

medwaves

The magazine of the **Mediterranean Action Plan**

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● Welcome to MedWaves.

This edition of MEDWAVES is appearing in a different format and with a completely new layout. Feature reports address topical and varied issues apart from being illustrated with colour photos. It is definitely a more dynamic publication which should attract a wider readership.

Above all, this edition is being made available also in electronic format and thus is available instantly and to a much wider audience than was the case with the previous editions in hard copies. Apart from making use of modern electronic means at our disposal, by circulating this edition of MEDWAVES electronically, we are cutting on the use of paper and thus contributing, even if in a small way, towards protecting the environment.

In this edition we are giving prominence to some of the activities carried out during 2006 to mark the 30th Anniversary of the Barcelona Convention. These events were the highlight of UNEP/MAP's activities in 2006. The signature thirty years ago of the Barcelona Convention, coming on the heels of the adoption of the Mediterranean Action Plan, is an important landmark in the Mediterranean with respect to the protection of the marine environment and thus deserved to be commemorated in an appropriate manner. We are also privileged to feature an interview with the new Executive Director of UNEP Mr. Achim Steiner on the subject.

We are confident that this new initiative will be well received. At the same time, we are open to suggestions and would appreciate receiving comments on how we can improve on this edition.



Paul Mifsud
Coordinator
Mediterranean Action Plan



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Pollution is another potential factor contributing to the disappearance of Red Coral. Its impact on the red coral is still not sufficiently known; however any change in the environmental factors (e.g. sediment input, rise in seawater temperature, increase in nutrient content) appears to have an extremely adverse effect on colony survival. **More on page 10.**



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Thirty and going strong

2006 has marked thirty years since the signing of the Barcelona Convention.

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean – also known as the Barcelona Convention - is the legal framework for the implementation of UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP).

Adopted in 1976 by the Mediterranean Countries and the European Community in order to give legal basis to their activities, the Barcelona Convention is the instrument through which countries can take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate, combat and eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea and enhance the marine and coastal environment so as to contribute towards sustainable development.

Since its establishment thirty years ago, MAP has contributed a great deal towards pollution reduction in the Mediterranean. MAP has created a full set of legal instruments, programmes and recommendations, which have been adopted by the Contracting Parties and have greatly contributed to protecting the environment in the Mediterranean region.

Over the past months MAP has proved once again that the Mediterranean is a common heritage to be preserved, that the involvement of all coastal countries and resources is necessary in order to move forward, and that MAP's coordination role is crucial.

During last summer's Israeli Lebanese conflict, UNEP/MAP received an urgent request for assistance from the Lebanese Ministry of Environment to deal with the oil spills along the country's coastlines that threatened the marine environment in the region.

The pollution, triggered by bombs striking a power utility 30km south of Beirut last July, affected 150km of coastline with oil reaching as far north as Syria. An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 tonnes of fuel oil seeped into the Mediterranean Sea.

The International Assistance Action Plan was prepared by the Experts Working Group for Lebanon under the supervision of MAP's Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) and the Ministry of the Environment of Lebanon.



Greek Minister for Maritime Affairs, the UNEP Executive Director and the Secretary General of IMO during the launch of the International Assistance Action Plan.



Lebanese Environment Minister briefing UNEP Executive Director about the Lebanese oil spill.



Oil pollution along the Lebanese coastline.

During the conflict, the organisation drove media attention to the environmental damage threatening the region.

On 17 August, United Nations officials and experts, led by UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, together with the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), countries in the region and the European Commission, gathered at an international conference in Athens, where they backed a plan aimed at dealing with the emergency in the region. An additional demonstration that, over the years, MAP has been a unique process for one key aspect: developing or developed countries, large or small, with different cultures and traditions sit around the table on an equal footing and work together for a better Mediterranean environment.

No other regional organization enjoys credibility and trust among the Mediterranean countries as MAP does. Its future role in the region should be built on this unique strength.

