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Summary of the 23rd meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols: 5-8 December 2023

The Mediterranean Sea is polluted by some 730 tonnes of plastic waste every day, and the Mediterranean region is warming 20% faster than the global average. Against this backdrop, the 23rd meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 23) to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and its Protocols gathered in Portorož, a picturesque town on the Slovenian coast.

COP 23, convened concurrently with the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai and for the first time since the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework. It also met in a year that marked significant progress towards a new international treaty to address plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. The Barcelona Convention serves as an example of how to translate such global environment and sustainability commitments into regional legal instruments and action.

The main outcome of the meeting was the [Portorož Ministerial Declaration](#), in which Contracting Parties commit, for instance, to: halt the degradation of marine and coastal biodiversity through implementation of the Mediterranean region's own Biodiversity Framework; advance decarbonization; address plastic pollution; make every effort to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed; and involve youth in environmental decision making.

Six main issues constituted the backbone of the COP 23 agenda, namely:

- consolidating the evidence base for the pursuit of Good Environmental Status in the Mediterranean;
- implementing the post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (SAPBIO);
- addressing the sources of land-based pollution;
- ingrain sustainability into the blue economy;
- paving the way for UN Environment Programme/ Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) activities during the 2024-2025 biennium; and
- enhancing governance, implementation and enforcement, communication, and advocacy.



Delegates during one of the COP 23 plenaries

COP 23 also reviewed progress achieved during the 2022-2023 biennium, considered strategic documents, and adopted 14 decisions, including on the Programme of Work (PoW) and budget for the 2024-2025 biennium, and the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report.

COP 23 was organized by UNEP/MAP and took place from 5-8 December 2023 in Portorož, Slovenia, with a Ministerial Session

In This Issue

A Brief History of the Barcelona Convention	2
Barcelona Convention COP 23 Report	3
Opening	3
Organizational Matters	4
Thematic Decisions	4
Programme of Work and Budget 2024-2025	9
Ministerial Session	10
Portorož Ministerial Declaration	13
Date and Place of COP 24	14
Other Business	14
Side Events	14
Adoption of the Meeting Report and Closing	15
Upcoming Meetings	15
Glossary	16

on 7 December. Some 400 participants from Contracting Parties, UN agencies, research organizations, multilateral development banks, the private sector, youth groups, and civil society attended the four-day meeting.

A number of [side events](#) took place on the sidelines of the COP, including on pollution, climate change, blue economy, and education and youth. Special attention was given to the COP 23 logo, designed by host country Slovenia. It encompasses blue and green elements that symbolize the sea, rivers, and forests. The shape represents both the silhouette of a fish and the aspect of the iconic marine plant *Posidonia oceanica*, as a nod to the importance of protecting Mediterranean biodiversity.

A Brief History of the Barcelona Convention

UNEP launched its [Regional Seas Programme](#) in 1974 with the aim of protecting the marine environment using a “shared seas” approach to address the accelerating degradation of the world’s Ocean and coastal areas. More than 143 countries have joined 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans for the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment. Although individual Conventions and Action Plans reflect a similar approach, each is tailored by its governments and institutions to suit the unique environmental challenges faced in each region.

Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP): The [MAP](#) was the first regional seas initiative. Spearheaded under the auspices of UNEP, it was approved in 1975 by Mediterranean states and the European Commission as the institutional framework for addressing marine environmental degradation in the region. It also endorsed the preparation of a framework convention for protecting the marine environment against pollution, as well as two related protocols that would provide a legal basis for action.

Initial MAP objectives included helping Mediterranean governments assess and control pollution, as well as formulate their national marine environmental policies. Over time, the MAP’s focus gradually widened from a sectoral approach to pollution control to integrated coastal zone planning and management for solutions that protect the marine environment.

MAP Phase II: The Action Plan for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Sustainable Development of the Coastal Areas of the Mediterranean ([MAP Phase II](#)) was adopted in 1995 to address weaknesses in the first action plan and evolving circumstances, specifically with respect to environmental protection and sustainable development following the [1992 Rio UN Conference on Environment and Development](#) (UNCED). Its objectives include: ensuring the sustainable management of natural marine and land resources and integrating the environment into socio-economic development and land-use policies; protecting the marine environment and coastal zones through preventing and reducing pollution; protecting nature and enhancing sites and landscapes of ecological or cultural value; strengthening solidarity among Mediterranean states; and contributing to improving the quality of life.

