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Agenda Item 3: Proposal for Revising IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO 10) on Marine Litter

Lessons Learnt and Gained Experience from the Use of IMAP Info System Data Standards (DS) and Data Dictionaries (DD) for IMAP EO10 (Marine Litter) for the Needs of Preparation of the 2023 MED QSR

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1. Introduction

1. IMAP Info System, developed by INFO/RAC during the second IMAP cycle, is fully operational and aims to collect, manage and share data from national monitoring programs developed under the framework of the UNEP/MAP Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP).

2. The system allows Contracting Parties to report data for 18 IMAP Common Indicators through 30 Information Standards developed and implemented in the IMAP Info System, including for Candidate Common Indicator 24 (cCI24) “Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles”. Relative data flows have been implemented, also for cCI 24 that can be reported on voluntary basis.

3. IMAP Info System web site is user friendly and accessible to the general public. Login is required only to access reserved sections. A specific guide has been developed to help users in browsing the web site: [IMAP Info System Technical Guide](#)

2. IMAP Info System Structure

4. The structure of IMAP Info System is user-friendly and allowing easy navigation with three main sections / menu options: (a) Reporting; (b) Explore; and (c) Info.

5. Reporting menu includes 3 sections that allow to download, compile, verify, upload and update the Information Standards:

- a) **Standards:** this section includes all the Modules (Information Standards) related to the CIs implemented in the System. To access this section login is not required. Through the arrow symbol, it is possible to download a specific Module.
- b) **Conformity check:** this tool checks the compliance of the file before proceeding with the upload procedure. This section is open, login is not required.
- c) **Upload:** Upload section is restricted to registered users and login is required. In this section it is possible to upload and update compiled Information Standards, using the PLUS button at the bottom of the page. Each IMAP User could access and download the files uploaded by the Contracting Party (CP) they belong to. It is also possible to download the list of all the files uploaded by its own CP.

6. Explore menu includes the following sections that allow to access the published data, visualize its location in the map and consult graphical representation of IMAP data:

- a) **Published Data:** in this section are available all the data published by CPs. This section is accessible to the general public.
- b) **Geographical data:** it shows location of monitoring site per Standards. This section is open, login is not required
- c) **Dashboard:** this is a tool that allows the user to have summarized, in a synthetic way and through graphical representation, different information coming from reported datasets. Graphs, tables and maps are interactive and automatically updated according to the data stored in the IMAP Info System DB.
- d) **Utility tools:** Superset and Jupiter Lab are the tools available to all the RACs to explore and visualize data entered in the IMAP Info System.

7. Info section allows to access the following sub-sections:

- a) **Documents:** this section is accessible to the general public. In this section all the IMAP documents are available. For easier consultation, the IMAP documents are organized by cluster and typology.
- b) **Guidelines and Tutorial:** in this section you can find all what can help users to navigate the IMAP Info System and in the reporting activities. Guidelines and Tutorial section includes an *User Guide* that explain step by step how to report data in the IMAP Info System, a *Technical Guide* to guide the user in browsing the website and *Video Tutorials*, the simplest way to understand how to navigate the website and report data in the IMAP Info System.

2.1 Data Standards (DSs) and Data Dictionaries (DDs)

8. The IMAP Info System allows reporting for 18 IMAP Common indicators and 30 modules as listed in Table 1 and 2.

9. Information Standards (11 IMAP Common Indicators) have been developed during the first phase of the IMAP (Pilot) Info System (Table 1).

10. In the last two years, 18 new Information Standards (

11. Common Indicator 22 - Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (including analysis of its composition, spatial distribution and, where possible, source).

12. Comparing the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries proposed by IMAP EO10 CI22 with the monitoring protocols and fact sheets generally reveals a significant degree of consistency. Both are aligned closely in terms of critical sampling details and the overarching methodology to be employed during the assessment process.

13. In details, the main elements subject to possible modifications or harmonization are listed below.

14. In the factsheets concerning beach litter (Beach_Survey_Form), there is a request to monitor the weight of each category of marine litter, information that is subsequently not requested and does not appear in the Data Standards (DS) for data processing.

