

Joint Regional Input of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) and UN Environment/MAP-Barcelona Convention Secretariats into the Concept Paper of the Secretary-General of the Conference for the Partnership Dialogues theme 2 and 4 building on their joint regional efforts to implement SDG14

a) Status and trends

The Mediterranean Sea is home to a large diversity of ecosystems and species subject to considerable pressures. Development of large and mega-cities is increasing pressures from the rising population levels as well as the accumulation of economic activities in coastal zones, including tourism, with the region accounting for up to 30 per cent of global tourist arrivals. Mediterranean fish, shellfish and agricultural products, as well as the related so called “Mediterranean diet” have a long standing global reputation, but depend on the sustainable use of rural landscapes, terrestrial and marine resources, as well as the maintenance of decent working conditions. Global shipping routes through the Mediterranean make the density of maritime traffic exceptional for a semi-closed sea, while the recent surge of interest in the exploitation of hydrocarbons and minerals under the Mediterranean seabed poses also increased risks for the environment.

Recent assessments show Mediterranean habitats, ecosystems and living resources to be far from good environmental status, as a result of a combination of the inherent characteristics of the region and the human pressures described above. There is an increasing recognition of the existing cumulative threats and the need to address them in a coordinated manner, in order to preserve the ecosystems while maintaining the livelihoods and cultural heritage of coastal communities.

b) Challenges and opportunities

The health of marine and coastal ecosystems is a prerequisite for sustainable fisheries, while sustainable fisheries and sustainable management of fish stocks can contribute to good environmental status of the oceans and seas. As such, cooperation between environmental and fisheries experts, bodies, organizations is key to achieve SDG14.

In line with the ecosystem approach, sub-regional and regional cooperation is an absolute necessity for sustainable management of coastal and marine ecosystems, including fisheries. Lack of cooperation however between respective Regional Sea Bodies/Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and lack of cooperation between respective national fisheries and environmental governmental bodies and research institutions creates a key challenge of coordination and effective implementation of the relevant SDGs targets.

The Mediterranean Sea is arguably the only marine area of the world where the respective Regional Sea Convention (UN Environment/MAP-Barcelona Convention) and Regional Fisheries Management Organization (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean of the FAO, GFCM) have both adopted their own strategy to accelerate progress towards the implementation of SDG 14. This presents an unparalleled opportunity to promote synergies and address together existing challenges that hamper the sustainable conservation and development of the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, joint action addressing marine environment and fisheries could pave the way for broader and more integrated cooperation, encompassing other uses of the Mediterranean Sea, such as shipping, via the involvement of other competent organizations.

c) Existing partnerships

The Mediterranean leads the way on addressing existing challenges to its marine environment and fisheries. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2012 between the GFCM and UN Environment/MAP is the first agreement that formalizes cooperation between a UN Environment Regional Sea Convention and an FAO Regional

Fisheries Management Organization. This MoU stemmed from years of bilateral consultations on common areas of work and responded to the request by Contracting Parties of both organizations for enhanced coordination.

The MoU between UN Environment/MAP-Barcelona Convention and GFCM addresses the following five areas of cooperation:

- 1) Promotion of ecosystem-based approaches for the conservation of marine and coastal environment and ecosystems, and the sustainable use of marine living and other natural resources;
- 2) Mitigation of the impact of fisheries and aquaculture on the marine habitats and species by the use of best available techniques in fisheries and the development of sustainable aquaculture;
- 3) Identification, protection and management of marine areas of particular importance in the Mediterranean (hot spots of biodiversity, areas with sensitive habitats, essential fish habitats, areas of importance for fisheries and/or for the conservation of endangered species, coastal wetlands);
- 4) Integrated maritime policy with a special emphasis on marine and coastal spatial planning, and integrated coastal zone management, and other integrated zoning approaches, with a view to mitigate cumulative risks due to reduced access and availability of space affected by multiple and increasing conflictive uses;
- 5) Legal, institutional and policy related cooperation.

