



# Securing a Greener Future for the Otranto Strait

POLICY BRIEF





## FACING UP TO ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN ALBANIA AND ITALY

The Coastal Area Management Programme (CAMP) was launched in 1989 to respond to local, national, and regional priorities in the Mediterranean. Country-driven CAMP projects are an example of local-level implementation of the Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) to the Barcelona Convention.

CAMP Otranto is the first programme to test the CAMP methodology on a transboundary scale in order to reinforce sustainable coastal development across the South Adriatic. The overarching goals of the project are contributing to the reduction of marine litter, preventing pollution, and supporting biodiversity conservation. It uses ICZM and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), promoting the exchange of expertise and best practice across borders. This approach to coastal planning recognises the diverse natural, legal and socio-economic contexts in the project coastal zones of Vlorë (Albania) and Puglia (Italy) regions, along with marine areas both within and beyond national jurisdictions.

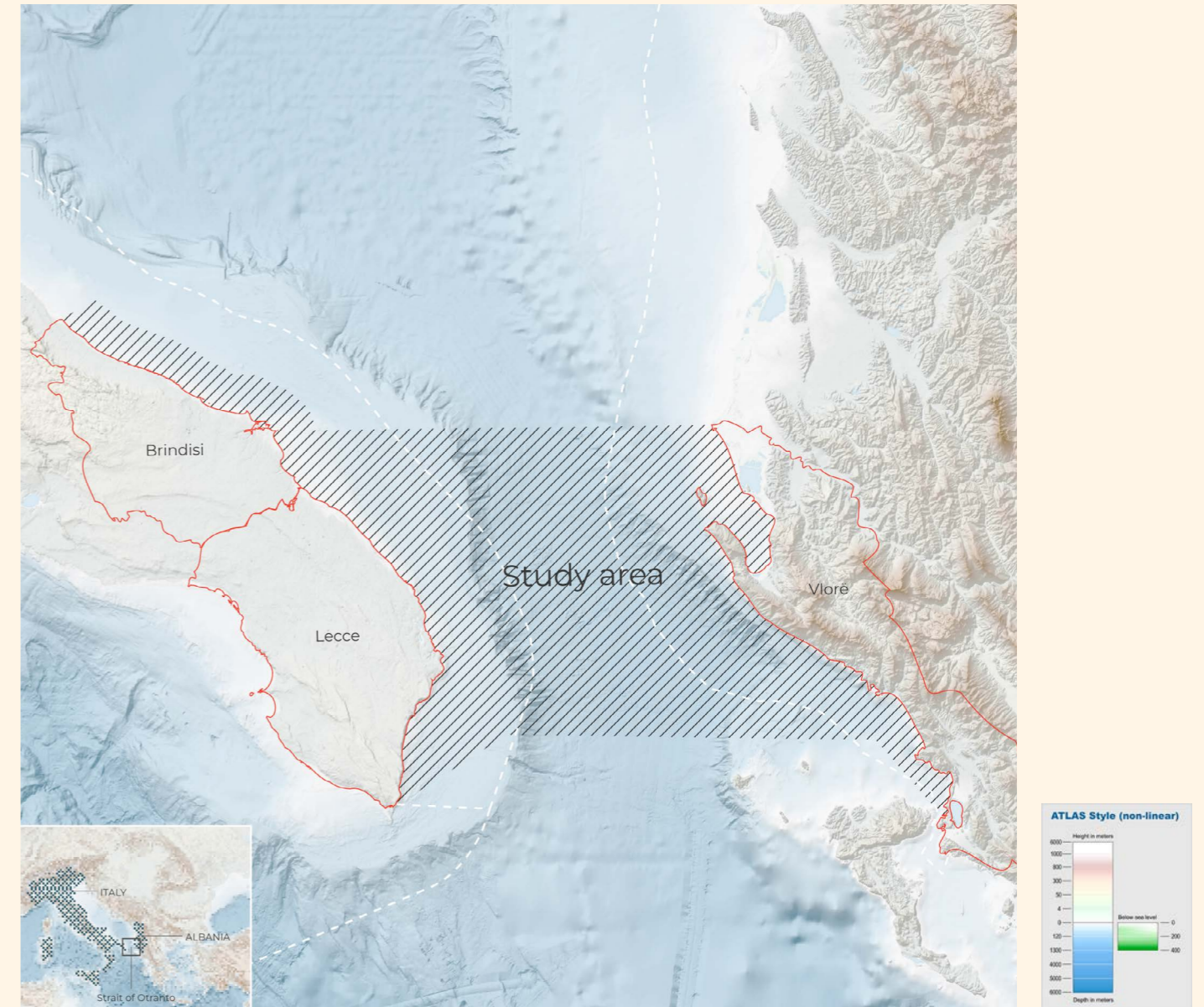
This policy brief (2023) underscores the significance of collaborative efforts, identifies crucial challenges, and provides strategic recommendations to establish a sustainable framework for the region's future. They are grounded in four key expert studies, developed within the framework of this project:

1. Feasibility Study for Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs) in the Otranto area
2. ICZM Methodological Guidance towards reaching Good Environmental Status (GES)
3. ICZM System and Audit Scheme (ICZM SAS)
4. Concept Note on Marine Spatial Planning in Albania

## THE OTRANTO STRAIT OCCUPIES A VITAL STRATEGIC POSITION

The Strait of Otranto is nestled between the Southern Adriatic and the Northern Ionian Sea with a mere 72 km separating Kepi i Gjuhës, Karaburun (Albania) and Punta Palascia to the east of Salento (Italy). Since ancient times, it has been instrumental in regulating the passage of maritime traffic between the Mediterranean and its Adriatic Sea.

The policy brief highlights project findings and recommendations for sustainable management and planning in the project area which encompasses the provinces of Brindisi and Lecce in Italy's Puglia region and Albania's Vlorë region. It is an area of great natural value with marine habitats and species protected as part of Marine Protected Areas, Natura 2000 and Emerald sites, National Parks, Managed Natural Reserve, Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI), Ecologically or Biologically Significant Area (EBSA) of the South Adriatic and Ionian Sea, and Cetaceans Critical Habitats (CCH).



# TAKING ACTION

The driving force behind Transboundary CAMP Otranto is to value and preserve local economy and the environment through sustainable management and planning.

As an ecologically significant space, the Otranto area is facing pressing environmental challenges due to its remarkably diverse and variable ecosystems. The key project findings recommend actions that will preserve natural heritage and secure a sustainable future for the region.

These biodiversity-rich waters shelter an array of Mediterranean megafauna species and have a variety of seabed types, particularly the *Posidonia oceanica* meadows which are designated as a priority habitat for conservation under the Habitats Directive (Dir 92/43/CEE). Not only do they serve as migratory corridors for shark and tuna species, but you can also find Cuvier's beaked whales, striped dolphins, common bottlenose dolphins, and loggerhead turtles here. The Vlora area is emerging as a potential habitat for monk seals, with a noticeable increase in monk seal sightings over the last five years. It's due to this diversity of important marine life that the Otranto area needs adaptive and integrated management to develop the most effective levels of environmental protection.

## A TRANSBOUNDARY APPROACH FOR MITIGATING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The Adriatic Sea's remarkable productivity has resulted in over-exploitation due to overfishing, intensive urban development, agriculture, mass tourism, and maritime traffic. These generate environmental pressures associated with marine pollution (especially marine litter), degradation of biodiversity and transformations of marine and coastal morphology. Anthropogenic pressures on the coastal zone necessitate a transboundary integrated management approach to prevent conflicts, maximize benefits, and safeguard both marine and coastal ecosystems.

## EROSION AND THE RISK OF FLOODING



The Puglia region has lost 31% of its coastline during the last decades, whilst its low-elevation coastal zones (up to 5 meters above sea level) face an imminent risk of flooding. In the Vlora region, a staggering 220 km<sup>2</sup> of low coastal elevation zone is at risk.

## IMPACT OF MARITIME INDUSTRIES



More maritime traffic in the Adriatic has intensified the threats to megafauna from collisions and pollution (acoustic, chemical, and biological). Added pressures from fisheries and impacts from the hydrocarbon industry (as seen in the offshore Puglia area) are exacerbating the environmental threat to its highest levels.

## DEEP-SEA TRAWLING



The bamboo coral, a biodiversity hotspot, is at great risk due to the impacts of bottom trawling. This practice results in the destruction or removal of coral, leading to the degradation of continental-slope ecosystems which take decades or even centuries to recover.