15. Concerning some preliminary but still important parameters requested in the DD_Station form (i.e., Prevailing currents off the beach and prevailing wind, etc.,) based on our monitoring experience, it is crucial to underscore that gathering this set of information can be quite complex, typically requiring a high level of expertise in oceanography or an extensive familiarity with the specific sampling location. Without these specialized skills and comprehensive site knowledge, obtaining these data can prove to be a significant challenge. Therefore, is opportune to foresee a priori assessment of the study area and ensure the acquisition of the necessary information.

16. The DD_Beach_litter_Survey_Form does not require any specific changes.

17.) related to 7 Common Indicators have been further developed and implemented in the IMAP Info System.

Table 1: 12 Information Standards (11 IMAP Common Indicators) developed during the first phase in the IMAP Pilot Info System

Common Indicator(s)	Module name
CI 1: Habitat distributional range to also consider habitat extent as a relevant attribute CI 2: Condition of the habitat's typical species and communities	B1 - <i>Coralligenous Habitat</i>
	B2 - <i>Maerl/Rhodolith Habitat</i>
	B3 - <i>Posidonia oceanica Meadows Habitat</i>
CI 6: Trends in abundance, temporal occurrence, and spatial distribution of non-indigenous species, particularly invasive, non-indigenous species, notably in risk areas	I1 - <i>Non Indigenous Species</i>
CI 13: Concentration of key nutrients in water column CI 14: Chlorophyll-a concentration in water column	E1 - <i>Nutrients & physical and chemical parameters</i>
CI 15: Location and extent of the habitats impacted directly by hydrographic alterations to also feed the assessment of EO1 on habitat extent	H1 - <i>Hydrography</i>
CI 16: Length of coastline subject to physical disturbance due to the influence of man-made structures	C1 - <i>Coastline</i>
CI 17: Concentration of key harmful contaminants measured in the relevant matrix (EO9, related to biota, sediment, seawater)	P1 - <i>Contaminants in Seawater, Sediment and Biota</i>
CI 21: Percentage of intestinal enterococci concentration measurements within established standards	Q1 - <i>Bathing Water Quality</i>
CI 22: Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (including analysis of its composition, spatial distribution and, where possible, source)	M1 - <i>Beach litter</i>
CI 23: Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and on the seafloor	M2 - <i>Seafloor litter</i>
	M3 - <i>Floating microplastics</i>

Table 2: The new 18 Information Standards (7 IMAP Common Indicators) implemented in the IMAP Info System during the last biennium.

<i>Common Indicators</i>	<i>N° of Information Standards</i>
CI 3: Species distributional range (EO1)	14 new Information Standards on marine mammals (one specific on the monk seal), marine turtles, marine birds
CI 4: Population abundance of selected species (EO1)	
CI 5: Population demographic characteristics (EO1)	
CI 18: Level of pollution effects of key contaminants where a cause and effect relationship has been established (EO9)	1 on level of pollution effects (PMO1)
CI 19: Occurrence, origin (where possible), extent of acute pollution events (e.g. slicks from oil, oil products and hazardous substances), and their impact on biota affected by this pollution (EO9)	1 on level of acute pollution events (PAE1)
CI 20: Actual levels of contaminants that have been detected and number of contaminants which have exceeded maximum regulatory levels in commonly consumed seafood (EO9)	1 on levels of contaminants in seafood (PSF1)
CI 24: Trends in the amount of litter ingested by or entangling marine organisms focusing on selected mammals, marine birds, and marine turtles (E10)	1 on ingestion and entanglement on marine turtles (MLT1)

2.2 Revision process of Data Standards (DSs) and Data Dictionaries (DDs) for all the IMAP Common Indicators

18. For all Data Standards and Data Dictionaries, a first fine-tuning exercise has been already carried out based on input and feedback collected from the Contracting Parties (CPs), aiming to improve and facilitate the reporting process. Feedback and comments referred in particular to mismatch between all the available DSs/DDs and monitoring protocols, missing data and gaps, have been implemented after the respective CORMONs discussions and approvals.