Paul Mifsud
Coordinator
Mediterranean Action Plan

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The MAP Secretariat has been hosted in Athens by the Greek Government since 1982. Being also the UN representative office in Greece, on October 24 UNEP/MAP and the UN Information Office (UNIC) commemorates UN DAY with the hoisting of the UN flag and the Greek national flag on the Acropolis. Flowers are also laid at the foot of the monument of the unknown soldier in Syntagma Square in central Athens during a wreath laying ceremony led by the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister.





Achieving sustainable industrial development in the Mediterranean

Industry is one of the main driving forces of the economic development of most Mediterranean countries, while still a major source of land-based pollution affecting the region, especially as far as the hazardousness and persistence of pollutant emissions is concerned. Therefore, the control and progressive reduction of the environmental impacts associated with the industrial activities is a primary objective to be achieved in the process towards sustainable development in the Mediterranean region.

The Mediterranean countries show different levels of progress in the development of their legal and policy frameworks for controlling and reducing industrial pollution. Countries that are either candidates for EU membership, like Croatia and Turkey, or precandidate countries, such as Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro, are taking important steps towards an effective application of the most relevant EU regulations. Likewise, there is a trend in some Southern Mediterranean countries to progressively incorporate environmental objectives and standards that are similar to those in the EU, as a result of their participation in European partnership initiatives, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

Enforcement of existing and new laws and regulations

Nevertheless, improvements in the consolidation of the legal frameworks of these countries have not yet been accompanied by effective enforcement in the implementation of both the existing and new laws and regulations. The principal causes include the lack of secondary and executive regulations, lack of human and financial resources for governmental authorities in charge of applying the regulations; over-lapping and imprecise distribution of responsibilities among the different authorities involved in environmental protection. Moreover, command and control regulations are rarely accompanied by mechanisms, facilitating progressive compliance with the environmental regulations and/or reducing environmental impact.

The development of voluntary agreements between public authorities and the industrial sector is still an unresolved issue in most eastern and southern Mediterranean countries. Likewise, the application of environmental taxes is currently not well balanced with economic instruments facilitating investment in cleaner technologies. This trend may result in a negative impact on the sector's performance, as for big companies "polluter pays" would become "payer pollutes", while it places excessive pressure on the capacity of SMEs to respond to environmental requirements. Likewise, many of the existing instruments promoting proactive attitudes still focus on corrective actions (end-of-pipe) rather than on preventive ones (Cleaner Production), resulting in environmental management lying outside the scope of general company management, and involving high investments with no benefit other than compliance with environmental regulations.

On the other hand, slow progress is being made in the implementation of Environmental Management Systems (ISO 14000 & EMAS) as competitive tools to help companies enter the international market. As for eco-labelling schemes and awards for environmental performance are concerned, these are still poorly developed in some countries.

In EU Mediterranean countries the use of voluntary instruments is more widespread. A problem that is common to these countries is the excessive number of environmental laws and related legislative acts and thus the obligation to continuously update their legal frameworks according to new EU regulations. Some initiatives have already been undertaken in order to tackle these problems like, for example, the consolidation of environmental legal systems to incorporate IPPC, EIA, air, water and waste management laws and regulations.



Clean production in the Mediterranean: shrinking the gap between north and south

Most Mediterranean countries are adopting or updating their National Environmental Action Plans/Strategies, incorporating the issue of clean production, and the pollution prevention approach. Both are key elements to help introducing sustainable patterns in the industry, promoting sustainable production well before getting to the end-of-the-pipe process. Especially in southern and eastern countries, where CP centres and similar institutions are developing, programmes and agencies for international and/or bilateral cooperation are playing a major role in supporting projects and activities to introduce and spread the concept of clean production.

However, actions are often on a one-off basis, they are dispersed and there is a lack of coordination between the different parties involved. This is due to the lack of a national policy on clean production that could be used as a framework to define what joint actions could be launched. This situation is far from ideal, as it could result in the duplication of efforts, no consideration

of synergies, insufficient dissemination and replication of the achieved results and outputs. Only a few countries are trying to tackle systematically the issue of clean production, developing national policies that define and incorporate CP needs and priorities.