## ACCUMULATION OF MARINE LITTER

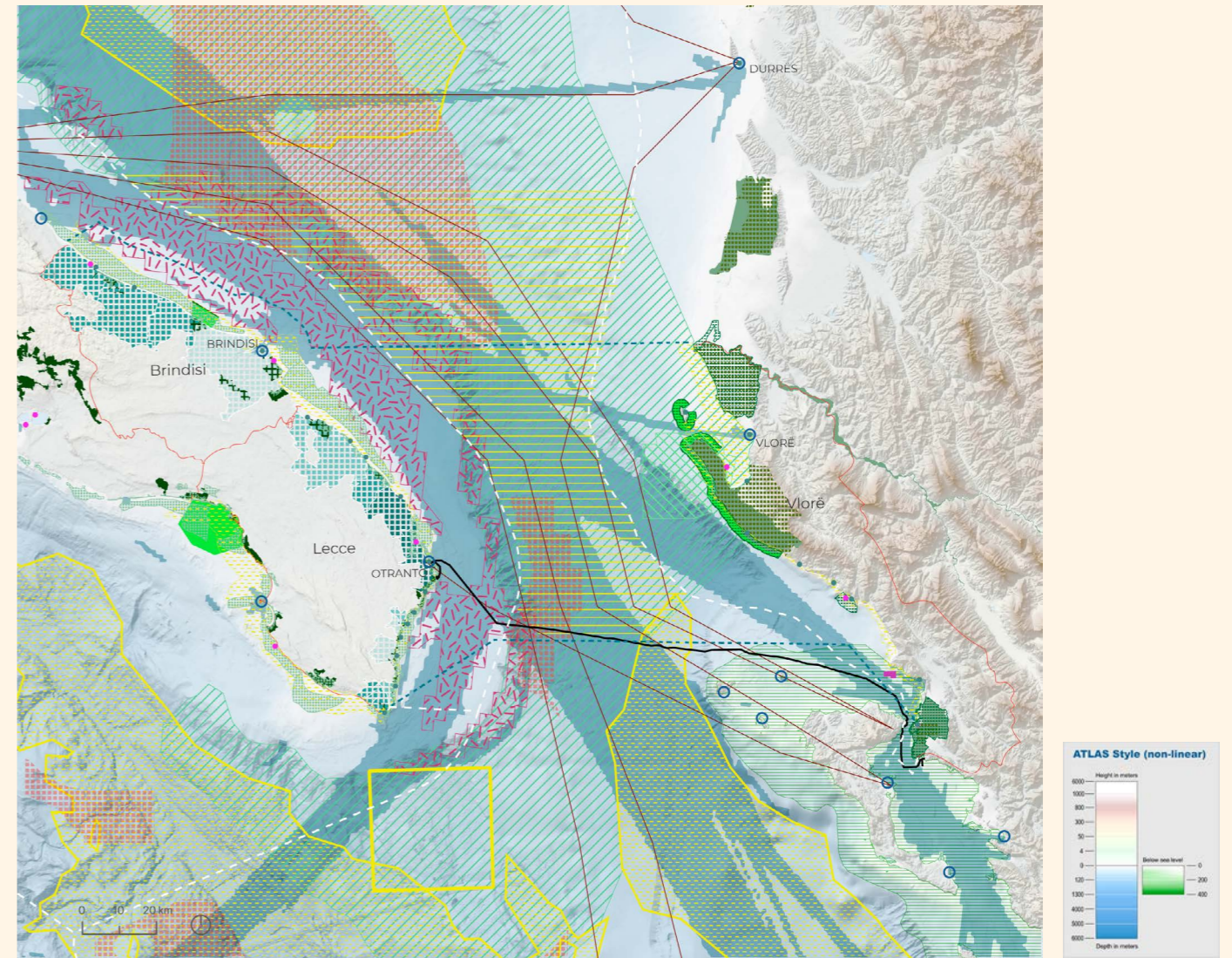


In the Adriatic-Ionian region, 91% of litter is plastic. Large pieces of polystyrene, cotton bud sticks, drinks caps and lids, mussel and oyster nets, crisp packets, sweet wrappers, glass and ceramic fragments are among the most common types of litter. Lines and ropes stand out as the most abundant marine debris, especially near important ports, confirming the impact of maritime activities in the area.

