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In charge of the activity at INFO/RAC

Lorenza Babbini, Director

Arthur Pasquale, Deputy Director

Report prepared by:

Lorenza Babbini, Francesca Catini, Alessandra Casali, Carlo Cipolloni, Cristian Di Stefano, Giordano Giorgi, Alessandro Lotti, Céline Ndong, Arthur Pasquale, Andrea Tosti

Activities carried out in the biennium 2020-2021

1. The INFO/RAC Centre is responsible for the development of the Mediterranean environmental information system and for supporting the Mediterranean Action Plan in the areas of data collection and management, data policy and data sharing, communication and advocacy, education and training, dissemination and outreach, partnership and networking, countries assistance and training, knowledge management and digital transformation.
2. The mission has been achieved ensuring adequate information and communication services and infrastructural technologies to support the Contracting Parties in the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, in order to improve the management of environmental information and the communication and knowledge dissemination capabilities of the MAP Barcelona Convention System.
3. The 2020-2021 Programme of Work has been implemented in collaboration with the Coordinating Unit, the MAP Components and in contact with other regional organizations, and has contributed to achieve the MTS 2016-2022 Strategic Outcomes.
4. The activities of INFO/RAC, implemented through two-year work plans, have included the design and implementation of a common environmental and spatial data infrastructure and network services for information sharing among the Mediterranean coastal states. INFO/RAC also provides continuous support to the Contracting Parties in carrying out coordinated activities at national and regional levels.
5. In order to ensure the availability of coherent and scientifically sound environmental knowledge, INFO-RAC maintained a close collaboration with other key environmental institutions and international bodies (i.e. EEA, GFCM, ACCOBAMS, UNEP etc.) leading the management of environmental data and information in order to foster an ever wider sharing of environmental information.
6. INFO-RAC played a central role in the promotion of environmental issues, in raising awareness among Mediterranean citizens and in developing a general awareness of the role of UNEP/MAP, the Barcelona Convention and its environmental policies aimed at sustainable development.
7. The work programme for the two-year period 2020-2021 was almost entirely carried out despite the pandemic contingency through an appropriate and effective reshaping of working methods. Nevertheless travel restrictions have required the strengthening of remote meeting modalities and have limited the possibility of direct interaction with the Contracting Countries of the Barcelona Convention.
8. During the last semester the activities foreseen by the Programme of Work 2020-2021 will be accomplished focusing on the main event of the year, the 22nd Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP 22) to be held in December 2021 in Turkey.

The Mediterranean Information System and its components

9. The **InfoMAP Platform**, constitutes the Mediterranean information system, designed to provide and share data, information and knowledge services for the benefit of the components of the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Contracting Parties. It is also able to support the drafting of the main reports on the environmental status of the Mediterranean Sea such as the State of Environment and Development (SoED) and the Quality Status Report (QSR).

10. During the current two-year period, the InfoMAP Platform has been strengthened by facilitating the maximum integration of its modules and structuring the Data Centre as the core of the data flows managed by INFO/RAC. The **Data Centre** is instrumental to improving the harmonisation and standardisation of data flow management, contributing to the detailed definition of the required data up to the delivery of the final information products such as reports or environmental indicators.

11. The upgrade of the platform concerned access to the reporting system, the harmonisation of the data structure and models, the creation of a common catalogue of resources, the integration of data with the interoperability layer and the creation of a common platform for data visualization and analysis.

12. Info Map and Data Centre have been developed and managed by INFO/RAC as a private environment set up and developed on-demand, such as a form of “private” cloud with physical servers on-premise on a virtualized environment, moving towards a hybrid cloud in next biennium

13. **Information Technology Security** of InfoMAP has been ensured by using a set of cybersecurity strategies that prevent unauthorized access to InfoMAP assets such as servers, networks, and data. It maintains the integrity and confidentiality of sensitive information, blocking the access of hackers due to new infrastructure protections. Measures taken to keep data secure include: making regular backups of files (backup copies stored in another building than primary data centre site) with protection against viruses and malware; use of long secure passwords so that access to any data is restricted; safe storage of data into the private/hybrid Cloud; only authorized staff allowed into certain computer areas with controlled entry by ID cards or magnetic swipe cards; backup data encryption techniques to code data in case data is copied or intercepted; restricted access to the systems only for defined system administrators and logged access.