19. INFO/RAC's activity has focused on the most urgent and useful changes in order to support, enhance and simplify CPs reporting. Furthermore, new functionalities have been implemented in IMAP Info System in order to facilitate reporting phase:

- Drop-down menu for fields containing lists of values;
- “Conditional” fields (blue in the factsheets): these fields must be filled in only if a specific field has been previously compiled;
- Automatic filling of some fields according to what has been filled in other specific fields (i.e. unit of measurements related to specific contaminants); and
- Introduction of range of values, under the guidance of MED POL experts, for numerical fields.

20. In the current biennium (2024-2025) an official systematic revision process has been initiated for the IMAP Info System aiming to evaluate the feasibility all the possible/proposed changes being in pipeline for all the available information standards, and most importantly selecting those mandated by

the IMAP Decisions and in-line with the reporting needs. In this regard, CPs are kindly invited to make an internal recognition based on data availability, compliance with monitoring plans, remarks collected by the respective national IMAP Info Users, and to provide written feedback to the Secretariat with a list of all possible improvements to be taken into consideration and to be discussed during the CORMON Meeting to be held during 2024-2025.

Validation and quality control:

21. Before submitting data to the IMAP Info System, the Conformity Check tool must be used by all IMAP Info Users to verify data compliance in-line with the rules specified in the DDs, aiming at having harmonized submission from all CPs. The conformity check procedures run control checks and verifications among all fields and contents, checking if data reported follow the rules defined into the DDs, specifically about data format and list of values. Furthermore, to avoid errors in filling in DS, new functionalities has been implemented (see paragraph before), like automatic filling, drop-down menu and introduction of range of values.

IMAP Info System New Features:

22. IMAP Info System has been recently enhanced with new features which make navigation, reporting, and access to information easier. Three main sections (Reporting, Explore, Info) allow intuitive access to the specific sub-section.

23. Specifically, the Explore section has 3 new functionalities available (the last two only for MAP Components):

- a) Dashboard: allowing user to have summarized, in a synthetic way and through graphical representation, different information coming from different data sources. Graphs, tables and maps are interactive and automatically updated according to data stored in the IMAP Info System DB.
- b) Superset: it is a tool for business intelligence and data analysis. It allows users to easily explore and visualize data, from simple line graphs to geospatial graphs.
- c) Jupyter Lab: it is a web-based interactive development environment (IDE) for data science and scientific computing. It provides a flexible and powerful interface for working with notebooks, code, and data.

24. Moreover, the IMAP Info System has been updated to allow these operations:

- Access to advanced research, allowing the searching of data per cluster, module, status, sampling interval, Id;
- Export all data or just selection of them displayed in the Upload or in the Published Data sections;
- Download zipped files containing all selected files or all files listed in the Upload or in the Published Data sections;
- Access to IMAP documents grouped by cluster and typology for an easier consultation;
- Access to guidelines and tutorials for easier navigation and aiming to support reporting process.

New Developments:

25. During the next biennium (2026-27), IMAP Info System will be enhanced with the following features:

- Creation of connection/link with data held and managed by GFCM (General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean) on Ecological objective EO3;
- Development of new dashboard;
- Improvement of Jupiter Lab supporting RACs for the next QSR assessments;
- Development of four new video tutorials (in addition to the two already available) to support IMAP users in reporting data within the IMAP Info System.

2.3 Coherence between IMAP data and methods used for coastal marine monitoring, towards a harmonization between IMAP Ecological Objective 10 and MSFD

IMAP Ecological Objective 10 (EO10 - Marine Litter):

26. Harmonization of monitoring protocols and data requirements is an essential task in the field of coastal and marine environmental research. This pursuit becomes particularly salient when considering the interface between the IMAP Ecological Objectives 10 and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), as well as the adherence to the National monitoring plans established by contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention. These plans underscore a collective commitment to the preservation of coastal and marine ecosystems on an international scale.