## URBANISATION AND TOURISM



The coastal landscape has been deeply altered by anthropogenic transformations affecting the morphology, quality and identity of the region. The increase in tourism infrastructure has had damaging consequences for marine ecosystems, biodiversity and water quality.



### LEGEND:

- Study area
- Territorial waters 12 Nautical Miles
- NUTS 3 Administrative borders
- Touristic pressure (presence/populations, ISTAT)
  - high
  - low
- Marinas
- Maritime transport (high density)
- Main ports
- EBSA
- CCH
- IMMA
- MPA - SPAMI
- NAT 2000 Protected areas
- Regional protected natural areas (Apulia)
- EMERALD network Protected areas
- Albanian Protected areas (DCM N°59-60)
- IUCN - Protected Areas Albania
- Suitable areas - PITESAI
- Telecommunication cables
- FRA established
- FRA proposal
- No trawling within -50m or 3nm from the coast
- Protection of deep-sea habitats and resources (no trawling -1000m)
- High fishing effort
- Aquaculture facilities
- Area designated for aquaculture Rezervat peshku
- Powerline



## KEY CHALLENGES — NAVIGATING THE PATH AHEAD

### 1. DATA GATHERING



Insufficient availability of relevant data limits the exchange of information, impeding mutually informed decision-making and coordinated strategies for sustainable development of the area.

### 2. COORDINATED POLICIES



Lack of coordination among different policies and occasional inconsistencies in national regulations between Italy and Albania can lead to differing land use practices and resource exploitation.

### 3. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Engaging local communities, industries, and NGOs from both states is crucial for future transboundary collaboration.

### 4. CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE



The area's vulnerability to climate change requires the development of effective adaptive strategies.

# RECOMMENDATION ONE

Using ABMTs at the right level of cooperation for better results

The complexity of the project area requires a transboundary integrated management approach. By building on the existing scientific foundations, future actions by Albania and Italy could use existing legal mechanisms to establish one or more ABMTs to create a flexible, coordinated, and enduring collaborative framework.

After reviewing primary causes, pressures, environmental effects, and existing management tools, this policy brief calls for both states to start expanding the protection status of existing designated natural areas with long-term ambitions to establish new spatial instruments for conservation and management of sea uses.

## TWO OPTIONS FOR ABMTs IN THE OTRANTO STRAIT

The first option proposes Albania and Italy utilize legal tools within or beyond their territorial seas by using ABMTs on a case-by-case basis within a flexible and permanent scheme of 'a single complex project area.' This action will help achieve the 30 x 30 target, for both the Kunming-Montreal CBD targets and the Post-2020 Barcelona Convention targets.

Option two includes all the recommendations from the first option but advocates taking cooperation to an advanced level by incorporating ABMTs into a permanent and adaptable integration framework. Albania and Italy would still retain flexibility whilst establishing a higher level of integration.

### OPTION ONE: Establishing or enlarging ABMTs in the area

#### ALBANIA

- Extending Marine National Park of Porto Palermo
  - Protect key habitats and species
  - Restore degraded areas
  - Ensure sustainable use by local communities

