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**Inception meeting of the GEF Adriatic Project - Implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning**

Tirana, Albania, 29 May 2018

**Report of the meeting**

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## **Introduction**

1. The Inception Meeting of the GEF project titled “Implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning” (hereinafter the GEF Adriatic Project) was held on 29 May 2018 in Tirana, Albania at the premises of the MAK Albania Hotel. The primary objective of the meeting was to discuss and agree upon the implementation strategy of the GEF Adriatic Project, which aims at restoring the ecological balance of the Adriatic Sea through implementing the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP).
2. The GEF Adriatic Project also aims to accelerate the implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol and the mainstreaming of the monitoring obligations of the Barcelona Convention’s other protocols into the ecosystem-based UN Environment/MAP Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP). Furthermore, consideration will also be given to the European Union Directives relevant for the Adriatic Sea area, in particular the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Maritime Spatial Planning Framework Directive (MSPFD), as well as, where relevant, the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The project will be implemented in Albania and Montenegro.

## **Attendance**

3. The meeting was attended by 53 participants from the eligible countries (22 from Albania and 31 from Montenegro) as well as five international experts.
4. Also represented at the meeting was the leading executing agency for the GEF Adriatic Project – the Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan (UN Environment/MAP) – and the co-executing partners, the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) and the Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC). A representative of MED POL also participated in the meeting.
5. The list of participants is attached as Annex I to this report.

## **Opening of the Meeting (Agenda Item 1)**

6. The meeting was opened at 10:15 a.m. on 29 May 2018 by Mr. Zamir Dedej, the GEF Adriatic Project Coordinator for Albania. Mr. Yegor Volovik, GEF Portfolio Manager of UN Environment, welcomed the participants and announced that the GEF Adriatic Project was now ready for implementation, following some delays with its launch. Mr. Dedej and Mr. Ešef Husić, General Director for Climate Change and Mediterranean Affairs of Montenegro, both expressed their gratitude as well as the importance of the project for their respective countries. Mr. Lorenzo Galbiati, UN Environment/MAP Secretariat (hereinafter the Secretariat) greeted the participants and introduced the background and objectives of the meeting.

## **General Overview of the Project (Agenda item 2)**

7. The Secretariat outlined the main objectives of the Project, which are to restore the ecological balance of the Adriatic Sea through the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp), and to improve sub-regional management capacity through Marine

Spatial Planning (MSP). Key elements of the project budget were presented, along with the co-financing contributions of the participating countries. The Secretariat then explained in detail the project's structure and timeline, the executing modalities, the three project components and related outcomes and outputs. In closing, the Secretariat highlighted the importance of the GEF Adriatic Project for enhancing the ability of Albania and Montenegro to make positive progress towards socioeconomic and environmental objectives in their coastal zones.

**Presentation on the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) in the Mediterranean Sea: Good Environmental Status (GES), Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) (Agenda item 3)**

