INFO/RAC National Focal Points

Rome, 7-8 June 2023

Agenda item 3. Progress Report on the Status of Implementation of the Programme of Work on Knowledge Management, Information and Communication 2022-2023

Activities carried out in the biennium 2022-2023

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, to improve the management of environmental information and the communication and knowledge dissemination capabilities of the MAP Barcelona Convention System.

3. The 2022-2023 Programme of Work has been implemented in collaboration with the Coordinating Unit, the MAP Components and in contact with other regional.

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.

5. In order to ensure the availability of coherent and scientifically sound environmental knowledge, INFO-RAC has 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. During the last semester the activities foreseen by the Programme of Work 2022-2023 will be accomplished focusing on the main event of the year, the 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP 23) to be held in December 2023 in Slovenia.

The Mediterranean Information System and its components

8. **MAP Data Policy** implementation is ongoing on the side of the development of data flows Annexes and on the bilateral discussions with Contracting Parties. Data Policy annexes have been developed ensuring a common structure. Specific contents for each data flow have been elaborated and finalized in order to provide more detailed information about data policy implementation. Customizations for the different data flows are set up and special efforts have been made to communicate the data policy in a clear and concise way.

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. Its architecture is diffuse across the various repositories, managed by the MAP components, although it is interconnected to work as a unique system.

10.   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. The update and upgrade of InfoMAP system and its modules has focused on the integration of databases already developed and managed by INFO/RAC and in view of a full integration of data collected by the other MAP Components through databases and platforms. The InfoMAP upgrade has been carried out also in view of the building of the UNEP/MAP Knowledge Management Platform under development by INFO/RAC and dialoging with MED Programme Knowledge Management Platform.

11.   The integration of available databases and integrated data in **InfoMAPNode** coming from the other MAP Components has been almost completed in line with the work carried out by the Data Management Task Force. REMPEC MEDGISMAR public layers (4 layers) have been uploaded; SPA/RAC Mediterranean Biodiversity Platform layers (237 layers) have been all linked using remote services in their actual state. Updated layers (from the new Mediterranean Biodiversity Platform) will also be linked once they are released; Plan Bleu indicators layers relying on MapX, whose remote services have been made available. have been linked (12 layers); SCP/RAC indicators layers relying on MapX have been all linked (31 layers) using remote services. Further linking and uploading of geographical data is scheduled, capitalizing the work from IMAP, NBB, BCRS and other UNEP-MAP data flows.

12.   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 using languages and tools so that interoperability among systems (inside and outside the MAP) is assured.

13.   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. In particular, the upgrading of the SPA/BD Protocol reporting template (i.e. Table III. List of SPAs within the SPA/BD Protocol's geographical coverage) has been performed to be aligned with the provisions of COP 22 Decision IG.25/12.

14.   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.

15.   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). Changes have been made to facilitate the reporting activity, improve the system with new features and provide documental material to support the reporting activity.

16.   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.

17. 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 applications, data, and identities that are moving to the cloud, which 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).

18. Analysis and state of art of data collection by MAP Components has been carried out in the framework of the MAP Data Management Task Force and on the basis of the first result, INFO/RAC organized bilateral meetings with MAP Components, integrated most part of the available layers in the InfoMAPNode, tool accessible to MAP Components and general public according to the principles of the MAP Data Policy, and investigated MAP documental heritage by identifying, qualifying and quantifying all available documental sources with the final aim to create a unique access hub to MAP knowledge.

19. Efforts have been provided for the completion of the **IMAP Info System** to make it fully operational for all IMAP Common Indicators. Drafts of Data Standards & Data Dictionaries for IMAP CIs 18 and 20 (biomarkers and contaminants in seafood) have been developed by INFO/RAC and reviewed by the online working group (OWG) on pollution, approved during the CORMON Pollution (27-30 May 2022) and finalized with the inputs received from the Contracting Parties. Moreover, drafts of Data Standards & Data Dictionaries for IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4 and 5 have been finalized to present the final version to the CORMON meeting on Biodiversity and Fisheries (Athens, Greece 9-10 March 2023). The final versions, related to the IMAP Common Indicators 3, 4, 5, 18, 20 and candidate 24, have been implemented in the IMAP Info System, extending the reporting to a total of 18 CIs, and supporting the elaboration of the draft 2023 MED Quality Status Report.

20. Changes have been made to the IMAP Info System, and others are still in progress, aimed at simplifying the reporting activities, facilitating the search, and downloading of the reported data.

21. Particular attention has been paid to the help desk to support the processing and loading of monitoring data by the Contracting Countries. Besides the daily support ensured by INFO/RAC Help Desk to all the Contracting Parties in uploading, formal check and validation into the IMAP Info System, national workshops have been organized to provide technical support to monitoring country teams to implement IMAP data reporting. On-line National workshops for technical assistance and training have been organized with the network of IMAP users (until now Montenegro, Malta, Slovenia, Croatia, France (2), Tunisia, Morocco (2), Israel, Turkey, Italy, Libya, Lebanon), 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.