#### ITALY

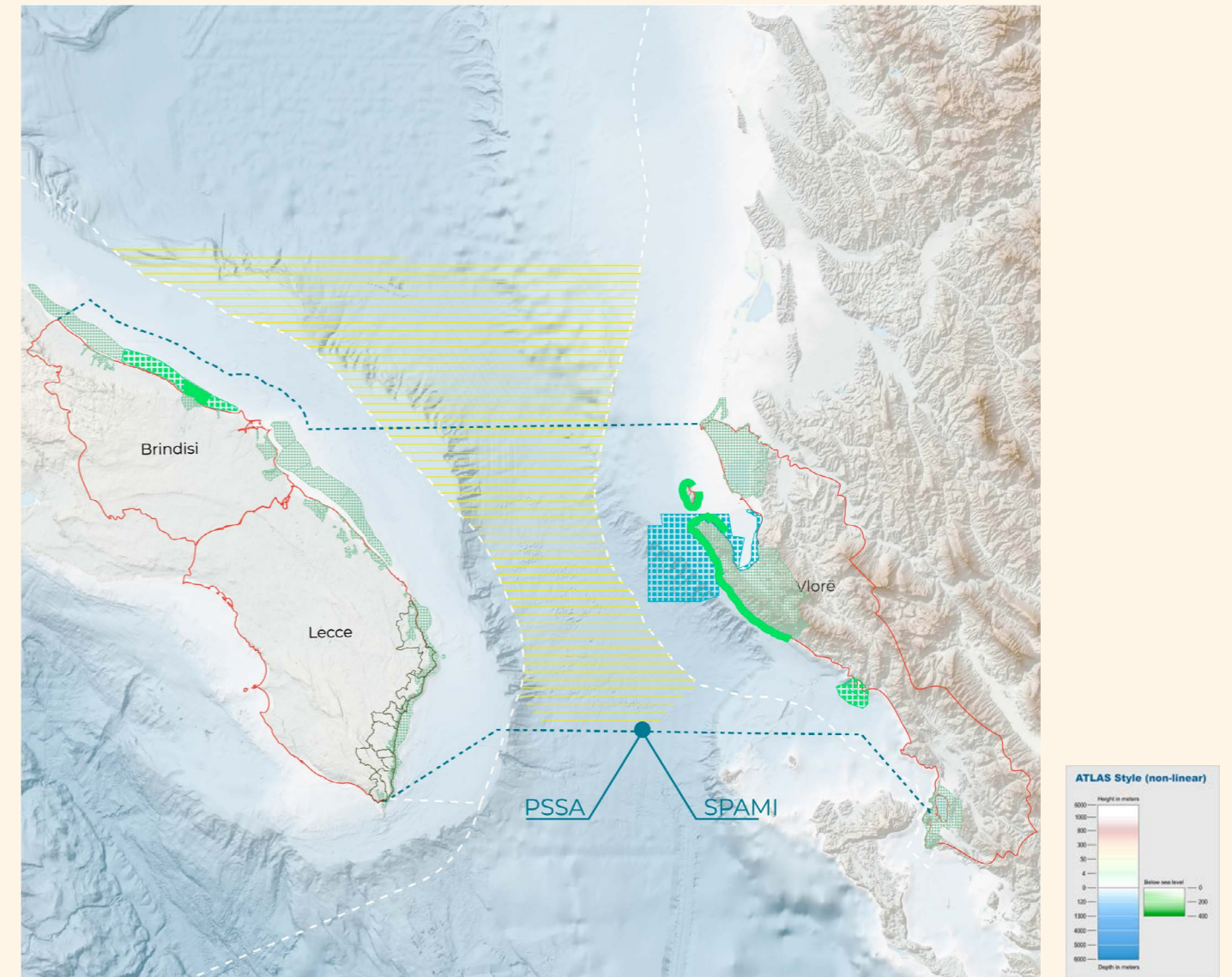
- Extending Torre Guaceto Marine Protected Area
  - Create a distinct, integrated safeguarded region
  - Enhance protection effectiveness
  - Alleviate fishing pressure in key zones
- Designation of the Marine Protected area of Capo d'Otranto
  - Eleven coastal municipalities have expressed interest
  - CORISMA project gathering data and performing technical investigations

#### OTHER ABMTs

- Establishing a Fisheries Restricted Area (FRA)
  - Protect vulnerable marine ecosystems, including nursery and spawning areas
  - Creating different zones and related prohibitions/conditions for fishing activities
  - Implementing monitoring, control, and surveillance measures for submission to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)
- Establishing Transboundary Specially Protected Area of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)
  - Setting up transboundary SPAMI for joint conservation of specific species and habitats
  - Prohibit disturbing and catching species
  - Reduce negative impacts from anthropogenic activities
  - Establish monitoring mechanisms
- Designating a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)
  - Apply for a PSSA under the International Maritime Organization (IMO) with either binding or recommended protective measures to reduce ship pollution and the risk of maritime incidents

#### Identifying areas of interest for additional studies towards MSP and ABMTs

- Reconciling environmental protection with socio-economic sustainability within the context of MSP in the Vlorë Bay and the offshore area of the Karaburun peninsula



**LEGEND:**

ABMT Agreement	Existing MPAs	Existing protected areas (Nat2000+Regional+IUCN+Emerald)	Area of interest for further studies towards MSP
Territorial waters 12 Nautical Miles	Coastal municipalities interested in the MPA "Capo d'Otranto – grotte Zinzulusa e Romanelli – Capo di Leuca" designation process	MPAs extension	FRA proposal
NUTS 3 Administrative border			