8. The presentation on the Ecosystem Approach in the Mediterranean Sea was opened by Ms. Jelena Knežević, the MED POL Programme Officer. The ecosystem approach is the overarching principle of UN Environment/MAP and its policies. The representative of MED POL presented a brief history of the integration of EcAp into the MAP system, emphasizing the establishment of the EcAp Roadmap and its seven steps (agreed upon in 2008) which applied the ecosystem approach to the definition and achievement of Good Environmental Status (GES). She also presented the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP), adopted in 2016 by the Contracting Parties, recalling that this was a key achievement for the Mediterranean region. IMAP will make possible for the first time a quantitative, integrated analysis of the state of the marine and coastal environment in the Mediterranean, while also strengthening scientific data collection activities. Next, the ecological objectives and common indicators of the EcAp Roadmap were presented, as well as the 2017 Quality Status Report (QSR), which provides a state-of-the-art assessment of the status of the Mediterranean ecosystem. The representative of MED POL also outlined next steps, focusing on ongoing and future projects that will promote EcAp implementation in the Mediterranean (e.g., the EcAp MED Project, the MedProgramme, GFCM, etc.)
9. Mr. Anis Zarrouk (SPA/RAC) then illustrated the ecosystem approach as it is applied to Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and articulation with MSP and Integrated Coastal Zone Management.
10. Ms. Marina Marković (PAP/RAC) presented the principles of MSP, and the recent developments in this domain at the EU level (i.e., the EU Directive on Maritime Spatial Planning) and at the Mediterranean level (Conceptual Framework for MSP, adopted at COP in 2017). She also presented the related methodology that was successfully tested in Boka-kotorska Bay in Montenegro. This methodology consists of two major steps: first, to utilize the existing MSFD/EcAp processes and data to produce a marine vulnerability assessment, and second, to utilize the marine vulnerability assessment for MSP. The presentation concluded with a brief overview of the MSP Process.
11. Mr. Ivica Trumbić, an independent expert, underlined that the focus is increasing on MSP, including on how it can be employed to help achieve GES. As an example, he mentioned the International Forum for MSP held in Brussels (25 and 25 May 2018), attended by 160 participants from all over the world, and designed to initiate discussions about the development of international guidelines on cross-border MSP.

**Goals and Expectations of the Participating Countries: Albania and Montenegro (Agenda item 4)**

## **A. Montenegro**

12. Ms. Ivana Stojanović, the GEF Adriatic Project Coordinator for Montenegro, presented Montenegro's goals and expectations for the project, and then outlined the relevant strategic and action documents (including the National Strategy for ICZM and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development); the legal framework (including international conventions); and Montenegro's national monitoring programme. For many MSFD Descriptors/EcAp indicators, details were provided on sampling locations and parameters. Other initiatives contributing to MSFD and IMAP implementation were presented as well, including relevant national activities and complementary projects. The process of transposing MSFD requirements into Montenegro's national legislation was thoroughly explained. Finally, the GEF Adriatic Project Coordinator for Montenegro highlighted the role of GEF projects in supporting MSP in non-EU countries and in enhancing the ability of countries to establish a systematic framework for monitoring biodiversity.

## **B. Albania**

13. The GEF Adriatic Project Coordinator for Albania recalled the importance of the coast and the sea to Albania's livelihood and economy and cited several current issues regarding management of marine and coastal areas in Albania. The main obstacles encountered include the very complex legislative framework, the large number of institutions lacking a clear scope of work, and ultimately the potential for overlap among the numerous laws and bylaws. He acknowledged that recently, however, the government has been taking a new approach and is establishing dedicated agencies that address the marine and coastal areas, whilst improving the coordination between the government and local institutions. In terms of the expectations and needs of Albania from the project, the GEF Adriatic Project Coordinator for Albania referred to improved collaboration between countries, partners, and institutions; a better institutional coordination and clear definition of responsibilities ('who is in charge of what'); and the aim to decrease pressures and inland pollution sources.

## **Draft Inception Report (Agenda item 5)**

14. The presentation on the draft inception report was opened by the Secretariat, which explained the structure of the inception phase and its main outcomes.
15. Mr. Daniel Cebrian-Menchero (SPA/RAC) continued the presentation by describing outcomes and outputs of Component 1 of the Project, "Consolidating common knowledge to utilize Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) as applied by UN Environment/MAP and Blue Growth in the Adriatic sub-region". Outcome 1 is focused on achieving consensus on achievement of GES of the Adriatic Sea. Its outputs are designed to update the assessment of the GES characteristics in the Adriatic Sea, and to develop measures to achieve GES. Outcome 2 refers to development of national IMAPs in Albania and Montenegro, with outputs related to the update of the database on marine and coastal biologically important marine areas in the two countries, and field surveys designed to collect the required data, amongst others.
16. Mr. Ivan Sekovski (PAP/RAC) followed with an overview of Component 2 of the project, "Integrating Marine Spatial Planning into planning process and capacity building for improved sub-regional environmental marine management". The related

Outcome 3 refers to the use of MSP to demonstrate how environmental status can be improved. Associated outputs include a draft marine spatial plan for a selected area in Montenegro, and a guidance document for the implementation of Marine Spatial Planning, applicable to all countries in the Adriatic region. The representative of PAP/RAC also explained Component 3 (“Knowledge management, Stakeholder involvement and Communication strategy”), citing a number of foreseen outputs designed to increase awareness of the use of MSP and to engage coastal stakeholders in MSP and EcAp processes.

