mapping and zoning plan for the area.

This provisional management plan was discussed at a presentation and consultation meeting in Malta on 16 and 17 March 2004. This public consultation in the presence of all the concerned actors enabled the management plan to be finalized.

As an action to initiate the implementing of the management plan, RAC/SPA provided help to the Maltese authorities to undertake awareness actions such as bringing out a leaflet and a CD-ROM to promote the protected area and making a promotional video of the protected area. The project also helped to finance signposting equipment on dry land (signposting boards) and out at sea (mooring buoys).

- Elaboration of the management plan for the marine part of the National Park of Zembra and Zembretta (Tunisia)

After the classic preliminary mission to make contact with the main actors and prepare for the field work (10-15 June 2002), two marine prospecting missions took place in the National Park of Zembra and Zembretta, the first from 11-20 October 2002 and the second from 19-26 June 2003.

Based on the zoning plan elaborated after the field prospecting and the socio-economic study, a provisional management plan was elaborated. This was publicly discussed in Tunis on 30 March 2004.

As an action to initiate the implementing of the management plan, a study on promoting public access, information and environmental education in the Park was elaborated as well as a sketch for posters and a brochure displaying the Park's main features.

- Elaboration of a management plan for the marine part of the Rosh Haniqra Nature Reserve (Israel)

After the preliminary mission to Israel from 11-15 July 2003, two field missions took place in the Rosh Haniqra Nature Reserve, the first from 28 February to 8 March 2004 and the second from 16-23 October 2004.

The results of the field prospecting plus those of a socio-economic enquiry enabled a provisional management plan to be elaborated. This provisional version was discussed at a presentation and consultation meeting to lead on to a management plan for the marine part of the Rosh Haniqra Nature Reserve.

As an activity initiating the implementation of the management plan, the project also worked on a strategy for promoting public access to the reserve and on sketches of posters and brochures.

- Elaboration of a management plan for the marine part of the protected area between Oum Toyour and Ras El Bassit (Syria)

The field assignment that took place in September 2002 (9-13 September) enabled a decision to be taken to extend this activity, that had originally been planned for the Oum Toyour area only, to that of Ras El Bassit. The preliminary prospecting showed that Oum Toyour did indeed have a great avifaunistic richness, but that the side of the Ras El Bassit bay had a greater underwater bed richness. For this, another field assignment took place from 1-11 August 2003.

On the basis of these prospecting, given that the Oum Toyour nature reserve had no managing body, it was not thought necessary to elaborate a classic management plan but to set out detailed recommendations for the management of the marine areas of Oum Toyour and Ras El Bassit.

- Elaboration of a management plan for the marine part of the El Kala National Park (Algeria)

After a preliminary contact-making assignment with the El Kala National Park (6-12 October 2003), three marine prospecting missions took place (19-22 December 2003; 8-18 July 2004; 31 July-4 August 2004).

Based on these field prospecting and on a socio-economic study of the El Kala region, a management plan for the El Kala National Park marine area was elaborated in consultation with the concerned Algerian bodies and in close collaboration with Algerian national experts.

As well as the management plan, a strategy for promoting public access, information and awareness was elaborated as part of the project, as were sketches for posters, a promotional brochure and a leaflet for the Park.

Elaborating National Plans for the development of protected marine areas

This activity concerned two countries, Cyprus and Syria, and meant carrying out field missions on the coasts of Cyprus and Syria to identify marine sites of conservation interest, which would later be proposed as specially protected areas in the context of a National Plan.

- Elaboration of a National Plan to develop marine protected areas on the Cypriot coast

To make contact with the concerned national authorities and establish the necessary preparations and planning for the field missions, a preliminary mission took place from 2-7 July 2002.

After this, three field missions took place along the Cypriot coast, the first from 16 November-1 December 2002, the second from 26 October-2 November 2003 and the third from 15-19 May 2004.

These field prospections particularly concerned three sites on the Cypriot coast: Cavo Greko, Moullia and Akamas.