27. The goal of this rigorous evaluation is focused on achieving a seamless synergy between IMAP EO10 and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) Descriptor 10 (D10). This harmonization is paramount for ensuring the protection and preservation of Mediterranean coastal and marine ecosystems, which are not just of ecological importance but also essential for the well-being and sustenance of communities around the world. By achieving this synergy between data requirements and monitoring methodologies, this document aims to lay the groundwork for the sustained flourishing of these invaluable environments, securing their vitality for generations to come.

28. The analysis within the context of IMAP EO10 encompasses Common Indicators (CIs) 22 and 23. CI22 involves assessing trends in the amount of litter that is washed ashore and deposited on coastlines. CI22 monitoring also entails the analysis of the composition, spatial distribution, and, wherever feasible, source attribution for the collected marine litter. Moreover, CI23 addresses trends in the amount of litter within the water column, with a specific focus on microplastics, as well as on the seafloor.

29. Comparative tables (Tables 3 and 4) have been prepared and presented to facilitate the comparison among monitoring protocols and examination of data required by each CI.

30. The "Compliance" section in a comparative table assesses the degree of alignment or similarity between two or more items, typically in the context of a comparison or evaluation. The available options for this section are typically "Yes," "No," or "Partially." A brief description of each option is provided hereunder.

31. When the "Yes" option is selected in the Compliance section of a comparative table, it indicates that there is a high level of agreement or correspondence between the items being compared. This suggests that the items are in sync or closely match each other in the specific aspect being evaluated. Choosing "No" in the Compliance section implies that there is a significant disparity or lack of agreement between the items under consideration. This option is selected when there is clear in compliance or a lack of alignment in the specific criteria being compared. "Partially", is chosen when there is some degree of Compliance between the items but not a complete match. This option suggests

that there are areas of agreement as well as areas of disagreement or inconsistency within the comparison. It signifies that the alignment is not absolute but exists to some extent.

32. In summary, the “Compliance section” in a comparative table helps assess how closely or loosely items align with each other in the context of the specific criteria being evaluated, and it provides a way to express the degree of Compliance using the options of "Yes," "No," or "Partially."

2.3.1 Common Indicator 22 - Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (including analysis of its composition, spatial distribution and, where possible, source)

33. Comparing the guidelines proposed by IMAP Common Indicator 22 with those under Marine Strategy Descriptor 10 criterion D10C1) reveals a remarkable degree of consistency in various aspects of their sampling protocols. Both frameworks align closely in terms of critical sampling details, encompassing factors such as the number of samples to be taken, the frequency at which these samples should be collected, and the overarching methodology to be employed during the assessment process. This shared commitment to standardization and uniformity in data collection procedures is a testament to the concerted efforts made in the field of marine environmental monitoring (Table 3).

Table 3. Sampling protocol and methodological features for macro-beach litter adopted and described in the guideline documents provided by the MSFD and IMAP Ecological Indicator 10.

	MSFD D10 Criterion D10C1	IMAP EO10 Common Indicator 22	Compliance
Frequency and Temporal trend	4 surveys per year (no information about the trend)	At least 2 surveys per year, ideally 4 repeating for at least 6 years monitoring	Compliant
Lower Size limit	2.5 cm (Plus 15 categories of litter that are always recorded, even if < 2.5 cm)	0.5 cm	Partial

34. Further examination of the definitions and criteria associated with beach macrolitter reveals differences in the lower size limit. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) sets a minimum size threshold for macro-litter at 2.5 centimetres and specifies 15 additional categories of litter to be recorded regardless of size, even if under this threshold (such as cigarette butts and plastic cups). By contrast, the IMAP indicator specifies a general lower minimum size requirement of 0.5 centimetres. Currently, monitoring efforts are largely focused on macroplastics, yet sampling items as small as 0.5 centimeters – often difficult to identify – can cause substantial fluctuations in the total count of sampled items.