The Mediterranean region has already launched some positive initiatives to work towards achieving sustainable industrial development, however major efforts are still needed in order to reduce the gap between the north and the south of the region.

The harmonisation of existing national legislation, its subsequent strengthening and the widening of its framework are urgent issues to be addressed. If we want to pursue the common goal of achieving economical development without environmental degradation, actions should also be taken to encourage clean production technology, such as incentives, and the sharing of technology 'know-how'.





Ambassadors of the Environment: Environmental education in children's camps

This program brings children close to nature and teaches them the need of moral and ethical behavior for the survival of mankind. It aims at helping them to understand that nature's conservation ability is great, but its tolerance can be exhausted due to the disturbances to the ecosystems.

The initiative "Ambassadors of the Environment" (AOTE) was launched for the first time in Greece during the 2006 summer by the Athens Environmental Foundation (AEF), a non-profit, non-governmental organization, in collaboration with Jean Michel Cousteau, a member of its Board of Directors and with the support of UNEP/MAP.

The program, which was designed by J.M. Cousteau and his team of experts, has been operating successfully in other parts of the world and accepts children aged 8 to 14 years. During the two weeks programme, children have the opportunity to get to know the ecosystems and their problems, learn facts about nature and environmental issues related to energy, recycling, biodegradation, biodiversity, and the food chain.

Professional trainers – fluent in English, German and Greek - teach children to use solar and wind energy to make juice or bake cookies with the help of solar ovens. They also learn how to make fertilizer from organic waste, they discover the value and the art of recycling and



ways to use recycled materials. Gardening is an exercise where ecology practices are connected with the community social work.

Besides hiking trips, children have snorkeling expeditions through which they discover many facts about the marine ecosystem and ways to protect it. They are also actively involved in a research project conducted in collaboration with the "Hellenic Center of Marine Research".

According to the organizers, being involved in these projects as part of an international team, children will not only extend their understanding of nature and the ways to preserve it, but also improve their self-confidence and their social abilities. Apart from the practical exercises, the field exercises and the experiments, the programme includes games, excursions and recreational activities.

To learn more about Ambassadors of the Environment:
www.aote.org | www.athensenvironmental.org

"This is not just a fun summer camp. It is a chance for children from all over the world to learn how they can actively participate and make a positive contribution towards the conservation of our planet".



The red gold of the Mediterranean under close scrutiny

Following the 14th Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Portoroz, Slovenia, Nov. 2005), the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) was encouraged to propose an action plan for the preservation of the coralligenous ecosystem in the Mediterranean. It is in this framework that a colloquium on the red coral in the Mediterranean was organized in Tabarka, Tunisia in May 2006. The colloquium aimed at taking stock of the situation of the red coral as an element of the natural and cultural heritage of the Mediterranean.

The red coral (*Corallium Rubrum*, Linnaeus, 1758) is a species of the Mediterranean cultural heritage and one of the most ancient gems known (20,000 B.C.). It was considered a powerful talisman and the Sumerians, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks and then the Romans used it to make jewellery, ornaments and various objects; they also painted it on walls and vases. In the beginning, people thought that it was a small marine tree, soft and green, which would harden as soon as it came into contact with the air; that is why it was named “tree of stone” (*Lithodendrum*). It was only in 1722 that the French scientist Peyssonnel showed that it belonged in the animal kingdom.

Essentially Mediterranean, the species *corallium rubrum* is found from surface waters in habitats with little light (caves, overhangs) down to a depth of 250 meters. It is most abundant in the Western Mediterranean but has a very localized presence in the Eastern Basin (Adriatic Sea, Aegean Sea). It is one of the emblematic species of the coralligenous ecosystem, the latter being the second Mediterranean ecosystem in terms of biological diversity.