The Barcelona Convention: The Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution ([Barcelona](#)

[Convention](#)) was adopted in 1976 within the framework of the MAP, as its principal legally binding agreement, and entered into force in 1978. The first meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention (COP 1) took place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 5-10 February 1979.

The Convention was subsequently amended in 1995 and renamed the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean. These changes were primarily made to include coasts in the Convention’s scope and to incorporate concepts that dominated UNCED, such as the protection and preservation of biodiversity, and the application of the precautionary and polluter pays principles. These amendments entered into force in 2004.

The [Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development](#) (MCSD) was established in 1996, composed of Contracting Parties and stakeholders on an equal footing, in line with Article 4 of the Convention. It is an advisory body to the Contracting Parties that assists in their efforts to integrate environmental issues in their socioeconomic programmes and to promote sustainable development policies in the Mediterranean region and countries.

In 2008, the MAP-Barcelona Convention committed to the ecosystem approach as an overarching principle and established its [Compliance Procedures and Mechanism](#). In 2016, Contracting Parties adopted the first six-year Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2016-2021 and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025, providing a strategic policy framework for securing a sustainable future for the Mediterranean region consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Barcelona Convention currently has 22 Contracting Parties: the 21 Mediterranean countries and the European Union (EU). The Convention’s specific objectives include: assessing and controlling marine pollution; ensuring the sustainable management of natural marine and coastal resources; and protecting natural and cultural heritage. The Contracting Parties meet every two years to decide on the MAP PoW and budget, policies, and plans.

[Seven protocols have been adopted](#) under the Convention:

- Protocol for the Prevention and Elimination of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft or Incineration at Sea (Dumping Protocol), which was adopted in 1976 and entered into force in 1978;
- Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea (Prevention and Emergency Protocol), which was adopted in 1976 and entered into force in 1978;
- Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities (LBS Protocol), which was adopted in 1980 and entered into force in 1983;
- Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean, which was adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1986;
- Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution Resulting from the Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf and the Seabed and Its Subsoil (Offshore



Fatma Varank, Deputy Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, Türkiye, and President of the COP Bureau

Protocol), which was adopted in 1994 and entered into force in 2011;

- Protocol on the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal (Hazardous Wastes Protocol), which was adopted in 1996 and entered into force in 2008; and
- Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean (ICZM Protocol), which was adopted in 2008 and entered into force in 2011.

COP 21: This meeting took place from 2-5 December 2019, in Naples, Italy. The Contracting Parties adopted 14 decisions to ensure the Barcelona Convention can continue its “pioneering role” in the Regional Seas Programme, including 13 thematic decisions, and one on the PoW and Budget 2020-2021. Thematic decisions included: the common regional ICZM framework; a set of regional measures to support green and circular businesses; and the identification and conservation of sites of particular ecological interest in the Mediterranean. A key outcome of COP 21 was the [Naples Ministerial Declaration](#), which committed Parties to take concrete action for enhanced safeguarding of the Mediterranean Sea. A key event during the meeting was the second [Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award](#) presented to the Municipality of Ashdod, Israel.

COP 22: This meeting took place from 7-10 December 2021 in Antalya, Türkiye, with a Ministerial Session on 9 December. The meeting marked 45 years of regional solidarity and mutual efforts for environmental sustainability. COP 22 highlights included agreement to submit a joint and coordinated proposal to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) for the designation of the Mediterranean Sea, as a whole, as an Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides (Med SO_x ECA), as established under Annex VI of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). COP 22 also adopted the PoW and budget 2022-2023, the UNEP/MAP MTS for 2022-2027, and the Post-2020 SAPBIO, complemented by a strategic document on marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. The Ministerial Session culminated in the adoption of the [Antalya Ministerial Declaration](#), showcasing strong political will for joint sustainability efforts in the region.

COP 23 Preparatory Process: UNEP/MAP Focal Points met from 12-15 September 2023 in Istanbul, Türkiye. [Meetings of the MAP Focal Points](#), which take place prior to COPs and act as their Preparatory Committee, constitute important milestones in the intergovernmental process. Discussions in Istanbul focused on the six main themes that constitute the backbone of the COP 23 agenda.