This is complemented by a technical annex that zeroes in on programmatic activities that are to be undertaken under the five areas of cooperation, including but not limited to the following ones:

- Contribute to the formulation/implementation of a regional framework strategy based on the ecosystem approach and on agreed indicators and reference points (ecological, biological, etc.) to monitor the status of the marine environment and coastal ecosystems and that of marine living natural resources;
- Cooperate in undertaking assessments of the state of marine environment and ecosystems and that of marine living resources, including socio economic aspects relating to the impact of the exploitation of fisheries on marine environment and ecosystems, the impact of the establishment of marine protected areas on marine living resources, and the impact of coastal and marine aquaculture;
- Collaborate in formulation/development and implementation of key regional strategies to integrate the environment in social and economic development especially in relation to fisheries and aquaculture.
- Collaborate in the elaboration, including extra-budgetary fundraising, of a joint regional project on the evaluation and mitigation of by-catch of endangered and non-target species and of the impact of fishing gears on marine habitats;
- Consider initiatives to develop the concept of marine spatial planning in a manner that takes into account fisheries and aquaculture activities, activities for the preservation of marine habitats and associated species, and possible conflicts between these activities and other uses of the sea (e.g. shipping, marine renewable energies, etc.);
- Exchange data and information on deep sea habitats in order to further the knowledge of these habitats, their biodiversity and their living resources for the purpose of better management;
- Collaborate in initiatives that raise awareness and mitigate major impacts such as those related to reduce amount of fishing gear as litter, etc;
- Enhance collaboration with other relevant organizations as appropriate, including those whereby other MoUs have been signed, to create a common regional database of sites of particular importance for biodiversity conservation and for fisheries management, complementary and coherent to the MAP database on pollution and biodiversity monitoring;
- With regard respectively to the Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and the Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs) in particular those located partially or wholly on the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), the Parties will collaborate to harmonize existing respective criteria to identify those areas, for the cases where their location may be coincident and in the selection of mechanisms needed for their establishment;
- The Parties will cooperate to promote respective Parties adoption of eventual Management Schemes

- developed within SPAMIs and FRAs to ensure that measures are consistent with the objectives pursued and respectful with the mandates of both organisations;
- Cooperate in undertaking assessments of the state of coastal lagoons and other relevant coastal wetlands to be used for the formulation and dissemination of sustainable management measures and sustainable use of its living resources;
 - Study the impacts of climate change on the marine environment and ecosystems and their marine living resources;
 - Contribute to the formulation and adoption of appropriate fisheries and aquaculture adaptation and mitigation measures to climate change in relation to the environment, and including enhancing knowledge and communication;
 - Strengthening scientific advice on issues of common interest, including the negative effects of pollution of the marine environment and ecosystems on marine living resources and ways to better address cumulative impacts;
 - Explore new fields of investigation applied to the conservation of marine environment and marine ecosystems and the sustainable use of marine living resources to promote an integrated approach to environmental and fisheries related issues;
 - Collaborate in initiatives related to the implementation and monitoring of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) approach and marine spatial planning as well as other zoning approaches;
 - Consult regularly on policy issues of common interest to identify synergies;
 - Promote exchanges of information and data as appropriate, and share the results of this cooperation through a website;
 - Coordinate positions within international fora which involve both Parties.

The implementation of the MoU is regularly reported to the respective meetings of the governing bodies of both organizations, usually by means of a document jointly prepared by the Secretariats that compile a matrix to inform on the progress made in the execution of the activities above. The matrix also contains relevant indicators and benchmarks, such as joint meetings, documents and initiatives undertaken. The strong cooperation at the regional level between GFCM and UN Environment/MAP has already resulted in tangible results, such as:

- A coordinated regional integrated monitoring and assessment programme, based on the ecosystem approach and on common indicators to monitor the status of the marine and coastal environment in the context of the UN Environment/MAP Ecosystem Approach Process (with GFCM leading work on fisheries related common indicators);
- Harmonization of existing respective criteria to identify Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs), in particular those located partially or wholly in areas beyond national jurisdiction (Res. GFCM/37/2013/1 “on area based management of fisheries, including through the establishment of FRAs and coordination with the UN Environment/MAP initiatives on the establishment of SPAMIs”);
- Elaboration of two parallel mid-term strategies for the implementation of SDG 14 (i.e. the UN Environment/MAP Mid-Term Strategy and the GFCM Mid-term strategy (2017–2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries);
- Coordination in joint projects on issues such as marine litter;
- Side events and presentations in relevant international fora on oceans.