Red coral, a fragile element of the Mediterranean cultural heritage

The species *corallium rubrum* is included in several international conventions:

The Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (Protocol SPA/BD) adopted in 1995 regulates the exploitation of the species (Annex III);

The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention, 19/09/79), includes it as a species of the protected fauna in the Mediterranean (Annex 3);

The European Directive on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (Habitat Directive, 21/05/92) includes it as an animal species of Community interest whose harvest in nature and its exploitation are subjected to management measures (Annex 5).



The Tabarka colloquium aimed at taking stock of the situation of the red coral as an element of the natural and cultural heritage of the Mediterranean. The first part dealt with the history of exploitation and trading in red coral; the second part, with the biology of the species, the threats it faces and the developments in fishing techniques. A round table in which all stakeholders were present, discussed efforts to reproduce and repopulate the red coral and took stock of ongoing research in these fields.

The papers presented in the colloquium made evident both the cultural significance of the coral and the role it played in strengthening the relations among the Mediterranean peoples through the ages. From a socioeconomic and cultural point of view, coral trading has played and continues to play a major role in certain regions. It remains even today the raw material for a centuries-old industry, from which many specialized craftsmen make their living (fishermen, divers, artisans, jewellery makers) in several Mediterranean countries, among them Italy, Tunisia, Algeria, Spain and France.

The scientific papers gave data on the current situation of the species, which remains under an ever increasing pressure. It is estimated that the quantities of red coral fished annually in the Mediterranean amount to almost 70 tons. Even if the species does not appear to be under threat – and it is not included in the IUCN red lists – its exploitation by the jewellery-making industry seems to have given rise to some localized phenomena of overexploitation or even disappearance from the surface sectors of the Western Mediterranean. This has had two consequences: fishing at greater depths (more than 80 to 100 meters) and exploitation of stocks, the size of which is not accurately known. Moreover, the harvesting of young colonies of smaller size coral, which is the object of lower quality trading (power of crushed coral mixed with synthetic resin) makes the populations even more vulnerable.

Sustainable management must encompass a greater effort to monitor populations and their exploitation

In addition to the quantities harvested, certain fishing techniques continue to inflict serious damage to the coralligenous environment. This is the case of the St. Andrew's Cross, a traditional fishing tool used until recently. It is a wooden, or lately a steel cross dragged on seabeds at -50 meters which breaks not just the coral colonies caught in the nets (1 to 2 tons of coral per year), but all the other organisms living on the colony and associated with it. The modern harvesting techniques (scuba diving) are more selective and allow the taking of the targeted species alone.

Pollution is another potential factor contributing to the disappearance of the coral. Its impact on the red coral is still not sufficiently known; however any change in the environmental factors (e.g. sediment input, rise in seawater temperature, increase in nutrient content) appears to have an extremely adverse effect on colony survival.

It became obvious from the discussions that our knowledge of the biology, ecology and genetics of the red coral is still inadequate. Coral culture may appear to be a means to reduce pressure on the species, but for the time being it is far from operational. In effect, taking into consideration the low growth rate of the species (of the order of 6mm/year) we come to the conclusion that coral culture cannot as yet be considered an alternative to colony exploitation.

Thus, sustainable management of this species must encompass a greater effort to monitor populations and their exploitation. In order to replenish the stocks in the zones where overfishing has taken place and to establish colonies in new habitats, the following recommendations should be considered:

- To raise the awareness of the public and the professional stakeholders in terms of coral ecology and coral as an element of cultural heritage;
- To promote rational exploitation through:
- The formulation of management plans based on the principle of fishing site rotation for periods adapted to the particular species.
- The protection of habitats from dragging gear and other threats.
- The formulation of rules concerning minimum size of coral taken, increased monitoring of banned fishing gear and the respect of fishing zones.
- The training of professional coral fishermen to use selective fishing techniques and the improvement of diver safety.
- To reinforce scientific research and promote the creation of data exchange networks with the support of regional organizations, such as UNEP/ MAP, the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development of the European Union etc.
- For the long term, to support coral culture as an alternative to coral fishing.
- In consultation with the stakeholders, to set up protected marine areas, sufficiently large to include coral sanctuaries.