Barcelona Convention COP 23 Report

Opening

Fatma Varank, Deputy Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, Türkiye, and President of the COP Bureau, opened the meeting on Tuesday morning. She highlighted the commitment of the Convention’s Contracting Parties to the environmental recovery of the Mediterranean, in the face of recent challenges, including floods, forest fires, and extreme temperature increases caused by climate change. She noted “we have fallen short of achieving good environmental status” and called for a holistic and united search for solutions.

Maša Kociper, State Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister of Slovenia, encouraged common actions and collaboration to “avoid the perfect storm and sail with the mild winds of sustainable development and green transition.” Noting that the Barcelona Convention provides the right framework to deal with cumulative challenges, she welcomed the participation of experts in every step of decision-making processes and commended the participation of youth groups and scientists in the meeting’s side events.

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, UNEP Deputy Executive Director, underscored the importance of the Barcelona Convention, its protocols, and the MAP in the context of a world fighting the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. She also: called for bold steps towards a sustainable blue economy; drew attention the establishment in the Mediterranean Sea of a Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides; noted nature-based solutions as paramount; and stressed the importance of cooperation.

Tatjana Hema, Coordinator, UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention, highlighted Portorož’s tradition of salt harvesting and harnessing the healing effects of sea water, and drew attention to successes within the Mediterranean region. She noted [the MAP’s MTS 2022-2027](#), its aims, and progress achieved, and called for delegates to focus on implementation on the ground.



Tatjana Hema, Coordinator, UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention



Mitja Bricelj, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, Slovenia, and COP 23 President

Organizational Matters

On Tuesday, the meeting welcomed Mitja Bricelj, Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, Slovenia, as COP president. Bricelj encouraged participants to pursue actions towards a better quality of life and future for the Mediterranean region.

In Friday's plenary, delegates adopted the proposed Bureau composition until 2025, with: Slovenia as President; Egypt, Morocco, Malta, and Spain as Vice-Presidents; and Montenegro as Rapporteur. They then adopted the meeting agenda (UNEP/MED IG.26/1) and working schedule (UNEP/MED IG.26/2). The COP also established an informal group to work on the draft Ministerial Declaration, led by Slovenia, and a contact group on budget, led by Egypt.

Thematic Decisions

Compliance and reporting: On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced the agenda item (UNEP/MED IG.26/4). She said the Secretariat had received nominations for members and alternate members to the [Compliance Committee](#), and urged that outstanding nominations be submitted.

Heba Sharawy (Egypt), Chair of the Compliance Committee, elaborated on the activities of the Committee in 2022-2023. She highlighted: amendments to Procedures and Mechanisms on Compliance and Status of Reporting; the activity report of the Committee during this biennium; the adoption of the Committee's 2024-2025 PoW; and that nine Contracting Parties have not yet submitted their 2020-2021 national implementation reports. She also drew attention to actions taken by Spain to implement the Committee's findings and recommendations for the case of the large-scale pollution of Spain's Mar Menor lagoon.

The EU suggested that the Committee only consider issues raised by the COP, and not by the Secretariat or individual Parties, and asked them to submit their national implementation reports for 2020-2021.

On Wednesday, the Secretariat noted that subregional groups held two meetings during the week, with the following nominations for Committee members and alternate members: Morocco, Libya, Italy, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus, and Slovenia. Outstanding nominations are to be endorsed at the first Bureau meeting in 2024.

On Friday, delegates adopted the draft decision without amendment.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/1), the COP, *inter alia*:

- adopts amendments to the Procedures and Mechanisms on Compliance;
- adopts the Activity Report of the Committee for 2022-2023;
- adopts the PoW of the Committee for 2024-2025; and
- elects the candidates nominated by the Parties as members and alternate members of the Committee.

Governance: On Wednesday, the Secretariat introduced this agenda item (UNEP/MED IG.26/5), explaining that it addresses governance-related decisions adopted at previous COPs, including: a Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with four organizations; accreditation of new MAP Partners; an [Updated UNEP/MAP Resource Mobilization Strategy](#); an updated partner policy; and composition of the Convention's Bureau.