With regards in particular to the common goals and aims of the respective Mid-Term Strategies, which both aim to (i) implement the 2030 Agenda through their work; (ii) strengthen implementation of existing regional legal frameworks key for the implementation of SDG14; (iii) strengthen science-policy cooperation and understanding of citizens on marine and coastal issues; (iv) address specific key regional challenges, such as marine litter; (v) strengthen partnership building and coordination on regional level for the implementation of SDG14.

In addition, both GFCM and UN Environment/MAP contributed (with the lead of the latter) to the development of the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy 2016-2025, which follows the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) aiming for their implementation at regional level. Unlike the above mid-term strategies, this addresses SDGs as a whole and, as such, it is the first regional implementation attempt of the 2030 Agenda. Interestingly, it provides a strategic policy framework, for securing a sustainable future for the Mediterranean region consistent with the UN agenda. Built upon a broad consultation process, it strives to harmonize the interactions between socio-economic and environmental goals and adapt international commitments to regional conditions. It also guides national strategies for sustainable development, and stimulates regional cooperation between stakeholders in the implementation of sustainable development. As highlighted in its subtitle (Investing in environmental sustainability to achieve social and economic development), the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy is underpinned by the resolve that investment in the environment is the best way to secure long-term sustainable job creation and socio-economic development.

Furthermore, GFCM takes active part in the Science-Policy Interface Platform of UN Environment/MAP, which aims to strengthen interaction between policy makers and scientists in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem approach in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, UN Environment/MAP takes active part in the Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries of GFCM, which is mandated to provide science-based advice on the exploitation of fisheries and the preservation of the marine ecosystems where they are found.

d) Possible areas for new partnerships

The strengthening of the existing partnerships, building on existing cooperation platforms, such as on the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, on the Science-Policy Interface Platform, on the Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter could be envisioned, with a specific focus on SDG14 targets.

In the context of implementing the Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean of UN Environment/MAP-Barcelona Convention, a Regional Cooperation Platform on Marine Litter in the Mediterranean was established. It aimed to ensure contribution of all regional partners and actors, to provide coordinated support and guidance to the implementation of the Regional Plan and to act as an informal forum for consultation, exchange of good practices, and solutions seeking with all relevant stakeholders present (key regional organizations, civil society, business).

Informal Regional Cooperation Platforms, building on this example, which includes all stakeholders next to key regional players, could be further envisioned, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. As such, a roundtable on “Sustainable Fisheries”, with the participation of ICCAT, ACCOBAMS, IfIs (e.g. the World Bank), civil society, scientists and business community, next to GFCM and UN Environment/MAP could be foreseen, in order to define joint priorities and actions, work together in a coordinated way, building on existing regional legislative basis of GFCM and UN Environment/MAP.

Furthermore, noting that the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025 is the regional implementation of Agenda 2030 and that the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development is the key structure for its implementation, further revitalization and strategic use of this body could be envisioned for stronger partnership building around the specific regional needs of SDG14 targets.

In the short term though, possible areas for partnership should focus on the coordinated implementation of the two Mid-Term Strategies of UN Environment /MAP and GFCM. This would arguably be an asset in terms of lessons learnt and dissemination through global platform within the UN System. Among others, interest has been already expressed towards the organization of a Regional Sustainable Ocean Initiative Dialogue for the Mediterranean Sea, under the auspices of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which would stem from the first Global Sustainable Ocean Initiative Dialogue organized in Seoul on September 2016. Having regard to the importance for a regional approach to the implementation of SDG 14, partnership between GFCM and UN Environment/MAP should be enhanced.

e) Guiding questions for the dialogue

in addition to the respective Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations that are the key regional, national and local players, whose cooperation is necessary to achieve SDG14?

What are the best ways to develop cooperative strategies to ensure the sustainability of blue growth?

How can businesses be more involved and, stakeholder cooperation in general be increased to design together innovative techniques to achieve SDG14 specific targets?

How can coastal citizens and consumers be more engaged to ensure that market choices help support the transition towards more sustainable models of fishing?

How can area based management measures (such as MPAs, SPAMIs, FRAs, PPSAs)¹ be more coordinated, with the common aim of implementing SDG14?

¹ Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and Fisheries Restricted Areas (FRAs), Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)