17. The Secretariat added that the publicly available results of the GEF Adriatic Project can be promoted through the knowledge management platform of the forthcoming MedProgramme, in which both Albania and Montenegro will participate.

#### **Any Other Business (Agenda item 6)**

18. Participants from various Albanian and Montenegrin institutions expressed gratitude for the invitation to the Inception meeting and welcomed the initiation of the GEF Adriatic Project. Many said that the project will be of great benefit for both countries, and will also strengthen the collaboration between their institutions.
19. Some participants expressed concern regarding the lack of data relevant to marine and coastal environment in both countries, especially in Albania. It was acknowledged that one of the aims of the project is to address the lack of data. Field survey should cover what is possible in terms of data collection, but the project’s outcomes (and identified gaps) can serve as basis for additional funding in the future.
20. The participants also expressed their expectations that some of the urgent environmental issues will be addressed by the GEF Adriatic Project, such as contamination and litter in some Albanian catchments, and underwater hydrocarbon exploration in Montenegro. Mr Trubmić highlighted that it is crucial to include issues such as hydrocarbon exploration/extraction in the marine spatial plan.
21. It was emphasized that a participatory process on clean-up activities in Albania was initiated: the process encompasses several large river catchments in Albania and it will hopefully reduce the litter problem in the upcoming two to three years. There is also a framework agreement between Albania and Montenegro on the management of Buna/Bojana and Shkodra Lake Basin, considered as a positive step towards transboundary collaboration.
22. There was a plea by NGOs and local authorities to include them in a consistent manner in all phases of the GEF Adriatic Project. A good example of the potential for cooperation mentioned was the Blue Land Project in Albania, where a trial MSP was developed in a smaller area, featuring effective collaboration between all stakeholders and awareness-raising events.
23. The importance of a sub-regional approach was stressed. Participants declared that a comprehensive assessment on eutrophication and marine litter, for example, was not possible without sub-regional approach and transboundary cooperation in the Adriatic.
24. An open-source database on Mediterranean level being developed under PANACEA project, was mentioned along with a willingness for cooperation between the two projects. However, it does not appear that this database contains a great deal of assessment data for areas of the Adriatic.

#### **Recommendations of the Inception Meeting (Agenda item 7)**

25. The Participants to the Inception Meeting of the Implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning – GEF Adriatic Project, held in Tirana, Albania, 29 May 2018, commending the efforts of the governments of Albania and Montenegro, UN Environment, UN Environment/MAP, PAP/RAC, SPA/RAC, produced the following recommendations:

1. *Recognizes* the importance of and supports the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) in the Adriatic Sea with the aim to support Albania, Montenegro and the entire sub-region to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Adriatic Sea.
2. *Recognizes* the importance of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) and supports its execution in Albania and Montenegro in full coordination with the respective national priorities and in line with the relevant decisions taken by the Contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention.
3. *Recognizes* the importance and supports the use of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) based on the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp), as an important tool to make informed and coordinated decisions on the sustainable use of marine resources. This is particularly important for the Adriatic Sea and its sub-regional dimension.
4. *Welcomes* the efforts made by UN Environment, UN Environment/MAP, PAP/RAC and SPA/RAC to prepare a clear and comprehensive Inception Report providing detailed descriptions of the activities that will be executed in Albania and Montenegro.
5. *Welcomes* the cooperation and synergies between the governments and stakeholders of Albania and Montenegro as an effective mechanism to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in the Adriatic Sea.
6. *Acknowledges* with appreciation the wide and comprehensive discussion held with and the engagement of the relevant stakeholders during the inception phase, which is reflected in the definition of the activities to be executed in Albania and Montenegro.
7. *Recommends* to the Project Management Unit and all executing partners to fully refer to the Inception Report and the activities defined in this document with the view to efficiently and in a timely manner achieve all the outcomes and outputs identified in the Approved Project Document of the GEF Adriatic Project.
8. *Recommends* to the Project Steering Committee to adopt the Inception Report as a solid base to support the successful execution of the GEF Adriatic Project.