14. **Network security** is used to prevent unauthorized or malicious users from getting inside InfoMAP Information Technology network. Internet security, involves the protection of information that is sent and received in browsers, as well as network security involving web-based applications. These protections are designed to monitor incoming internet traffic for malware as well as unwanted traffic. This protection may come in the form of both firewalls and Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS)/Intrusion Prevention Systems (IPS). It is important to analyze that applications, data, and identities that are moving to the cloud, means that users are connecting directly to the Internet and are not protected by the traditional security stack. The new Cloud security policies will help to secure the usage of software-as-a-service (SaaS) applications and the management of infrastructure as a service (IaaS).

15. **The Barcelona Convention Reporting System (BCRS)**, has been further updated to allow Contracting Parties to report under Article 26 of the Barcelona Convention and the articles of the Protocols. The main objective of the system is to collect, store, manage and process compliance reporting data (textual and numerical) related to the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. The Secretariat has legal responsibility for BCRS, while INFO/RAC is responsible for its operation and development. A continuous Help Desk activity was ensured to support the countries in the different phases of reporting for the seven mandatory protocols.

16. The **MED POL Info System**, as agreed with the MAP Coordination Unit (CU), was integrated into the IMAP Info System. The migration process of the database into IMAP Info System was successfully completed. The migration involved the information standards of IMAP Common indicators 13-14 (eutrophication) and 17 (contaminants) and the MEDPOL monitoring data for nutrients and contaminants (sediment and biota) acquired from INFO/RAC during 2019. The monitoring data have been received from Mediterranean countries over the last 15 years from 2005 to 2015-2017 and include some MED POL Info System datasets dating back to the early 1990s, in compliance with the LBS - Land Based Sources protocol of the Barcelona Convention. The entire dataset is now available on the IMAP system in a standardised format and stored on an infrastructure able to guarantee its integrity and preservation over time.

17. The **National Budget Baseline (NBB)**, an inventory of pollutant emissions from all substantial land sources of the Contracting Parties updated on an annual basis and complying with Art. 5 of the Land Based Sources (LBS) Protocol, managed by INFO/RAC has been updated to allow monitoring of the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) to guide the formulation, adoption and implementation of the LBS National Action Plans (NAPs).

18. The **IMAP Info System** is the main tool for the implementation of the EcAp Roadmap and allows the Barcelona Convention countries to implement the IMAP programme for the monitoring of Mediterranean waters and coasts in close integration with the European Marine Strategy.

19. The information standards related to the **11 Common Indicators** selected for the pilot phase of the IMAP Info System, have been constantly updated taking into account the criticalities found by the countries during the testing phase of the system. The system has been made fully available to support the **official IMAP call** for the collection of monitoring data launched in June 2020 in view of the preparation of the next Quality Status Report 2023 of the Mediterranean Sea that should be based essentially on monitoring data acquired according to the IMAP protocols.

20. The 11 Common Indicators selected referring to the clusters of biodiversity and fisheries, coast and hydrography, pollution and marine litter have been reviewed including: structural changes for new fields insertion, resolution of problems related to the conformity check for modules M2, Q1 and I1; revision of descriptions in Data Dictionaries (DDs); update of lists of values in modules M1, M3, Q1, B1, B2, B3, E1 and I1, update of the litter list (module M1) to adapt to factsheet wg.473/08, upload of updated information standards, prefilled information standards prepared for M1, M2, M3 and P1 modules, summary table of the information standards uploaded on IMAP Info System. The GIS standards for the Common Indicators related to hydrographic alterations induced by coastal and off-shore infrastructures and to the level of coastal artificialisation have also been updated. This last element is specific to the EcAp programme of the Barcelona Convention with respect to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