22.   Strong support to UNEP/MAP has been provided in the framework of the following projects: EcAp MED III project, IMAP-MPA project, CAMP Bosnia and Herzegovina project, CAMP Transboundary Otranto project, SciNMeet programme.

Communication, Education, Dissemination and Outreach

23. Implementation of MAP Communication Strategy has been carried out strengthening MAP Advocacy and enhancing public awareness and outreach on UN Days observance and on key MAP topics.

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, 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. The process for the development of a **MAP Knowledge Management** Strategy has been defined and the work is ongoing for the development of the prototype of the Knowledge Management Platform. The architecture of the prototype has been conceived and it foresees two sections: one for the geographical layers, the other one for documental heritage. A consistent upgrade of the first section related tool InfoMAPNode has been recently carried out, available layers from UNEP-MAP have been integrated, metadata for those layers have been imported, where available, or written, where they were not available, and the visual layout of the entire platform has been realized. Close dialogue with other initiative as MED Programme KM platform has been kept through bilateral meetings and the participation at MED Programme Steering Committee. Competencies in Knowledge Management and operational support has been provided to MED Programme in view of the hosting and maintenance of the MedProgramme Knowledge Management by INFO/RAC.

27. 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. INFO/RAC has supported CU developing a dedicated web page. The survey for the application has been developed and easy access with a clear vademecum has been provided. The video developed by INFO/RAC facilitates IEFCA dissemination and give the main information to candidates.

28. Public awareness and outreach on UN Days observance and their topics has been enhanced for Ocean Day through the participation to Ocean Conference 2022. INFO/RAC in close cooperation with co-organizers supported the definition and successful delivery of UNEP/MAP side events. INFO/RAC has actively been engaged in the delivery of the event Fostering multi- stakeholder partnerships and regional cooperation for SDG14 Organized by: Government of Slovenija, Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning; Government of Italy, Ministry for Ecological Transition; Government of Mauritius; Government of Sweden, Ministry of Environment; Partnership for Regional Ocean Governance (IASS, IDDRI, TMG). Graphical material for the social campaign and a video has been produced. Coast Day digital has been updated with the 2022 contents.

29.   Participation and support to the Mediterranean Pavilion has been provided during the UNFCCC COP27 in Egypt. Cooperation with UFM has been strengthened. UNEP/MAP work has been promoted through thematic and institutional side events.

30.   Participation and support to UNEP/MAP SPA/RAC activities has been provided during the UN Biodiversity Conference - CBD - COP15 in Canada. Graphic material for social media has been produced.

31.   As part of the production and dissemination of news and communication materials INFO/RAC produced the 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. MED News was restyled in 2023 and its frequency was intensified: MEDNEWS has a new layout and the publication frequency is monthly. MEDNEWS is no longer structured in sections and news is collected according to relevance.

32.   On the Social Media networking front, INFO/RAC has strengthened MAP's presence on Twitter by adopting new communication tools such as twitter cards. Collective MAP Communication Task Force approach to social media, relies on a consistent use of MAP hashtags (especially 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.

33.   In the framework of the activities related to SEAWatcher App, a partnership has been established with the LIFE funded project STRONGSEA. 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).

34.   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, training 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 organizations working with INFO/RAC has been expanded.

35.   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. The Platform training called MedLearning was maintained and updated to support the enlargement of activities of virtual education. Online training activities on thematic and cross-cutting topics have been promoted within the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention System. The INFO/RAC MedLearning platform is currently undergoing a graphic restyling. With regard to training activities, courses are planned on the following topics: GIS; IMAP and Governance.

36.

37.   As part of the Pathways for Transversal Competences and Orientation (PTCO), INFO/RAC has promoted the training pathway "A lesson in environmental governance: discovering the actions for the Mediterranean Sea and its coasts" addressed to the students of "Liceo Ginnasio Torquato Tasso" high school in Rome. Starting on 7 February 2023 for a total of about 20 hours of training, the students have had the opportunity to meet representatives of the INFO/RAC Centre to learn more about the role and tasks of some of the main international and national institutions responsible for environmental protection. The topic of the Barcelona Convention has been discussed, the decision-making mechanisms of the Conference of Parties (COP) negotiations have been illustrated, and the Mediterranean Regional Activity Centres have been presented with particular reference to the activities of the INFO/RAC Centre. The theoretical lectures have been complemented with workshop activities aimed at stimulating interest in the production of disseminated materials on the main topics covered during the training course. The students, in collaboration with the INFO/RAC Centre's contact persons, organised an "Environmental Info-Day" at the school and with material produced and presentations made during the workshop activities illustrated what they have learned during the training course.