The EU proposed minor edits, which delegates approved. The AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF CETACEANS OF THE BLACK SEA, MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND CONTIGUOUS ATLANTIC AREA (ACCOBAMS) commended the signing of the MoU with UNEP/MAP, which provides a framework for cooperation to further shared goals and objectives. The MoU was signed after Thursday's Ministerial Session.

On Friday, the EU requested some additional minor changes to the draft decision. These were agreed and the decision was adopted.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/2), the COP, among others:

- approves the updated MoU between UNEP/MAP and the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM);
- approves MoUs between UNEP/MAP and ACCOBAMS, the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, and the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Environment of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden;
- endorses a list of new and renewed MAP Partners, contained in Annex III to this decision;
- authorizes the UNEP/MAP Secretariat to host the [Plan of Action for a Model Mediterranean Sea](#) (PAMEx) Technical Secretariat;



Heba Sharawy, Egypt, Chair of the Compliance Committee

- adopts an updated Resource Mobilization Strategy;
- requests the governments of [MAP Components](#)' Host Countries to implement the "Common Operational Principles for MAP Components"; and
- requests Parties and the Secretariat to further enhance efforts on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.

Proposal by Türkiye on the Establishment of a Regional Activity Centre (RAC) on Climate Change hosted by Türkiye:

On Wednesday, the Secretariat presented this draft proposal (UNEP/MED IG.26/15). It was supported by EGYPT, LIBYA, MOROCCO, LEBANON, the EU, the NETWORK OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN (MEDPAN), WWF, and OCEANCARE. Following informal discussions, the COP agreed on the text of the related draft decision. TÜRKIYE expressed gratitude and said the Centre would contribute to addressing the formidable challenges posed by climate change in the region.

On Friday, the COP adopted the decision.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/12), the COP decided to establish the UNEP/MAP RAC on Climate Change (CC/RAC) as one of the Components of the MAP system, at the Mediterranean Climate Change Research Center/Akdeniz İklim Değişikliği Araştırma Merkezi (AIDAM) Institution, in İstanbul, Türkiye.

The COP also requests the Secretariat to develop an independent mapping exercise, including a fully-fledged assessment of the UNEP/MAP system and its different Components, to avoid possible overlaps.

The 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report and a Renewed Ecosystem Approach Policy in the Mediterranean:

On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document

and draft decision (UNEP/MED IG.26/6/Rev.1). She noted that it presents the updated Executive Summary of the [2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report](#) (MED QSR), addresses comments received, and includes editorial amendments. She drew attention to the main elements of the draft decision and brackets pertaining to the preparation of an additional summary for policymakers and setting up a working group. She noted new additional graphical representations added in the report's Appendix A (Status of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Mediterranean).

The EU lamented a lack of monitoring data from Parties, recalling their obligation to assess, monitor, and report. She proposed deleting Appendix A to allow for further consideration. Instead, she proposed a new operational paragraph in the decision to "take note of the online publication of the integrated 2023 MED QSR along with the public availability of the [2023 Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme](#) (IMAP) Pollution MED QSR as approved by the Meeting of the Ecosystem Approach Correspondence Groups (CORMONs) (27-28 June 2023), and all thematic assessments, which will be provided by the Secretariat on the dedicated website for the 2023 MED QSR."

EGYPT questioned whether corridors should be mentioned as the most important pathway of introduction for non-indigenous species, with the Secretariat clarifying that the data comes from the QSR. The PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN drew attention to the hazards of persistent organic pollutants and called for a swift ban on their production and use, and the promotion of alternatives. The Secretariat underscored the EU proposal would be added, with the [Information and Communication Regional Activity Centre of the Barcelona Convention](#) (INFO/RAC) providing details online



Delegates follow the COP 23 proceedings

of how and when the report would be published. ISRAEL looked forward to participating in the working group to improve the QSR and its Executive Summary.