The results of the scientific studies plus a socio-economic study of the three concerned sites enabled a national plan to be designed in close collaboration between the project team and the Cypriot authorities to promote and develop marine protected areas on the Cypriot coast.

- Elaboration of a National Plan to develop marine protected areas on the Syrian coast

To be able to elaborate a national plan to develop marine and coastal protected areas along the Syrian coast, a preliminary mission took place in Syria from 9-13 September 2002, as well as three other field prospection missions (1-4 October 2002, 8-15 November 2002 and 1-18 August 2003).

The national plan for marine protected areas was elaborated in consultation with the various concerned bodies at national level, and with the help of a panel of Syrian national consultants.

Elaborating guidelines and technical tools

One of the Project's main aims is to produce the technical tools that are necessary in the Mediterranean and that can be used to help the managers and authorities responsible for protected areas to better conserve natural sites and species. The two

technical tools provided for by the Project were elaborated over the period covered by the present Report:

- the guidelines for setting up and developing Specially Protected Areas. These guidelines put into effect a recommendation in the new SPA Protocol. They dealt with the following aspects: (i) the role of protected areas in protecting the marine environment, (ii) involving concerned actors in planning and managing marine protected areas, (iii) the promotion, management and control of visitors to marine and coastal protected areas and (iv) monitoring in marine protected areas
- the practical guide on species requiring special attention in the Mediterranean coastal area (identification, population and habitat management, monitoring). This guide is just a set of descriptive illustrated sheets on all the species that appear in Annex II and III to the SPA Protocol.

It is expected that both tools will soon be published and widely circulated to all the concerned bodies in the Mediterranean countries.

2.2. Assistance to countries in developing SPAMIs

After a request by Algeria, RAC/SPA gave technical support by recruiting a consultant to elaborate the files presenting four Algerian sites for inclusion on the SPAMI List.

Support for Parties' requests for certain SPAMIs to be included as PSSAs

To help the concerned Parties draw up their applications for certain SPAMIs to be listed as PSSAs (particularly sensitive sea areas) with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), RAC/SPA recruited a legal consultant specialising in international environmental law to pronounce on whether the existing SPAMIs qualified for inclusion as PSSAs. This first phase, aiming at making a preliminary assessment, is being done in close contact with the IMO. It will be followed by a second phase, when the SPAMIs' application files (that have been deemed eligible during the first – current – phase) will be submitted for inclusion as PSSAs.

An information note on the process of listing SPAMIs as PSSAs, the result of this consultation, is presented as information document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.8.

Proposing new sites for inclusion on the SPAMI List

RAC/SPA received from the Algerian NFP for SPAs the presentation reports for the following sites proposed for inclusion on the SPAMI List:

- the Banc des Kabyles marine reserve
- the Cap de Garde marine reserve
- the Habibas Islands
- Rachgoun Island.

RAC/SPA also received from Italia NFP the presentation report for the Portofino site proposed for inclusion on the SPAMI List.

The presentation reports appear in document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.232/7.

2.3.Exchange and circulation of information

Reviving the MedPAN Network

RAC/SPA signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with WWF France, the body appointed by the Port-Cros National Park (the Network's Executive Secretariat) to have operational responsibility for the MedPAN Network, in reviving the MedPAN Network (Mediterranean Marine Protected Area Managers Network). In fact revival of the MedPAN Network had been recommended by the Contracting Parties in 1999, and RAC/SPA is acting as the Network's General Secretariat.

Thanks to Community funding (INTERREG III), the MedPAN Network is again functioning, starting from January 2005. This funding will enable it to function in project mode over the three coming years (until end 2007).

Elaborating the Mediterranean Marine Protected Area Managers Directory

RAC/SPA, in collaboration with WWF France, has compiled a directory of managers of marine protected areas around the Mediterranean. After the compilation phase there will be a validation phase (now ongoing). This directory will be posted online on the RAC/SPA web site; this will enable these managers to network and will encourage exchange between them.