21. The definition of the information standards for the remaining Common Indicators has been started, in order to complete the data flows on marine mammals, marine reptiles, marine avifauna, effects of contaminants on marine biota and contaminants on fishery products. Finally, discussions are underway with the GFCM for the acquisition of fisheries data in the Mediterranean Sea. In particular, a draft version of **Data Standards & Data Dictionaries for IMAP Common Indicators 18 & 20** (biomarkers and contaminants in seafood) are in development and will be reviewed by the Online-Working Group (OWG) on Pollution. Moreover **Data Standards & Data Dictionaries for IMAP Common Indicators 3-4-5** including marine mammals, reptiles and birds have been finalized and submitted to the next CORMON on Biodiversity (10-11 June 2021) and to the Online-Working Group (OWG) on Biodiversity (w512/inf6, w512/inf7, w512/inf8). All the DSs and DDs will be submitted to the EcAp Coordination Group Meeting in September 2021.

22. Particular attention has been paid to the help desk to support the processing and loading of monitoring data by the Contracting Countries. **Bilateral Training/Assistance Meetings** have been organized with the network of IMAP users (until now Montenegro, Malta, Slovenia and Croatia), and other are planned, to provide a clear picture of the IMAP Pilot Info System and its functionalities, support for the correct understanding of Data Standards and how to fill in them, an overall guide about the consultation of Data Dictionaries, information about the available supporting tools (utility check and user guide), support to provide a clear state of art of the monitoring data availability in the country, support to make compliant the filled in Data Standards, information in order to complete the list of IMAP users still pending in some countries.

23. In the framework of integration between IMAP process and EU Marine Framework Strategy Directive, INFO/RAC has participated to the **MED REGION Project** aimed to improve data collection to fill the gaps in monitoring data. INFO/RAC have supported sharing information and methods, monitoring

programmes and subprograms among MSs, as well as assessment of the comparability of data in the Mediterranean region; development of a management mechanism including on line update; access and interoperability of the data from monitoring programmes used for the assessments in accordance with MSFD Art. 19 and the INSPIRE Directive requirements; in depth analysis of monitoring programmes, increasing the efficiency of the assessments, standardization and harmonization among the MSs, as well as making more coherent and comparable GES and thresholds. An analysis on different kind of data has been performed in order to avoid duplications and vice versa creating a good comparability of data type, possible development of mechanism and/or methodology to share environmental data/information among EU and non-EU countries.

Communication, Education, Dissemination and Outreach

24. In line with INFO/RAC's mandate, considerable work has been done on communication, education and dissemination to enhance the visibility of UNEP/MAP and spread sustainability awareness within the framework of the MAP Communication Strategy 2018-2023 and the MAP Operational Communication Strategy 2020-2021, both designed and developed by INFO/RAC, to support the MAP Mid Term Strategy (MTS) 2016-2022 and, through communication and advocacy, the proper knowledge of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

25. The implementation of the strategy, in line with UNEP's identity guidelines, has emphasized the "**Communicating as ONE**" approach to integrate the different activities of the MAP System and promote their dissemination and presentation in a coherent manner.

26. In the current two-year period, under travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, particular impetus was given to the **Digital Campaigns**. The campaigns included the development of specific initiatives aimed at the Mediterranean region, including dedicated web pages, key messages, articles on featured topics, online video libraries, storymaps and infographics, extensive networking with Mediterranean partners and countries, photo competitions, quizzes for children, vademecum on sustainable behaviours, online thematic dictionaries, hashtags, twitter cards and video messages. Among others, the following digital campaigns were designed and organized:

- a. A digital media campaign for **UN Oceans Day in the Mediterranean** to celebrate the oceans and make to appreciate what they give us (<http://www.info-rac.org/worldoceansday/index.html>). In the context of the events organized all around the world on 8th June, designated by the United Nations since 2008 as "World Oceans Day", the digital campaign focused on the Mediterranean region and was marked by the following initiatives: "*Oceans Tips from Mediterranean Experts*" an advice from experts, raising global awareness of the benefits deriving from the ocean and individual and collective duty to use its resources sustainably; messages from the UNEP / MAP Coordinator as well as RACs directors aimed at safeguarding the oceans and our Mediterranean sea; "*Oceans initiative for Mediterranean children*", a contest for children aged 6 to 10 living in the Mediterranean region aimed to collect drawings and comics about the protection of the oceans; a video library collecting thematic videos on Mediterranean Sea and on Oceans and an access to a map with an overview of related events in the Mediterranean region.
- b. A digital media campaign for **Marking the first edition of the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies in the Mediterranean** (<http://www.info-rac.org/en/events/international-day-of-clean-air-for-blue-skies>). Encouraged by the increasing interest of the international community in clean air, and emphasizing the need to make further efforts to improve air quality, including reducing air pollution, to protect human health, the United Nations General Assembly decided that 7

September would be designated as the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies, to be observed starting in 2020. In this special day, UNEP/MAP has focused the attention on raising awareness on the Mediterranean Sea peculiarities through the story map **Enhancing air quality in the Mediterranean coasts** “Introducing the Roadmap for a Proposal for the Possible Designation of the Mediterranean Sea, as a whole, as an Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides Pursuant to MARPOL Annex VI, within the Framework of the Barcelona Convention” developed by INFO/RAC in close cooperation with REMPEC and MAP CU in a special feature web page explaining the rationale, the benefits and the timeline. On this occasion, an op-ed signed by the UNEP/MAP Coordinator was published in Euractiv on 24 August 2020.

- c. A digital media campaign for the celebration of **Mediterranean Coast Day** (25 September) with the slogan “*The Mediterranean needs you. If you put a seashell to your ear, you will hear it calling*” and the hashtag “#Act4Med”. A promoting web page (www.info-rac.org/coastday) was developed by INFO/RAC in close cooperation with PAP/RAC with the support of CU and the MAP Communication Task Force. The page offers information on the state of the Med coasts and on what the public can do to help reduce the pressures being exerted on them. It also features MAP statements and other information and communication assets aimed at the public. The campaign started on 7 September with a focus on air quality in the coastal region through the celebration of the first edition of International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies. In particular, on the featured page is promoted the story map relating to air quality at the Mediterranean coasts created for the international air day. Further elements included into the web-page are: messages from UNEP / MAP Coordinator, PAP / RAC Director and a video message from the 2020 Ambassador for the Coast aimed at safeguarding and protecting the Mediterranean coasts; a video library collecting thematic videos related to the coast (ICZM, CAMP projects, blue economy, SWITCHMED project, marine biodiversity, climate change, etc.); a handbook to become a responsible citizen of the coast as well as a series of info graphics to reduce human footprint; a coastal dictionary that contains the main terms used in various themes; a presentation of the "SeaWatcher" application for coastal protection; the promotion of "The Istanbul Environment Friendly City award for Mediterranean Coastal Cities" initiative; a quiz and video cartoon for children, information about local events held in various cities of the Mediterranean basin in particular in Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Italy, Montenegro, Morocco, and Slovenia.
- d. A digital media campaign for the **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment on the occasion of International Women's Day (IWD)**, The theme selected for the 2021 edition is “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world”. This theme celebrates the great efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender equality is the overarching and long-term goal, while gender mainstreaming is a set of specific, strategic approaches as well as technical and institutional processes adopted to achieve that goal. Gender is woven into the UNEP/MAP mandate. Indeed, UNEP/MAP and the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) have made clear commitments to the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment. There is a recognition of women's key role in promoting a healthy, clean, sustainable and climate resilient Mediterranean Sea and Coast, contributing to sustainable livelihoods and enhancing benefits for all, men and women, boys and girls. “**Sheroes of sustainability in the Mediterranean**” stories, a special feature developed by the MAP Communication Task Force, SPA/RAC in primis, to highlight the accomplishments of some of the **everyday female heroes** (among many) who embody the principles enshrined in the Barcelona Convention

through their work, have been the focus of the last issue of MEDNews, the MAP newsletter edited by INFO/RAC.