Achim Steiner speaks to MedWaves

A German national born in Brazil in 1961, Achim Steiner was appointed this year as the new Executive Director of UNEP. Before joining UNEP, Achim Steiner served as Director General of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) from 2001 to 2006.

His professional career has included assignments with governmental, non-governmental and international organizations in different parts of the world. In Washington, where he was Senior Policy Advisor of IUCN's Global Policy Unit, he led the development of new partnerships between the environment community, the World Bank and the United Nations system.

In Southeast Asia he worked as Chief Technical Advisor on a programme for the sustainable management of Mekong River watersheds and community-based natural resources management. In 1998 he was appointed Secretary-General of the World Commission on Dams, based in South Africa.

Achim Steiner's professional track record in the fields of sustainable development policy and environmental management, his first-hand knowledge of civil society, governmental and international organisations, as well as his global experience spanning five Continents, make him an excellent choice to lead the United Nations Environment Programme as the 5th Executive Director in the organisation's history.

Q: You have been UNEP's Executive Director and UN Under-Secretary-General since June 2006. What are your priorities in your new position?

Well, my first priority has obviously been to get to know my new colleagues here in Nairobi and around the world. I've also been meeting the government representatives who make the policy that guides UNEP's role. But above all, I want to reach out to UNEP's partners around the world. I think that as an intergovernmental body, our departure point is governments but our key partners in achieving the goals and mandates of UNEP are really also civil society, the private sector, and broader society at large. So, one of the departure points for me will be to listen, to understand and from there to build the kinds of alliances that would allow us to do the work that we are meant to do.

Q: What do you see as UNEP's assets and weaknesses in facing environmental challenges?

UNEP is entering a time of change and renewal. By adopting the Bali Strategic Plan at the last Governing Council, governments handed UNEP a unique challenge and a unique tool to become a 'meaner leaner' organization that is more relevant on the ground and better



able to respond to countries' needs. Currently we are often hampered by internal processes and administrative bottlenecks. I firmly believe we can change this.

I want to ensure that, at the end of my first four year term, UNEP becomes an ever brighter beacon of intellectual leadership and scientific assessment, and an energetic catalyst for the deep and meaningful policy reforms and revolutions so urgently needed world-wide.

Q: 2005 marked the United Nations' 60th Anniversary. In your view how has the role of the organization evolved over the years and is it still relevant – in particular in the environmental field?

I have high hopes for the United Nations and for the environmental cause. First of all, we are in the midst of a far-reaching reform of the UN system and second, as I have outlined, UNEP is also changing as an organization. There is a real tide of opinion that is now running in the direction of environmentally sustainable economies which we must take advantage of. A new generation increasingly recognizes that, while money may make the world go round, what makes money go round is ultimately the trillions of dollars generated by the planet's goods and services: These include the air cleaning and climate-change countering processes of forests to the fisheries and the coastline protection power of coral reefs.

Some of the mechanisms and bodies that have taken shape over recent months offer real opportunities that we must seize. I am talking of the UN Secretary-General's high-level panel on UN system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. But also of the UN General Assembly's informal consultations on the institutional framework for the UN system's environmental activities, chaired by ambassadors from Mexico and Switzerland.

For the first time in two decades, environment and the institutional architecture are receiving the highest levels of attention. We have a golden opportunity to reform the institutions and structures that deliver global and regional environmental policy. It is a chance we must not let slip away.

Q: The 2006 oil spill in Lebanon has been defined as "one of the worst environmental disasters to affect the Mediterranean Sea". What was UNEP's role and added value in dealing with this incident?

We were very concerned over the impact of the oil spill on coastal communities who were affected by this environmental tragedy. Another concern were the short and long term impacts on the marine

environment, including the biodiversity upon which so many people depend for their livelihoods and living through tourism and fishing. The Eastern Mediterranean is a biodiversity hotspot, a vital habitat for species such as bluefin tuna and sea turtles.