A more elaborate version of this directory, including a descriptive sheet per protected area, is being perfected.

Elaboration of technical documents

A document on marine specially protected areas and international law was prepared in collaboration with the University of Nantes. The document synthesizes all the related information available and may be a useful tool for Parties wishing to further develop conservation schemes for sea areas. The document is being made available in both electronic and printed versions. (UNEP (DEC)/ MED WG.268/Inf.16).

A document is being prepared on the economic principles for managing protected areas, sufficiently flexible to suit all contexts in the various Mediterranean countries. This tool is intended as a guide to managers to help them optimise the economic issues that affect their protected areas.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Put the sites proposed by the National Focal Points for SPAs on the SPAMI List

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Elaborate a programme of work on developing protected areas during the period 2006-2011, aiming at helping the countries of the region to develop before 2012 a representative network of marine protected areas, in accordance with the recommendations of the Johannesburg Summit
- Collaborate with IUCN to prepare a report assessing the sites appearing on the SPAMI List.

3. COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES (CAMPS)

CAMP Algeria

To carry out this activity successfully, two teams were chosen and worked in close collaboration on the marine and coastal part of the CAMP area. Inventory and diagnosis studies were done to suggest protection scenarios. Two pilot areas were chosen to develop preliminary management plans (the Chenoua marine area and the Reghaia marine reserve). Two documentaries, 26 minutes long each were made to describe the pilot areas. The closing conference is planned for the second half of 2005.

CAMP Lebanon

After the start-up workshop, the concerned national authorities identified the NGO Amwaj el Biaa as RAC/SPA's partner for implementing the 'Marine conservation area' CAMP activity. The activity started late compared to the original plan.

The activity aimed at:

- inventorying marine biotopes using the inventorying tools elaborated in the CAMP context
- assessing the situation in the area
- suggesting management measures for two pilot sites (Damour and Naqoura).

Field prospections were carried out to gather information on the area, particularly on priority species and habitats. Awareness actions and consultation with local communities took place in order to propose the coastal areas of Damour and Naqoura as Protected Areas.

CAMP Slovenia

The activity RAC/SPA has developed as part of CAMP Slovenia aims at improving knowledge on and thus conservation of the marine and coastal biodiversity of the concerned area, by setting up a database on types of habitat. The activity is implemented in close collaboration with the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation and the Geodesy Institute of Slovenia.

Setting up a database on types of habitat will be done in two phases:

- first phase: taking aerial photos of the coastal and infralittoral part of the study area and preparing digital orthophotos
- second phase: on-the-spot verification and preparation of maps of habitat types.

CAMP Cyprus

Following the organisation of the start-up workshop, RAC/SPA will support the concerned national authorities to include biodiversity conservation issues in the Integrated Coastal Management of Cyprus as part of the project developed by PAP/RAC. The activity is expected to start in the coming months.

4. ACTIVITIES LINKED TO PROCESSING AND MANAGING BIODIVERSITY-RELATED DATA

4.1. Data collection and management

RAC/SPA's activities in this field have focused on: (I) elaborating and finalizing technical tools for inventories, and (II) gathering scientific and technical information on habitats and species in sites of conservation interest. The following activities were carried out over the period covered by the present Report.

Following the recommendations made by the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA integrated the 'Reference list of coastal habitat types (dry land and wetlands) for the choice of sites to include in national inventories of natural sites of conservation interest' within the Standard Data entry Form (SDF). The list constitutes Appendix F of the said document. The complete SDF is available by downloading from the RAC/SPA website in the French and English version at the following address: www.rac-spa.org.

In accordance with the recommendations made by the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA started computerization of the SDF. The application programme, which is being developed and tested, includes:

- a capture module: the module contains capture forms for the 8 parts of the SDF. This module validates the information before saving in the database. During the capture operation, assistance is expected (use of the handbook for interpreting marine habitats and land habitats)
- a research module that is compatible with the capture module. The results are in report format compatible with the SDF, maps and statistical tables
- a research and centralization module for information collected on a national or regional scale
- an import/export module with Emerald/Natura 2000 software and MedWet software.