35. Moreover, EU MSFD uses the Joint List of litter categories, as proposed by Fleet et al. in 2021, whereas within the IMAP framework, the 2021 MED POL beach marine litter items list is used. Provided that the revision process for the Joint List is ongoing (expected to be finalized in late 2025/early 2026), further alignment should be examined.

2.3.2 Common Indicator 23 - Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and on the seafloor

36. Regarding the IMAP CI23 seafloor macrolitter and floating microplastic monitoring, a thorough review of the monitoring guidelines reveals a remarkable alignment between the methodologies outlined in the MSFD D10 Criteria D10C1 and D10C2 Guidance Documents and those specified in IMAP EO10 CI23 (Table 4). The absence of significant disparities highlights a strong commitment to maintaining consistency in the assessment of seafloor macrolitter, with important implications for the reliability and comparability of collected data. The precise alignment of sampling strategies, protocol guidelines, sampling frequencies, and reporting units not only streamlines the implementation of these monitoring procedures but also enhances their scientific rigor. This shared

adherence to standardized practices ensures the methodological reliability of seafloor macrolitter assessments, enabling accurate data collection and interpretation within and across regulatory frameworks.

Table 4. Sampling protocol and methodological features for floating microplastics adopted and described in the guideline documents provided by the MSFD Criterion D10C2 and IMAP EO10 CI23.

	IMAP EO10 CI23 (Floating Microplastics)	MSFD Criterion D10C2 (Floating Microplastics)	Compliance
Vessel speed	1-2 knots, max 3.	0.5-3 knots	Compliant
Trawl time	20 minutes or more	10 to 30 minutes	Compliant
Shape	Fibers, filaments, films, fragments, foams, pellet and granule	filament, film/sheet, fragment, granule, pellet, foam	Compliant
Color	White, black, red, blue, green, and other color.	White, black, grey, red, orange, yellow, purple, pink, brown, multicolor, colourless blue, green.	Compliant

3. Integration of elements and review of Data Standards (DSs) related to the IMAP Common Indicators for Marine Litter (EO10).

37. The "Compliance with sampling guidelines " column in a comparative table assesses the degree of alignment or similarity between the DD/DS and the monitoring guidelines protocols. The available options for this section are "Yes," "No," or "Partially." Here's a brief description of each option:

38. When the "Yes" option is selected in the Compliance section of a comparative table, it indicates that there is a high level of agreement or correspondence between the items being compared. This suggests that the items are in sync or closely match each other in the specific aspect being evaluated.

39. Choosing "No" in the Compliance section implies that there is a significant disparity or lack of agreement between the items under consideration. This option is selected when there is clear in Compliance or a lack of alignment in the specific criteria being compared. "Partially", is chosen when there is some degree of Compliance between the items but not a complete match. This option suggests that there are areas of agreement as well as areas of disagreement or inconsistency within the comparison. It signifies that the alignment is not absolute but exists to some extent.

40. In summary, the Compliance section in a comparative table helps assess how closely or loosely items align with each other in the context of the specific criteria being evaluated.

41. The "Needs of revisions" column was created to highlight the need for modifications or changes in the DSs and DDs to harmonize information requirements with the monitoring protocols. These adjustments play a key role in ensuring the alignment of requests information with the monitoring protocols, requiring improvements, enhancements, and changes that could be essential for preserving standardization and accuracy. The available options for this section are "Yes," "No," or "Partially."

42. The "Comment" section has been used to provide detailed descriptions of the suggestions required for harmonization or the identified inconsistencies.

3.1 Common Indicator 22 - Trends in the amount of litter washed ashore and/or deposited on coastlines (including analysis of its composition, spatial distribution and, where possible, source).

43. Comparing the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries proposed by IMAP EO10 CI22 with the monitoring protocols and fact sheets generally reveals a significant degree of consistency. Both are aligned closely in terms of critical sampling details and the overarching methodology to be employed during the assessment process.

44. In details, the main elements subject to possible modifications or harmonization are listed below.

45. In the factsheets concerning beach litter (Beach_Survey_Form), there is a request to monitor the weight of each category of marine litter, information that is subsequently not requested and does not appear in the Data Standards (DS) for data processing.