The draft decision was adopted in Friday's plenary.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/3), the COP, *inter alia*:

- takes note of the 2023 MED QSR;
- endorses the provisional Executive Summary of the 2023 MED QSR;
- endorses the assessment criteria and threshold values;
- requests the Secretariat to prepare a revised Ecosystem Approach Roadmap Policy, including IMAP enhancement, taking into account the outcomes of the 2023 Mediterranean QSR;
- takes note of the Terms of Reference for the technical correspondence groups and Online Working Groups and the flow of interaction between the Ecosystem Approach and MAP governing bodies;
- requests the Secretariat to provide technical and financial support in line with the adopted UNEP/MAP PoW and Budget for the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap, IMAP, and related Programmes of Measures/National Action Plans, as well as the 2023 MED QSR assessment findings; and
- calls upon the scientific community at the national and regional levels to contribute to the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and IMAP.

Amendments to Annexes II and III to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) in the Mediterranean: On Tuesday, the Secretariat presented the document (UNEP/MED IG.26/7), which includes two options to amend [Annex II \(endangered or threatened species\)](#) and [Annex III \(species whose exploitation is regulated\)](#) to the Convention's Protocol concerning SPA/BD. The first option proposes including six species of cartilaginous fishes in Annex II and three in Annex III. The second option proposes listing four of the six species proposed for Annex II in Annex III instead.

The EU, with ISRAEL and the MEDITERRANEAN ASSOCIATION TO SAVE THE SEA TURTLES (MEDASSET),



Nadia Andreanidou, MEDASSET

supported option 1, urging an ambitious approach based on the precautionary principle and noting that the species in question require a high level of protection.

Supporting option 2, TUNISIA and EGYPT called for more time to consult about the species concerned, and, with LIBYA, urged recognizing that these species are a source of income for fishermen, especially in developing countries. They felt that any approach should be based on human rights. COP President Bricelj deferred the issue to allow for further consultation.

On Wednesday morning, the COP decided to establish an informal working group to discuss this issue, facilitated by the EU. In reporting back to plenary, the EU provided an overview of the group's deliberations. She underscored the EU preference for option 1, drawing on the information available about the species in question. She stressed that these are all included on the [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#) and reiterated that the precautionary principle should be applied. She noted the EU would make an exception for the eagle ray *Myliobatis aquila*. This was opposed by ISRAEL, who said it was the most endangered of the species considered. The EU further explained that those in favor of option 2, in particular the southern Mediterranean countries, drew attention to a lack of information on the species, referred to socio-economic consequences of option 1, and suggested a step-by-step approach of adding species at a later stage. She concluded that delegates did not reach agreement on the matter.

TUNISIA, MOROCCO and LIBYA reiterated their preference for option 2. ISRAEL, favoring option 1, noted that all four species are endangered and have been under the protection of a national law for the past twenty years. The Secretariat suggested adding provisions in the PoW and budget to undertake socio-economic studies might help ease the deadlock.

TUNISIA queried whether enough time had been afforded to consider the decision, with the Secretariat illustrating the comprehensive consultative steps taken in preparation for this COP. She further explained the process ahead, noting Parties usually manage to reach agreement on decisions. Italy suggested that a stepwise approach could be followed, after the adoption of the decision, to provide time for countries to adapt, whilst concurrently initiating socio-economic studies to explore the impacts of implementing the decision. Delegates agreed to the



Nassira Rheyati, Morocco



Silvia Bartolini, EU

Secretariat's proposal to retain option 1 with a footnote pertaining to Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya expressing reservations on the matter, and including the EU's reservation regarding the listing of the eagle ray *Myliobatis aquila* in Annex II.

On Friday, the EU suggested minor editorial changes to the draft decision. ISRAEL requested that its opposition regarding the EU's reservation pertaining to *Myliobatis aquila* be reflected in the meeting report. This was agreed and the decision was adopted, with the respective reservations.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/4), the COP, *inter alia*:

- adopts the amendments to Annexes II and III to the Protocol concerning SPA/BD in the Mediterranean, as set out in the Annex to the present decision (option 1), with a footnote noting reservations by Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, and the EU reservation for one species in Annex II (*Myliobatis aquila*);
- urges Parties to take the necessary measures for effective implementation of the conservation of the species included in Annexes II and III to the SPA/BD Protocol; and
- requests the Secretariat to assist Parties in the implementation of the conservation and management measures of the species included in Annexes II and III to the SPA/BD Protocol, including through resource mobilization activities.