The final version is expected for late 2005. This version will be circulated to the NFPs for testing and observations.

In order to help the Mediterranean countries inventory marine habitats using the SDF, RAC/SPA has translated into English the handbook for interpreting marine habitats. A computer version of the handbook is available on CD-ROM containing all the technical tools developed by RAC/SPA for the inventories.

In order to test the classification list, RAC/SPA supported three case studies in Tunisia, Turkey and Spain to compare RAC/SPA's and MedWet's classification systems. These studies showed:

- dovetailing between the two types of classification and description of habitats: the RAC/SPA classification enables the non-wetland coastal area to be covered and seems more explicit as to the descriptions of habitats and species
- the need to keep both classifications for coastal land habitats and develop interfaces of identification, exchange and comparison between the different classifications. The MedWet classification is still stricter in reference to the water parameter. Thus, according to the specific hydrological, geomorphological,

floristic and faunistic feature, one or other of the classifications would be better suited

- both types of classification can be done to complement the other, but the classification developed by RAC/SPA seems better suited to the inventories.

As a result of a request made by Greece, RAC/SPA supported a case study on *Posidonia* meadows in the Zakynthos National Marine Park, using the Standard Data Form (SDF). This action enabled (i) a map to be made of the main populations and types of bed in Laganas Bay, optimizing the Natura 2000 document, (ii) *Posidonia oceanica* meadows to be characterized by their vitality and their response to anthropization phenomena, and (iii) a monitoring system to be set up. This case study enabled three Zakynthos National Park managers to be trained.

As part of harmonising the inventory system using the SDF with the Natura 2000, Emerald and MedWet systems, RAC/SPA started a study to analyse the different inventory systems, to discover common points and differences and suggest harmonising mechanisms. A coordination meeting with the various concerned actors is planned for some time in the last three months of 2005 to finalize the procedures to be used. An information note on harmonising inventory systems is presented in document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.9.

4.2. Data circulation

Setting up a CHM

Like other specialised clearing house mechanisms (CHM) set up internationally, and in the context of implementing the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, and following on recommendations by the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA did the necessary studies to set up a Clearing House Mechanism devoted to the conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean.

This CHM will be the nodal point of a network that joins up (at the level of the various Mediterranean countries) the National Focal Points or national CHMs. RAC/SPA will act as catalyst, organiser and coordinator of the network's activities.

The resources and services offered by the said CHM will be accessible via an internet portal that should be the formal part of an electronic network devoted to marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean, joining up communities, computer resources and information services, aiming to:

- facilitate access to and exchange of information and experience and technology in the field of protecting marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean
- promote scientific and technical cooperation
- enhance the networking of actors concerned by the conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean.

A study on designing and implementing the portal of the said CHM was started. An information note on the results of this study is presented as UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.10.

Dynamic atlas

Following an agreement with the Regional Seas Programme, a Mediterranean Dynamic Atlas based on a Web Map server was started, to allow maps based on the inputs to the Geographic Information System for the Mediterranean (MedGIS) to be made. These maps can display MedGIS data shared with other data existing in a remote server, by establishing connections which make them interoperable. The functioning of the Dynamic Atlas is described in document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.11.

RAC/SPA's website

Following the recommendation made by the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA started a total overhaul of its website to adopt a new structure and new graphics. The new site includes technical facilities for updating and downgrading resources. The website's new address is www.rac-spa.org.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Further inventory natural sites of conservation interest, using the SDF and other technical tools adopted by the Contracting Parties.
- Develop national CHMs on marine and coastal biodiversity.
- Use Geographic Information Systems (GISs) as tools for the management and exchange of data on marine and coastal biodiversity.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Assist countries to inventory natural sites of conservation interest
- Harmonise the inventory system using the SDF with the Natura 2000, Emerald and MedWet systems.
- Develop the use of Geographic Information Systems for managing and circulating data on marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean.
- Improve RAC/SPA's directories and databases and integrate them within a regional information system (CHM).
- Assist countries in order to attain a good qualitative and quantitative level of information on marine and coastal biodiversity in the national Clearing House Mechanisms (CHMs).

5. ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE TRANSFER AND EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE

5.1. Information and awareness

RAC/SPA published 3 posters produced by ICRAM (Italy) on the monk seal, marine turtles, and cetaceans, in three languages (Arabic, French and English). These posters are intended for the general public, presenting species, threats, conservation status and the international legal instruments that guarantee their protection.

RAC/SPA contributed to printing the Arab version of the 'Mediterranean Sea: source of life' kit in collaboration with MEDASSET. The kit is intended to make schoolchildren of between 6 and 12 more aware.

5.2. Training and capacity-building

Training actions as part of the MedMPA Project

The lack of qualified personnel being one of the constraints southern Mediterranean countries face in the field of managing marine protected areas, it was essential that the MedMPA project (whose main aim is to improve the management of these areas) include training activities, bearing in mind each country's specific requirements. The training activities done by the project are:

- a national training workshop on developing tourism in protected areas (Morocco). This was held in Rabat from 25 to 28 June 2003 with 25 participants
- a national training workshop on marine protected area monitoring techniques (Tunisia). This took place in Tunis from 23 to 26 June 2003 with 19 participants
- a national training workshop on marine protected area management (Algeria). This took place in the El Kala National Park from 4 to 7 July 2004 with 30 participants
- a regional training seminar on 'Planning for managing marine protected areas'. This took place in the south of France and Catalonia (Spain) from 19 to 29 January 2004. The seminar included several field visits, and 16 participants from 11 Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Croatia, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Slovenia, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) were trained.

Training workshop on inventorying and mapping techniques

RAC/SPA organised a training workshop on techniques of mapping *Posidonia* meadows. The session took place in Vibo Valentia in southern Italy between 28 September and 5 October 2003. Training was possible thanks to the technical help given by the Nautilus company (since November 2003 a partner of the Action Plan for the conservation of marine vegetation). 7 participants from 4 Mediterranean countries (Albania, Cyprus, Greece and Tunisia) were given this practical training,

particularly training in modern marine bed mapping techniques (ROV, lateral sonar, multi-beam echo sounder, etc.).

In accordance with the recommendations made by the Contracting Parties, in November 2004 RAC/SPA organised, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the RAMOGE Agreement and the Portofino marine reserve (Italy) a training session on use of the SDF. This focused on the inventory tools developed in the MAP context, including use of the SDF and of the handbook for interpreting marine habitats.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Promote the training of taxonomists by inviting the concerned universities and institutions to encourage post-graduate specialisation in taxonomy and by setting up national and/or bilateral cooperation systems to urge students to specialise in taxonomy (grants, subsidies, etc.).

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Develop a training session on applying GIS to biodiversity.
- Develop a training session on mapping marine biotopes using aerial and satellite imaging.

6. STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION (SAP BIO)

Preparing to implement SAP BIO

After the SAP BIO programme was adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Catania, 2003), and according to its recommendations, a concept paper for launching SAP BIO and implementing its preparatory phase was prepared by RAC/SPA and sent to MEDU and GEF Nairobi, in March 2004.

Following a request from the Serbia and Montenegro delegation, and in accordance with a recommendation made by the Thirteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties, RAC/SPA appointed two national consultants and an international consultant to prepare the National Report and Action Plans on specific biodiversity issues, allowing it to be incorporated in the SAP BIO.

RAC/SPA helped amend the draft concept paper for the new Mediterranean GEF Project, "Mediterranean Sea Strategic Partnership, with Special Focus on the Adriatic Sea", Athens, 22-23 June 2004.

