

DECLARATION

Ecosystem-based approaches for biodiversity protection and management

A Consensus Statement towards understanding and managing transboundary and cumulative impacts in Mediterranean Ecosystems

Brussels, 5 December 2018

Representatives of European and Mediterranean institutions active in biodiversity protection and management science, practice and policy, meeting on 4 and 5 December 2018 on the occasion of the event “Ecosystem-based approaches: benefits for people and nature” and the public hearing with Members of the European Parliament on “Mediterranean Ecosystems in Danger: Enhancing EU policy response”, supported by the SEARICA group in Brussels, acknowledged the following:

- The Mediterranean region is globally known for its rich coastal and marine biodiversity and fosters important and unique habitats and species, many of which are endemic or globally endangered.
- Coastal and marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean is heavily threatened by habitat degradation and loss as a result of unsustainable human activities including the overexploitation of natural resources. This is exacerbated by increasing pollution, unsustainable fisheries and extreme climatic phenomena, such as increases in temperature and sea level rise.
- Ensuring the Good Environmental Status of Marine Biodiversity in the Mediterranean is currently an EU priority in European waters. The UN Regional Sea Convention for the Mediterranean, through its Action Plan, is key to supplementing EU initiatives as it mobilises non-EU countries to use global tools and targets to manage and conserve biodiversity. Using both is vital to maintaining functional natural ecosystems across borders and ensuring continuity in the provision of ecosystem services on which local livelihoods and local economies in the Mediterranean depend.
- Existing Protected Areas (PAs) are potentially a powerful tool for effective biodiversity conservation and natural resource management if properly designed, managed, funded and enforced.

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- The current ecological network of Mediterranean coastal and marine protected areas as it stands needs to be reinforced through technical and financial instruments as well as enhanced human cooperation. This would ensure the adequate maintenance of marine ecosystem functions and biodiversity, given the insufficient protection, management and representativity of habitats and species and limited long-term monitoring plans for existing protected areas.
- Mechanisms to ensure and enhance the socio-ecological resilience of Mediterranean coasts, seas and communities are necessary to manage impacts beyond Protected Areas or national boundaries. Such mechanisms must be linked to participatory public consultation and integrated decision-making where key actors, namely local communities, regional and national authorities, and civil society, have ownership of natural resources and play a major role in the protection and co-management of their biodiversity and ecosystems.
- Effective clearing mechanisms are required to assign relevance, build synergies, integrate methodologies, and channel the results of scientific research to practitioners and policy-makers working on biodiversity protection.
- The coordinated compilation of data generated through ongoing scientific efforts, and effective collaboration with existing data aggregation initiatives should be encouraged and pursued.

And decided to adopt a holistic, integrated, ecosystem-based and cross-cutting approach for the conservation and management of the coastal and marine environment and to support collaborative mechanisms, tools and actions according to the following:

1. The current state of biodiversity is dire and human use of natural resources is not sustainable in the Mediterranean region.
2. New marine protected areas (MPAs) should be designated in underrepresented habitats and the integrity and management of existing ones should be strengthened and ensured using principles of ecological network design and best practices management sharing.
3. Local community co-management is a powerful tool for participatory decision-making that needs to be empowered for enhanced decentralised governance of biodiversity and natural resources.
4. Multiple pressures on the Mediterranean Sea from different sectors yield cumulative impacts that undermine biodiversity and ecosystem integrity, structure, and function, thus impeding their sustainability and resilience beyond geopolitical borders, and even reaching into protected areas.
5. Working beyond protected areas and national boundaries is necessary to address transboundary mobile species conservation and impacts such as pollution, fishing, and climate change and requires the use of ecoregional planning approaches and units that account for multiple hierarchical scales to reach a Good Environmental Status.
6. Using spatial units of management and protection with distinct ecological functions where critical processes such as ecological connections are strongest require better policies and tools reflecting the transboundary nature of sea life for an effective management and to ensure the persistence of natural resources and ecosystem services.

7. A regionally accepted ecoregional planning unit and platform designed upon geopolitical and scientific consensus is essential. Ecoregional planning and management will encompass multiple country commitments across the Mediterranean, together with macro-regional strategies.
8. Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas, transboundary jurisdictions developed under the Convention of Biological Diversity and the Mediterranean Action Plan and that have the consensus of Contracting Parties, are an underutilised platform that can be used as key planning approach for ecosystem-based management across EU and non-EU countries in the Mediterranean. Understanding and managing these units and their connectivity is key for proper Ecosystem Functioning of cross-sectoral and integrative mechanisms in order to preserve Mediterranean natural resources through the involvement of society at large.

Written in Brussels, 5 December 2018, by the Interreg Med PANACeA partnership

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