Specially Protected Areas (SPAs), Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) and Ecosystem

Restoration: On Tuesday, the Secretariat presented this agenda item (UNEP/MED IG.26/8). The MEDITERRANEAN WETLAND INITIATIVE (MEDWET) called for measures to conserve and restore coastal wetlands, including through nature-based solutions, ICZM protocols, and local governance schemes.

The decision was adopted without amendment in Friday's plenary.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/5), the COP, among other things, invites: the Secretariat to conduct a mid-term assessment of the collective implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO by 2025; and Parties to review their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans accordingly to ensure achievement of the Post-2020 SAPBIO objectives by 2030. The COP also:

- adopts the Evaluation and Monitoring Framework for the Post-2020 Regional Strategy for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures in the Mediterranean;
- decides to provisionally assign the Habibas Islands (Algeria) as a SPAMI;
- adopts the format for the periodic review of SPAMIs; and
- requests the SPA/RAC Secretariat to work with the relevant designated authorities in Albania, Cyprus, France, Italy, Lebanon, Monaco, Slovenia, Spain, and Tunisia to carry out ordinary and extraordinary reviews for the 25 SPAMIs listed in the Decision, and to report to COP 24.

Regional Plan on Agriculture Management: On Tuesday, the Secretariat presented the draft decision as contained in document UNEP/MED IG.26/9. There were no comments, and the decision was adopted without amendment on Friday.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/6), the COP, among other things:

- adopts the Regional Plan on Agriculture Management;
- calls on Parties to effectively implement the Regional Plan and report to the Secretariat; and
- requests the Secretariat of the Programme for the Assessment and Control of Marine Pollution in the Mediterranean (MED POL) to provide the necessary assistance to Parties for the implementation of the Regional Plan.

Appendix II contains a workplan with a timetable for implementation of the Regional Plan.

Regional Plan on Aquaculture Management in the Framework of Article 15 of the Land Based Sources and

Activities Protocol: On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced this issue (UNEP/MED IG.26/10), noting it had been adjusted based on EU comments at the MAP focal point meeting. There were no comments, and the decision was adopted without amendment on Friday.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/7), the COP, among other things:

- adopts the Regional Plan on Aquaculture Management;
- calls on Parties to effectively implement the Regional Plan and to report to the Secretariat; and



Delegates from Türkiye confer

- requests the MED POL Secretariat to assist Parties in implementing the Regional Plan.

Appendix II to this decision contains a workplan with a timetable for implementation of the Regional Plan.

Regional Plan on Stormwater Management in the Framework of Article 15 of the Land Based Sources and Activities Protocol: On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced this agenda item (UNEP/MED IG.26/11). The MEDITERRANEAN INFORMATION OFFICE FOR ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (MIO-ECSDE) drew attention to linkages with other issues such as coastal and offshore waters. There were no comments on the draft decision, and it was adopted without amendment on Friday.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/8), the COP, among other things:

- adopts the Regional Plan on Urban Stormwater Management;
- calls on Parties to effectively implement it; and
- requests the MED POL Secretariat to assist Parties with its implementation.

Appendix II contains a workplan with a timetable for the implementation of the Regional Plan.

Updated Guidelines for the Dumping of Inert Uncontaminated Inorganic Geological Materials: On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced the document (UNEP/MED IG.26/12) for this agenda item. There were no comments, and the decision was adopted without amendment on Friday.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/9), the COP:

- adopts the Updated Guidelines for the Dumping of Inert Uncontaminated Inorganic Geological Materials;
- calls on Parties to ensure their effective implementation; and
- requests the Secretariat to help Parties implement the Guidelines, by strengthening cooperation and synergies with the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter 1972 (London Convention) and its Protocol, the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and other relevant instruments.

Another annex contains monitoring methodologies and techniques for the Dumping of Inert Uncontaminated Inorganic Geological Materials.



Michael Scoullus, MIO-ECSDE

Conceptual Framework for Implementing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) in the Mediterranean: On Tuesday, the Secretariat of the Priority Actions Programme RAC (PAP/RAC) introduced this document (UNEP/MED IG.26/13).

FEDERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO SOSTENIBILE E LA LOTTA CONTRO LA POVERTÀ NEL MEDITERRANEO-MAR NERO (FISPMED) highlighted the importance of direct-democracy processes and questioned the definition of a blue economy. EGYPT expressed concern with the entire decision, which was still bracketed in its entirety, and favored returning to it later.