RAC/SPA took an active part in the Stocktaking Meeting for the Development of the GEF Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (Trieste, Italy, 11-12 October 2004). During this Meeting, it was said that the SAPBIO should be implemented through an additional funding from the "GEF Biodiversity".

A regional component, "Implementation of agreed actions for the protection of the environmental resources of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal areas", could be implemented in 2005 through a GEF PDF-B.

After the Trieste Meeting, RAC/SPA helped finalize the UNEP/GEF request for Pipeline Entry, "GEF Mediterranean Regional Project under Strategic Partnership", and has intervened several times in this process, preparing the two sub-components 2.4 et 2.5 which are respectively "Identify and develop specific activities for the biodiversity protection strategies to implement the SAP BIO and related NAPs", and "Define specific activities for living resources strategies to implement the SAP BIO related to the conservation and sustainable management of vulnerable or endangered fish and invertebrates", in collaboration with the WWF and FAO.

Moreover, five concept papers were prepared focusing on concrete national and regional actions and will be submitted to other funding agencies. One of these concept papers was prepared for the French GEF, according to the proposals made by representatives of the French Government at the NFP Meeting (Marseilles, June 2003) and the Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Catania, November 2003).

The documents (including the SAP BIO document) elaborated as part of the SAP BIO Project were the subject of several presentations and discussions and were circulated at the following events:

- Workshop for Mediterranean Media Professionals on Biodiversity in the Mediterranean Region, 11-13 March 2004, Nicosia, Cyprus

- Fourth World Fisheries Congress, Canada, 2-6 May 2004
- Tenth Meeting of the Subsidiary Body Responsible for Providing Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (CBD), Bangkok, 7-11 February 2005
- International Workshop on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas, Meknès, Morocco, 23-25 March 2005
- MEDITERRE 2005 – the Mediterranean Parks Fairs – 3rd edition- Brindisi 3-6 March 2005.

The SAP BIO document was translated into Spanish and Arabic and presented at the Thirteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties. The French and English versions were published.

New lines of work suggested as part of SAP BIO

Since most of the actions undertaken by RAC/SPA fall within the SAP BIO context, RAC/SPA is working on integrating some priority actions (regional and national) in its programme for the next biennium.

- Programme to work on the coralligenous in the Mediterranean
- Programme to work on the sustainable use of the elements that make up marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean

Both programmes are presented, in documents UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/10 and UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/11 respectively.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Invite the national and regional institutions to collaborate on implementing SAP BIO.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Integrate SAP BIO in its activity programme for the next biennial period.
- Suggest projects and look for funding enabling SAP BIO to be implemented.
- Elaborate a work programme on protecting the coralligenous in the Mediterranean and submit it for adoption by the next Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties, after getting the opinions of the National Focal Points for SPAs.
- Start consultation on methods of implementing the Addis Ababa principles (adopted within the context of the CBD) in the Mediterranean, to improve the Mediterranean countries' ability to implement practices of sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity.

7. OTHER ACTIVITIES

Common Criteria for the choice of species that could be included in or excluded from Annexes II and III to the SPA Protocol

Taking into account the procedures for amending the Annexes to the Barcelona Convention and the Annexes to its Protocols, as well as similar procedures within the framework of other international conventions/organisations for establishing and amending the list of endangered/threatened species, RAC/SPA elaborated common criteria for the choice of species to be included in, or left out of, Annexes II and III to the SPA Protocol. The process followed is recorded in document UNEP(DEC)/ MED WG.268/Inf.13.

The Common Criteria document (UNEP(DEC)/ MED WG.268/9) is being presented here to the Seventh Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs, to be submitted to the Contracting Parties for adoption.

Amending the Annexes implies that several years from now the lists in the Protocol will be different from the original ones, without the origin of these changes being clearly reflected in the Protocol text itself. The problem could be solved by annexing the eventually adopted criteria to the SPA Protocol in a further Annex IV.