- e. A digital media campaign for the **UN International Day for Biological Diversity**, (<http://www.info-rac.org/biodiversityday>), as extended piece on the enforcement of biodiversity conservation focusing on “**A gender-based approach to biodiversity management in the Mediterranean**” It includes a feature on the MedProgramme’s approach to the gender and biodiversity nexus and as a MAP system contribution to the CBD global campaign titled “*We’re part of the solution*”. The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system is indeed “part of the solution” and constitutes the strategic instrument to deliver solutions in the Mediterranean. The Convention on Biological Diversity addresses gender issues by identifying and assessing women and men’s differentiated roles vis-a-vis biodiversity, including different responsibilities, priorities, decision-making power, and knowledge, all of which affect how individuals use and manage biological resources. It is important to recognize that understanding women and men’s influence on natural resources and differences in capacity, skills and knowledge is key to devising sustainable and inclusive solutions to biodiversity management challenges.
- f. A digital media campaign supporting Plan Bleu for launch and dissemination of the MAP’s flagship publication, the **State of Environment and Development Report (SoED)** and the related communication and media kit for the release of the full set of SoED publications (namely the Full report, the Summary for decision-makers and Key messages). It was developed a system-wide communication plan identifying the main audience groups and optimal ways of engaging them, either through the UNEP/MAP system’s own communication channels or by harnessing the dissemination capabilities of the media and other multipliers. The SoED campaign generated significant media coverage, including a mention at the daily briefing of the UN Secretary-General Spokesperson in NY. Op-Eds by the Coordinator were also published in prominent newspapers.
- g. Digital media dissemination has been provided for the launch of many further events (i.e Earth Hour, Raise Your Voice For Nature, etc.) publications, initiatives, meetings, trainings, guides, platforms and other activities of the MAP Barcelona Convention System.

27. As part of the production and dissemination of news and communication materials INFO/RAC produced the quarterly online newsletter **MEDNEWS** that updates on the progress of MAP, ongoing initiatives and projects and provides an overview of actions aimed at safeguarding the Mediterranean. Each edition of the newsletter is opened by an editorial by the MAP Coordinator and is structured in 3 sections: **MAP progress** updating about institutional progress in implementation of Barcelona Convention and its protocols, containing articles on project and non-project activities of the MAP Barcelona Convention System); **Droplets** containing articles related to events / initiatives in which MAP community members and RACs have been involved and news coming from the Mediterranean basin; **Focus on** containing articles dedicated to a emerging topics or central initiative as COP21, bilateral Agreement between UNEP/MAP and IMELS Agreement, SoED (State of Environment and Development Report), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment on the occasion of International Women’s Day (IWD).

28. On the **Social Media** networking front, INFO/RAC has strengthened MAP's presence on Twitter by adopting new communication tools such as **twitter cards**. Particular attention was given to the dissemination of information on the COVID 19 pandemic in the context of the necessary transition towards a more sustainable and resilient future in the "post-COVID Med Region" (Green Renaissance). Collective MAP Communication Task Force approach to social media, relies on a consistent use of MAP hashtags (especially #BarcelonaConvention) in relevant posts on the various social media platforms (mainly Twitter but also on Facebook and LinkedIn). The Twitter account @infoRAC and @UNEPMPANews (followers consisting

mainly of environment and development researchers, practitioners and institutional accounts) has enabled UNEP/MAP to secure a presence in this platform where other institutions operating in the region are active. This has given a voice to UNEP/MAP and enabled consistent communication, including messages on key events and priorities. Digital content ranging from videos to digital cards carrying quotes and facts and figures have been developed by the MAP Communication Taskforce.

29. In the area of **Award Promotion**, INFO/RAC supported the promotion of the "**Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award for Mediterranean coastal cities**", initiative that recognizes and recompenses the efforts of local authorities to improve the environment and the quality of life and promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean coastal cities.