On Wednesday, the Secretariat reported back on informal consultations and noted that more time is needed to address Egypt's concerns. She noted that 80% of the content of the decision has already been presented to COP 20 in Tirana in 2017. COP President Bricelj encouraged the dialogue with Egypt to continue. On Wednesday afternoon, the Secretariat asked Egypt to define their final position on the matter. EGYPT stated they still had reservations on the decision in its entirety. COP President Bricelj concluded the draft decision would be forwarded for adoption on Friday, with Egypt's reservation. On Friday, LIBYA requested to be included in the reservation as well.

The decision was adopted in Friday's plenary, with the two reservations.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/10), the COP adopts the Conceptual Framework for Implementing MSP in the Mediterranean. It also requests the PAP/RAC Secretariat to establish a dedicated working group composed of experts and all UNEP/MAP components to lead the work on MSP, and to continue supporting Parties in their effort to implement the ecosystem-based MSP by providing, for instance, capacity building and training.

Regional Harmonized Procedures for the Uniform Implementation of the Ballast Water Management Convention in the Mediterranean Sea: On Tuesday, the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) introduced the document (UNEP/MED IG.26/14), noting links with the [Ballast Water](#)



Delegates and the Secretariat consult prior to one of the sessions

[Management Convention](#) and other decisions on non-indigenous species introductions.

EGYPT noted its reservations about the use of port “administrations” rather than “authorities” had been discussed internally and that they agreed to the use of “port authorities.” TÜRKIYE suggested removing a footnote relating to the database of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (MAPAMED), whilst the EU requested time to consider the suggestion.

When delegates returned to the issue on Wednesday morning in plenary, the EU said they could lift their reservation and delete the footnote.

The decision was adopted in Friday’s plenary.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/11), the COP:

- adopts the regional harmonized procedures for the uniform implementation of the Ballast Water Management Convention in the Mediterranean Sea;
- requests the Secretariats of REMPEC and SPA/RAC to provide targeted technical support for the ratification and implementation of the Ballast Water Management Convention, as well as the implementation of regional harmonized procedures; and
- requests the REMPEC Secretariat to communicate the regional harmonized procedures to the IMO so that they may subsequently be circulated to IMO Member States for their information and action, as appropriate.

Assessment Studies: Summary for Policymakers of the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC) Special Report on Climate and Environmental Coastal Risks: On Tuesday, Plan Bleu introduced the document (UNEP/MED IG.26/16) with the understanding that it would be returned to on Wednesday.

EGYPT asked for additional time to ensure that all their comments, provided during an earlier online meeting, were taken into consideration.

On Wednesday, the Secretariat introduced the draft decision contained in document UNEP/MED IG.26/16/Rev.1. MedECC presented the contents of the Special Report, highlighting the participation of fifteen authors. He said the report aims to provide decision makers with an assessment of scientific knowledge on climate and environmental change in the Mediterranean basin.

On Friday, the COP adopted this decision without amendment.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/13), the COP, *inter alia*:

- endorses the Summary for Policymakers of the MedECC Special Report on climate and environmental coastal risks;
- urges Parties and the Secretariat to make all possible efforts to overcome the knowledge gaps that are identified in the Special Report;
- requests the Plan Bleu Secretariat to continue its institutional support to MedECC;
- requests the Secretariat to further mainstream the results of the MedECC Special Report;
- requests the Secretariat to invite Parties to participate in the consultation process of the two upcoming MedECC Special Reports on the climate-water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus

and on environmental change, conflict, and human migration; and,

- requests the Secretariat and invites Parties to cooperate with the other supporting institutions on the preparation of the Second Mediterranean Assessment Report (MAR2) planned for 2024-2027.