#### **Closure of the Inception Meeting (Agenda item 8)**

9. Mr. Yegor Volovik closed the Meeting at 1:30 p.m. on 29 May 2018.



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## **Annex II Annotated Agenda**

### **Introduction**

1. At the kind invitation of the Government of Albania, the Inception Meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project “Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning” (GEF Adriatic), will be hosted in Tirana, Albania, on 29 May 2018.
2. The objective of the Inception Meeting is to present to and discuss with the participants the agreements reached on the Project’s activities, workplan and budget. It also provides confirmation to the Project’s stakeholders that all conditions are met, provisions and legal agreements are in place and formalities have been concluded for a smooth start of the Project’s implementation.
3. The following annotations to the proposed provisional agenda for the present meeting were prepared by the Project Management Unit (PMU) to assist the meeting and its deliberations.

### **Agenda item 1: Opening of the Meeting**

4. The meeting will be opened at 10.00 on 29 May 2018 by the UN Environment/GEF International Water Task Manager, Mr. Yegor Volovik.
5. Opening statements will be made by:
  - a) H.E. Mr. Blendi Klosi, Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania, or his representative;
  - b) Mr. Gaetano Leone, Coordinator of the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention Secretariat, or his representative.

### **Agenda item 2: General Overview of the Project**

*Information Documents: UNEP/MED WG.448/Inf.5, Inf.17, Inf.18*

6. The PMU will present the main characteristics of the GEF Adriatic Project, its structure, outcomes, outputs and targets, together with an overview of the GEF portfolio projects under execution and preparation at the Barcelona Convention.
7. The participants to the Inception Meeting will discuss the importance of the GEF Adriatic Project with attention to its value for the sub-regional dimension in the Adriatic Sea.

### **Agenda item 3: Presentation on the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) in the Mediterranean Sea: Good Environmental Status (GES), Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP).**

*Information Documents: UNEP/MED WG.448/Inf.11, Inf.12, Inf.13, Inf.14, Inf.15, Inf.16*

8. Under this agenda item the PMU and execution partners will presents several overarching principles and tools of the Barcelona Convention, which are integrated in the GEF Adriatic Project.

### **Agenda item 4: Goals and Expectations of the Participating Countries: Albania and Montenegro**

9. Under this agenda item Albania and Montenegro will present the goals and expectations to be achieved through the execution of the GEF Adriatic Project.

**Agenda item 5: Draft Inception Report**

*Information Documents: UNEP/MED WG.448/Inf.6, Inf.7, Inf.8, Inf.9, Inf.10*

10. Under this agenda item the PMU and execution partners will present the Draft Inception Report, the revised Project Logical Framework, the revised Project Budget, Annexes H and Appendixes 6.

**Agenda item 6: Any Other Business**

11. Participants will be invited to discuss other matters that may require attention of the Inception Meeting.

**Agenda item 7: Recommendations of the Inception Meeting**

12. The recommendations of the Inception Meeting will be discussed and agreed for their submission to the Project Steering Committee Meeting, scheduled on 30 May 2018.

**Agenda item 8: Closure of the Inception Meeting**

13. It is expected that the Inception Meeting will be closed by Mr. Yegor Volovik at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, 29 May 2018.