The Criteria document has been prepared in a legal format similar to that used in the Protocol, which might allow it to become Annex IV to the Protocol, should the Parties so decide. In that case, the next Meeting of the Contracting Parties should include a Conference of Plenipotentiaries session to allow a decision to be taken on whether or not a new Annex should be added to the Protocol.

Mediterranean initiative on taxonomy

The need to develop taxonomy as a tool to back up the biodiversity conservation programme has been stressed at world level on many occasions. RAC/SPA is acting as a catalyst for implementing the Mediterranean initiative on taxonomy and to this end has started concrete actions:

Organising workshops on themes

To promote the organising of theme workshops on taxonomy and permit exchange between Mediterranean taxonomists, RAC/SPA coorganised with NAFRINET, the North African Taxonomy Network, the first national taxonomy workshop, held in Tunis on 9-10 December 2003. The main results of this workshop concerned:

- evaluating human resources (taxonomists) and assessing needs
- evaluating the state of existing collections and assessing needs.

Publishing taxonomic guides

RAC/SPA provides financial support to the Lebanese National Centre for Marine Sciences to publish a catalogue on loricata Ciliata (tintinnidae) in the Lebanese coastal waters.

Promoting post-graduate training in taxonomy

Thanks to the support of the Paris National Natural History Museum, especially the Aquatic Environments and Populations department, a girl student from the Science Faculty in Tunis will be supported by RAC/SPA to take a marine biology training course to learn the technique for identifying Ascidiens as part of her thesis.

Training activities (individual or training session) will be supported and further developed by RAC/SPA during the second semester 2005.

In the context of inventorying national needs, RAC/SPA is preparing, in collaboration with Bionet-international (Global Network for Taxonomy) a questionnaire intended to highlight Mediterranean countries' gaps and needs.

Using marine and coastal biodiversity indicators

To promote the use of marine and coastal biodiversity indicators at regional and national level, and on the basis of a bibliographical analysis, in particular of works and methods developed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), RAC/SPA has carried out case studies to validate the application of these indicators in the Mediterranean region. The results of this study appear in document UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.268/Inf.14.

Suggested recommendations

Recommendations to the Contracting Parties

- Adopt common criteria for the choice of species that could be included in, or left out of, Annexes II and III of the SPA Protocol.
- Make taxonomy one of the priority subjects when allocating grants for post-graduate study.

Recommendations to the Secretariat (RAC/SPA)

Invite the Secretariat (RAC/SPA) to:

- Prepare, on the basis of common criteria for the choice of species that could be included in, or left out of, Annexes II and III of the SPA Protocol, suggestions for amending the two lists of species annexed to the Protocol. To this end, RAC/SPA can collaborate with IUCN, particularly its Commission for Species Conservation.
- Set up two working groups to evaluate the taxonomic guides available for Mediterranean marine flora and fauna and propose a work programme to make new guides and/or update existing guides.
- Organise a Mediterranean workshop on reference collections of marine species in the Mediterranean.
- Make contact with the concerned university departments in some countries of the region to stimulate them to make taxonomy one of their priorities when choosing Masters and thesis subjects and allocating study grants.

ANNEX I

Broad outline of activities that RAC/SPA is suggesting to the Contracting Parties for the period 2006-2007 and corresponding budget
(x1000 euros)

Activity	2006	2007
Data collection and help to countries to prepare inventories of species and sites of conservation interest	50	25
Help for countries to set up and manage specially protected areas	50	25
Elaboration and circulation of data relating to biodiversity, its conservation and its sustainable use (CHM)	20	20
Mediterranean taxonomy initiative	50	15
Action Plans	124	76
Elaboration of strategies and plans in the field of conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity	50	50
Training courses on the scientific and technical aspects of conservation of the natural heritage	40	40
Amendments to the Annexes of the SPA Protocol	12	20
Work programme on the coralligenous in the Mediterranean	-	-
Work programme on the sustainable use of the constituent elements of marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean	-	-
Eighth Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs	0	65
Total (1)	396	336

(1) This total does not include a sum for the CAMPs