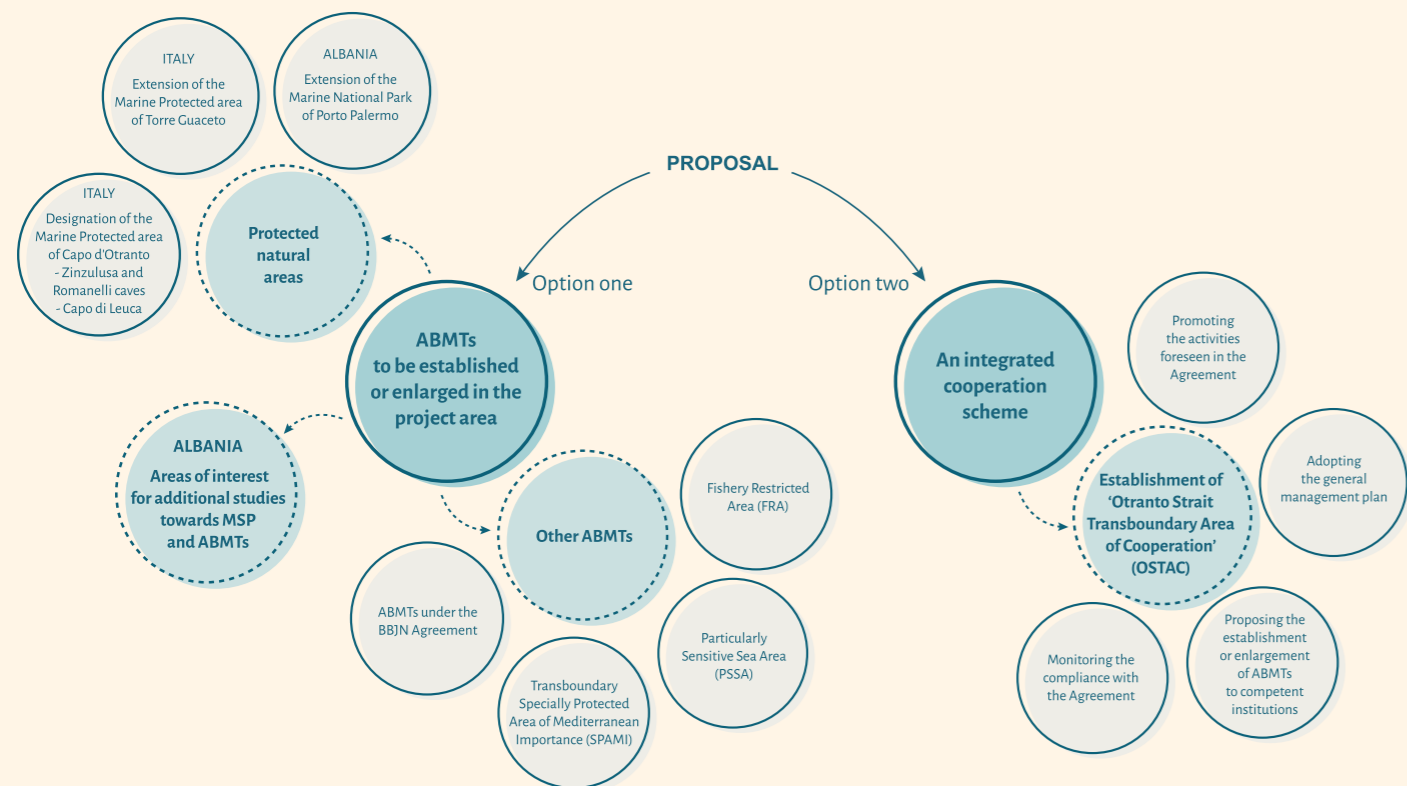
**OPTION TWO:  
Creating an integrated  
cooperation scheme**

Forming the 'Otranto Strait Transboundary Area of Cooperation' (OSTAC) to enhance integration and facilitation of different funding initiatives through a coherent coordination scheme.