UNEP, together with many international partners, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), European Commission, as well as NGOs, both international and local, was able to coordinate assessment and clean-up activities on the ground as soon as the security situation would allow it. We were able to draw on the services and experience of some of the leading experts in the field and also draw public attention to the situation by a concerted media strategy which included a website which was constantly updated, as well as press releases and interviews.

Q: There was some international criticism about the slow reaction of international organizations such as UNEP in dealing with the clean up operations. How do you view UNEP's involvement following the oil spill?

The inter-agency cooperation that we achieved during the first days and weeks of the Lebanon crisis is a good example of how I think we should work in the future. The main reason for the delay was not down to the slow reaction of the international community, it was because of the ongoing hostilities which made any assessment or clean-up work impossible. With the coming into force of the ceasefire and then the lifting of the blockade, we were able to move quickly and start addressing the most immediate environmental concerns on the ground: the oil

spill, but other environmental and public health concerns as well.

Q: After three decades the MAP process is still going strong. How do you see MAP's short term and longer term priorities develop over the coming years?

The birth of the Mediterranean Action Plan thirty years ago helped to kick-start a process that has blossomed into a Regional Seas Programme that today encompasses 18 regions and 140 coastal states and territories. The Mediterranean is one of the world's most culturally diverse and populous regions. It also harbours a number of biodiversity hotspots and provides essential ecosystem services. MAP's initiatives have been a beacon for many other regional seas and have even helped stabilize the region. The Barcelona Convention was the first political and diplomatic framework under which countries could share and develop dialogues: Greece and Turkey, the Arab countries and Israel, during the tense years of the 70s and 80s and later on, the divided countries of the former Yugoslav Republic, all worked together to protect the Mediterranean under this fruitful UNEP programme.

MAP has also developed many strong partnerships: with the Global Environment Facility, with European Union bodies and other UN bodies, and this has made it one of the major players in the region. I see MAP continuing along its chosen path of being an agenda-setter and a facilitator in the region and on a global scale, and look forward to working closely with MAP in coming years.



Clean up & Scoop the Med 2006

This year, hundreds of students gathered to clean up Lady's Mile beach in Limassol, in Cyprus. The event, leading up to the organization of BLUEweek-MEDday in September in Turkey, was also made possible by the collaboration of the Cyprus Centre for Environmental Research and Education (KYKPEE).

A legion of volunteers armed with gloves, rakes and rubbish bags invaded 800 Mediterranean beaches during the summer of 2006. The occasion was Clean up & Scoop the Med, the international campaign organized by Legambiente since 1995, and promoted this year by INFO/RAC-MAP, the Italian Information and Communication Centre of the Barcelona Convention. The objective was not only to clean up the environment from the tonnes of plastic and other solid waste that are dumped into our, but also to monitor the state of Mediterranean coasts using photography.

"This year's edition mobilised over 200 NGOs from the 21 Mediterranean Countries, with each group collecting an average of 400 kg of solid waste", declared Michela Presta, the campaign coordinator for Legambiente. "More than 70% of the collected waste was plastic, followed by glass, paper, cigarettes and nylon. We should try to avoid littering, since solid waste can kill many marine animals, can cause chemical contamination, adverse aesthetic impact and repercussion on fisheries. Furthermore, the degradation of plastic products can last up to 1000 years."

Mediterranean coastal countries produce over 30 million tonnes of solid waste per year

As indicated in the UNEP/MAP Report on Environment and Development (RED) compiled by Blue Plan, "Mediterranean coastal countries produce some 30–40 million tonnes of solid waste per year. A consistent yet not quantifiable proportion of it ends up in our seas".



This is the reason why Legambiente decided to join forces with INFO/RAC to organize Clean up & Scoop the Med in Cyprus, during the Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development.

Since 1995, Clean-up the Med has succeeded in mobilising more than 6.000 organisations, public institutions, schools and universities. It represents the basis for the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Environmental Network (EEN), an association of NGOs, public and private institutions (municipal councils, schools etc.) that cooperate to promote and support peaceful and sustainable development in the Mediterranean Region.