30. In the framework of supporting communication activities of **MAP Projects**, coordination and implementation of communication activities for the **CAMP Bosnia and Herzegovina** project have been carried out. The logo and website for the dissemination of Integrated Coastal Management results has been developed.

31. In the framework of supporting communication activities to **MAP Agreements**, coordination in close cooperation with MAP CU of the development and the implementation of the Communication Plan for the UNEP/MAP-IMELS (Italian Ministry of the Environment and protection of Land and Sea) Agreement has included the development of a communicative booklet highlighting the importance of the agreement as best practice in the Mediterranean and a promotional video resuming the main outcomes achieved. In its framework INFO/RAC has developed a web and mobile application for the collection of geographic data on marine litter called **SEAWatcher**. The App aims at enhancing marine litter management providing a tool that is easy and readily available for the reporting of beach, floating or seafloor litter and it is based on the main principles of participatory science (citizen science). SEAWatcher has a simple and intuitive interface, which makes the reporting as easy and fast as possible. A landing page and an explanatory video has been developed (http://www.info-rac.org/seawatcher/index_en.html).

32. The already intense **Partnership and Networking** was enhanced in the current biennium. Activity within the existing task forces including the other MAP Components and the whole MAP System was intensified. Support to Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention has been enhanced in terms of assistance, trainings and mutual exchange. Collaboration was also extended to other international and regional bodies such as ACCOBAMS and GFCM and environmental NGOs. Relationships with UNEP, EEA and the European Commission have been strengthened and the number of organisations working with INFO/RAC has been expanded.

33. In the framework of INFO/RAC's educational mandate, impulse to the **E-learning** was given also as response to the new context determined by the Covid19 pandemic. Moodle Platform training platform was maintained and updated to support the enlargement of activities of virtual education. On-line training activities on thematic and cross-cutting topics have been promoted within the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System. For this purpose a **brief survey on the educational demand** has been developed to monitor the needs of each RAC, the eligible activities for the development of basic or advanced courses (as additional or substituting in person ones), the main challenges or any critical issues. In parallel INFO/RAC is going to explore interest and priority of Contracting Parties about e-learning offer. A specific survey is under development.

MAP Data Management Policy

34. In relation to the preparation of the UNEP/MAP Data Management Policy, following Decision IG.24/2 (COP 21, Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019), INFO/RAC has developed a **questionnaire** to collect basic information on possible existing policies at Contracting Party level. The questionnaire, distributed

during September 2020 was aimed to also facilitate the bilateral discussions with Contracting Parties planned for this biennium and support the drawing up a priority list of bilateral meetings.

35. Due to delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the current biennium, it has not been possible to have in person bilateral meetings with the Contracting Parties, aimed to have a detailed and full picture about data availability and data management at local level, neither to discuss difficulties at level of the single layer and dataset. Meeting in person with all the main actors involved in the process of production, collection, elaboration and sharing of data was an important requisite to develop a document tailored on the peculiarities of each country.

36. Nevertheless, the current situation has not prevented the elaboration of a proposal of MAP data policy, developed on the basis of the collected information, inspired to common principles, **valid and applicable for any UNEP/MAP data flow** that will constitute the first reference document in this field and foresees all the due restrictions needed in the MAP context.

37. Although a data policy document is conceived as a synthetic and general document, detailed aspects related to the different data flows, including management elements, surely useful to the Contracting Parties for an operational approach and not usually included, will be part of specific Data metric policy annexes (Data policy management plans) that will be developed during the implementation phase of the next biennium, also integrating what already acquired until now (see IMAP Data Policy elements already developed in the past and current biennium).

38. A short term consultation has been launched in order to be facilitate exchange with the Contracting Parties, before the document to be officially presented at the Second INFO/RAC Focal Points Meeting planned. Contracting Parties active participation in the data policy definition process is essential with the overall aim to achieve the essential knowledge basis for the Mediterranean. Further discussion will be facilitated in the NFPs Meeting during an *ad hoc* session.

39. A specific alias to collect input and comments by the Contracting Parties has been created: MAPdatapolicy@info-rac.org.