- **Bilateral Agreement**
  - Covering broad coastal area, including waters under different legal regimes
  - Integrating different sectoral actions
  - Aligning to different ABMTs

- **Shared coordination body**
  - Represents two State Parties
  - Involves institutions, local bodies and operators based in the territory to jointly implement the management plan
- **Management plan**
  - Identifies objectives, scope, measures, and the authorities responsible for their implementation
- **Monitoring system**
  - In place to monitor the implementation of relevant measures of the management plan

**SCHEME PREVIEW**





## RECOMMENDATION TWO

Using economic activities to boost the ICZM process

Economic activities actively contribute to ICZM through sustainable resource use and ecosystem preservation. Greener economic development demands an understanding of the local context that spans environmental, cultural, economic, and social aspects.



The ICZM System and Audit Scheme (ICZM SAS), developed under the CAMP Otranto project, assesses, manages, and bolsters local marine and coastal sustainability. It's a voluntary scheme that adheres to ICZM principles for economic activities, and its influence ranges from local to Mediterranean levels.

### OPTIONS FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES THAT STRENGTHEN SUSTAINABLE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT



**INCLUSIVE, PRODUCTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS**



**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**



**SMALL-SCALE, RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE**



**REDUCTION, REUSE AND RECYCLING OF WASTE**



**GREEN PORTS**



**ENERGY-EFFICIENT SYSTEMS**



**RENEWABLE ENERGY**



**GREEN TECHNOLOGIES**

Participatory decision-making that involves communities through workshops and consultations is crucial. National authorities are encouraged to prompt key stakeholders in local communities to pursue the ICZM label certificate by facilitating sustainable coastal development and advancing the goals outlined in the framework of the Barcelona Convention.





## RECOMMENDATION THREE

### Adopting sustainable practices

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The project partners have developed a specialized methodology that incorporates a quantitative scoring system to evaluate the cumulative impacts of environmental pressures.

The assessment is important for providing strategic guidance to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) through Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). It links the Ecological Objectives (EOs) of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) with the driving economic activities and their imminent pressures, and takes into account the condition of the coastal environment, its landscapes, and cultural heritage.

A preliminary assessment confirmed that human activities are putting huge pressures on the coastal environment and are a significant risk to biodiversity, water quality, and the ecosystem.

### POLICY RESPONSES TO MITIGATE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 📌 Responsible urban planning
- 📌 Development of local governance tools addressing the sustainability needs of local communities and enhancing transboundary cooperation
- 📌 Enhancement of environmental impact monitoring and assessment
- 📌 Development of conservation and restoration strategies
- 📌 Guidelines and policies for sustainable coastal economies, primarily addressing tourism, agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture
- 📌 Incentives for sustainable and eco-friendly practices
- 📌 Capacity building and engagement of local communities

Ensuring the preservation and protection of coastal zones requires a dedicated focus on sustainable management and the proactive mitigation of harmful impacts. The urgency of incorporating these practices is imperative to guaranteeing the long-term well-being of the Otranto Strait coastal regions, and their resilience to climate change.

## RECOMMENDATION FOUR

### Marine Spatial Planning in Albania

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Marine Spatial Planning is key to achieving a shared vision for sustainable development of the Mediterranean marine areas and supports the implementation of the Protocol on ICZM.

Within the context of the Barcelona Convention, the Contracting Parties are aiming to harmonize their approach to MSP. Since Albania initiated accession negotiations with the European Union (EU) in 2022, EU Directives must be incorporated into national legislation. This is why Albania is intensifying its efforts to align its legal and policy framework with the provisions of the EU MSP directive and the Barcelona Convention.

The rapid transformation of Albania's coastal economy requires MSP to accommodate growing opportunities for the blue economy while securing the preservation and restoration of the marine environment and strengthening national capacities.

Data collection, according to the Barcelona Convention and EU standards, is vital for an integrated MSP process. Incorporating wider data sets, which include the entire *marine and coastal area*, should result in a more productive analysis addressing land-sea interactions, ecosystem approach, as well as challenges and risks associated with climate change.

## RECOMMENDATION FIVE

### Investment and capacity building

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Both states should strive to secure funding to increase capacity for Integrated Coastal Zone Management practices. By pursuing collaborative design and investing in common research initiatives to support data collection, sharing know-how and co-developing projects we can foster sustainability in the Adriatic region.

## CONCLUSION

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**Transboundary Integrated Coastal Zone Management is crucial for addressing the environmental, social, and economic challenges faced by the Otranto Strait. Collaborative efforts between Italy and Albania, along with active involvement from stakeholders, are essential to safeguarding the region's natural heritage and securing its greener future.**





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