For the 2006 edition, an innovative idea was introduced: besides classifying and quantifying the collected waste, volunteers were encouraged to take pictures of degraded areas to help build an image database of the state of the Mediterranean environment.

"The image database will represent a piece in the "large jigsaw puzzle" of the state of the Mediterranean coastline: an important record of the progress or regression made on our beaches every year", concluded Michela Presta.

The United Nations of the Mediterranean One

UNEP/MAP COMPONENTS

- MEDU (Secretariat) Athens - GREECE
- MEDPOL (Pollution Assessment and Control) Athens - GREECE
- BP/RAC (Environment and Development) Sophia Antipolis - FRANCE
- CP/RAC (Cleaner Production) Barcelona - SPAIN
- INFO/RAC (Information and Communications) Rome / Palermo - ITALY
- PAP/RAC (Integrated Coastal Area Management) Split - CROATIA
- REMPEC (Marine Pollution Emergency) Giza - MALTA
- SPA/RAC (Specially Protected Areas) Tunis - TUNISIA



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Mediterranean's most threatened marine species

The Mediterranean monk seal is in urgent need of protection. Once an abundant species loved by the Ancient Greeks, only around 500 Mediterranean and Atlantic monk seals are left. The main threats to this species are lack of food sources, killings by fishermen, bycatch in fishing nets, habitat disturbance and sea pollution.

In Ancient Greece, Mediterranean monk seals were placed under the protection of Poseidon and Apollo because they showed a great love for sea and sun. One of the first coins, minted around 500 BC, depicted the head of a monk seal, and the creatures were immortalised in the writings of Homer, Plutarch and Aristotle. To fishermen and seafarers, catching sight of the animals frolicking in the waves or loafing on the beaches was considered to be an omen of good fortune.

Recorded in history over 2,500 years ago, today the monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) is one of the most rare animal species in the world and one of the six most-threatened animals on Earth.

Despite being listed as critically endangered under the CITES Convention (Appendix I) and the IUCN classification (Red List) as well as classified in need of strict protection under EU law, the monk seal remains the most endangered marine mammal in Europe.

From historically large populations of thousands of animals, the current population is estimated at 400 – 500 individuals spread over Mediterranean and West African countries. About 200 – 250 monk seals live in Greek waters.

Its genetic group includes 3 species: the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) and the Hawaiian monk seal (*Monachus schauinslandi*), estimated as endangered, as well as the Caribbean monk seal (*Monachus tropicalis*), which has been extinct since 1952.

Human activities and monk seals: an unbalanced coexistence

Monk seals are timid animals and very vulnerable to any form of human disturbance. By the end of the 1900s, the Mediterranean monk seal population has declined dramatically due to increasing human impacts such as excessive hunting, habitat destruction, marine pollution, disturbance by tourists, depletion of fish stocks, and competition with local traditional fishermen.

The monk seal originally used to inhabit sandy coastlines and islands, however, due to the extensive use of the sea and seaside, they now hide in sea caves. Human encroachment and human pressure are reducing the available habitat for monk seals and further isolating pockets of this already fragmented species.

Human access to the seals' natural habitat areas, curious tourists, or unscrupulous diving guides, disturb the seals and hamper their reproduction. Mass tourism has had a significant impact on this already declining species.



■ Mediterranean Monk Seal Distribution

Their new habitats are also inadequate, as females are forced to pup in sea caves, which are relatively undisturbed areas but particularly exposed to rough waves and bad weather conditions. This situation threatens the survival of baby seals, which may be swept away and injured or drowned during storms.

The increasing intensity of maritime traffic and the consequent increase in pollution of the marine environment can endanger seals and even reduce fish stocks. Pollutants enter the sea through dumping from ships or land-based activities, maritime accidents and domestic or agricultural run-off. Biotoxins such as toxic algae are also a fatal poison leading to massive mortality. It paralyzes seals when they dive and makes them sink.