46. Concerning some preliminary but still important parameters requested in the DD_Station form (i.e., Prevailing currents off the beach and prevailing wind, etc.,) based on our monitoring experience, it is crucial to underscore that gathering this set of information can be quite complex, typically requiring a high level of expertise in oceanography or an extensive familiarity with the specific sampling location. Without these specialized skills and comprehensive site knowledge, obtaining these data can prove to be a significant challenge. Therefore, it is opportune to foresee a priori assessment of the study area and ensure the acquisition of the necessary information.

47. The DD_Beach_litter_Survey_Form does not require any specific changes.

3.2 Common Indicator 23 - Trends in the amount of litter in the water column including microplastics and the seafloor.

48. Comparing the Data Standards and Data Dictionaries proposed by IMAP Common Indicator 23 with the monitoring protocols and fact sheets generally reveals a substantial degree of uniformity. Both are aligned closely in terms of critical sampling details and the overarching methodology to be employed during the assessment process.

49. In details, the main elements subject to possible modifications or harmonization are listed below.

50. In the DD_Stations form for sea surface microplastics, it is necessary to standardize the parameter 'Closest Coast' with the monitoring protocols that specify measurements in nautical miles. This could potentially lead to misunderstanding during the selection of sampling stations established in nautical miles.

51. In the DD_Stations form for sea surface microplastics the parameter "Mixing" is not mentioned in the monitoring protocol.

52. In the DD_Stations form for sea surface microplastics the parameter "Area typology" there are some values to be added or specify for the offshore sampling in the list of values proposed. Considering that the monitoring protocols also contemplate monitoring at 24 miles from the coast, none of the provided values (RP = River Plume PF = Port Facility, US=UrbanSettlement, IS = Industrial Settlement) can be inserted.

53. In DD_Microplastic_Mesh the parameter "Sea Depth" is also specified in DD_Stations. Additionally, the parameter is marked as non-mandatory in DD_Stations; it would be necessary to clarify this aspect to harmonize the request and the outcome.

54. In DD_Sampling_Microplastic the parameter “MicroplasticMorphType” needs to be standardized to align with the shapes described in the monitoring protocols. It has been observed that the list of values for 'MicroplasticMorphType' is currently incomplete, lacking the category 'fibres'. This is a significant omission, given the pervasiveness of microfibres in marine environments. Although fibres and microfibres are not accurately sampled with manta nets, due to their distinctive shape and size, their absence from the standardised list may result in information gaps that hinder a comprehensive understanding of marine plastic pollution. Furthermore, the incorporation of 'fibres' into the standardised list would facilitate data comparability across different monitoring projects and better align with existing protocols, which often recognise fibres as a distinct category.

55. It is therefore proposed that the 'MicroplasticMorphType' parameter be updated to include 'fibres' as a category, in alignment with the categories described in IMAP monitoring protocol. This amendment would serve to enhance the robustness of the CI23, provide a more accurate reflection of environmental conditions, and support more effective policy-making and mitigation efforts aimed at reducing microplastic pollution.

56. In DD_Sampling_Microplastic The parameter 'Number of objects' is explicitly mentioned in the monitoring protocols as 'Number of microplastics' and not 'Number of objects.' It should be specified with accuracy, as the presence of meso and macro plastics can alter the final data.

57. A specific focus should be given to the polymer analysis of the particles. The monitoring protocols mention the spectral procedures for polymer identification (“For laboratories that have the possibility to use them, in the case that time and resources do not allow analysis of all samples, the recommendation is to proceed with a representative spectroscopic analysis for a subsample of 10% of the total, choosing the suspected microparticles to verify visual identification”). So, there is the necessity to create a specific DD and DS to report the polymer identification results.

58. The creation of **new Data Standards and Data Dictionaries for monitoring marine litter in shallow waters (less than 20 meters depth)** using scuba diving seems to be necessary, as the methodology exhibits certain differences, and some information in the Data Dictionary could be misinterpreted or unclear.