Other threats to the population are represented by decreased food availability, incidental capture in fishing gear and deliberate killings by traditional fishermen who see monk seals as competitors for increasingly scarce resources.

Protecting the Mediterranean Monk seal

IFAW – the International Fund for Animal Welfare – has been engaged in protecting this critically endangered marine mammal for many years. It has worked on improving scientific knowledge on monk seal population and threats with its research vessel Song of the Whale, and has funded several local projects aimed at protecting, restoring and rehabilitating monk seals, including through rescue operations. Raising public and political awareness at European and international level are also part of IFAW's work on this issue.

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1976-2006: 30 YEARS PROTECTING THE MEDITERRANEAN

To mark 30 years of the Barcelona Convention and to commemorate UN DAY (24 October), UNEP/MAP launched an exhibition highlighting the major activities, achievements and milestones of the organization.

“You live in the Mediterranean. Is your sea protected?” was the theme of the exhibition held under the patronage of Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Dora Bakoyannis.

Paul Mifsud, Coordinator of UNEP/MAP, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Eviros Stylianidis opened the exhibition. Over one hundred guests attended the event, including representatives of Greek Ministries, Ambassadors, representatives of UNEP/MAP regional activities centres, NGOs, and other civil society members.

Extensive media coverage was given to the event. Speakers included Yannis Vournas, Director General for the Ministry of Environment, on behalf of Deputy Foreign Minister Stavros Kaloyannis, and Deputy Foreign Minister Eviros Stylianidis. A video message by UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner was broadcasted and a presentation about 30 years of MAP activities made by Paul Mifsud.

As Yannis Vournas reminded at the opening “the Mediterranean is a sea that from ancient times onwards has formed a link among the peoples living around it and has been the cradle of many civilizations, as well as a centre for economic and commercial development. At the same time, it is an area with substantial marine wealth and physical beauty. However, as time went by and as a result of an intensive economic and industrial development, severe environmental problems arose, given also the fact that the Mediterranean is a closed sea. [...]

[...] The environment is the neighbourhood in which we live and where our children will continue living. It is our home and its protection is a duty for all of us. The well-known adage “the environment does



not belong to us, we have borrowed it from future generations” really encapsulates the meaning of environmental protection.”

Following the Athens event, Spain, the depository country of the Barcelona Convention, organised a ceremony in Barcelona on 30th November, where representatives of the Spanish national and regional authorities joined UNEP/MAP Coordinator Paul Mifsud in this commemorative event.

Over the last 30 years MAP has contributed a great deal towards pollution reduction in the Mediterranean.

From the political point of view, MAP has been a unique process for one key aspect: developing or developed countries, large or small, with different cultures and traditions sit around the table on an equal footing and work together for a better Mediterranean environment for the present generation and generations to come.

The Secretariat of UNEP/MAP, which has been hosted in Athens by the Greek Government since 1982, coordinates the efforts of the Mediterranean countries, Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, to protect the Mediterranean Sea.



● MED CALENDAR



Date	Name of Meeting	Venue	Contact
January 2007			
18–19 January	RAC Directors meeting	Athens, Greece	T. Hema
February 2007			
5–6 February	MED POL Workshop on Eutrophication Assessment and Monitoring	Anavissos, Greece	F.S. Civili
12–15 February	3rd meeting of the Working Group on ICZM Protocol	Loutraki, Greece	T. Hema I. Trumbic
March 2007			
26–28 March	Extraordinary Meeting of MED POL Coordinators	Mytilini, Greece	F.S. Civili F. Abousamra
May – June 2007			
31 May – 1 June	MCSD meeting	Turkey	P. Mifsud
June (to be confirmed)	BLUEweek	Morocco	INFO/RAC
October 2007			
16–19 October	MAP Focal Points meeting	Athens, Greece	T. Hema
December 2007			
10–13 December	CoP15 – Meeting of the Contracting Parties	Almeria, Spain	T. Hema