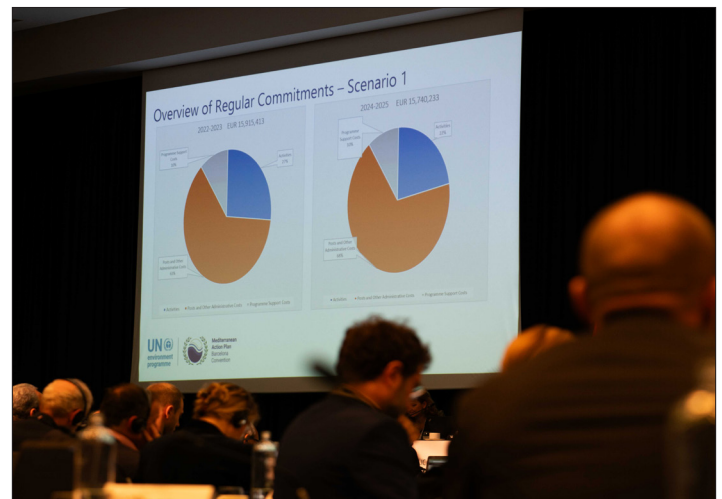
Programme of Work and Budget 2024-2025

On Tuesday, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (UNEP/MED IG.26/17). She presented the proposed PoW and budget for 2024-2025, focusing on key elements considered for PoW preparation and the number of PoW activities per MTS Programme. She outlined key outcomes for each programme objective, for instance on attaining a pollution- and litter-free Mediterranean, or on the twinning of marine protected areas (MPAs) from north to south.

On activities pertaining to climate change, she noted the preparation of the updated regional framework for adaptation in the Mediterranean, whilst on the sustainable use of resources and a circular and blue economy, she underscored, among other things, efforts towards dealing with marine incidents. On advocacy and communication, she drew attention to a number of upcoming events, such as the 50-year anniversary of the MAP and the 30-year anniversary of MAP II.

On the budget, the Secretariat noted the intention was to try to match resources to priorities, rather than the other way around, and proposed that discussions continue in a contact group. She pinpointed three funding streams (contributions from Parties, the surplus, and voluntary contributions from the EU) and drew attention to two potential funding scenarios, inviting delegates to join the contact group led by Egypt.

On Wednesday, Egypt, as Chair of the budget contact group, expanded on the outcomes of the various meetings of the group. He underscored that agreed points included: a budget with a 0% increase of the ordinary contribution; financing the increase of staff salaries by the surplus only; and efforts should be made by the Secretariat to utilize positive balances, excluding the Working Capital Reserves .



Participants listen to a presentation on the Programme of Work and Budget

Egypt said the group further suggested that the Secretariat undertake an internal evaluation of MAP systems. He noted the budget had general approval pending one issue relating to a REMPEC head office P5 position.

The Secretariat presented the relevant document and delegates discussed, amongst other things: staffing issues being subject to the availability of voluntary funding; the independent mapping exercise for the RACs, as well as the socio-economic study and the climate change and species gap analysis being budgeted for; and the application of the scale of assessment. COP President Bricelj suggested the contact group reconvene on Thursday morning, before the Ministerial Session. A new document was subsequently produced on Thursday.

On Friday, the EU requested minor editorial changes to the draft decision. These were agreed and the decision was adopted.

Decision: In its decision (UNEP/MAP IG.26/14), the COP, *inter alia*:

- requests UNEP’s Executive Director and the MAP Coordinator to execute the Budget;
- approves the 2024-2025 PoW and Budget set out in the Annex to this decision including the deliverables of the PoW and Budget 2024-2025 set out in Appendix 1;
- approves: the budget appropriations; the income in the amount of EUR 13,296,144, composed of the [Mediterranean Trust Fund](#) in the amount of EUR 11,413,576, the EU discretionary contribution of EUR 1,192,968 and the host country contribution of EUR 689,600; and the use of the unutilized Fund’s positive balance up to EUR 3,289,504;
- requests the Executive Director of UNEP, subject to approval of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), to extend the Mediterranean Trust Fund through 31 December 2025;
- takes note of the external funding secured by the Secretariat and MAP Components in the amount of EUR 16,386,037 and external non-secured funding in the amount of EUR 10,295,644 for implementation of the PoW 2024-2025;
- requests the Secretariat to keep up to date and post publicly information on the status of Parties’ contributions to the Mediterranean Trust Fund;
- requests the Secretariat to undertake, with no budgetary implications, an internal evaluation to assess the coherence of the MAP system to the provisions of the “Common Operational Principles for MAP Components”;
- also requests the Secretariat to prepare a results-based PoW and Budget for 2026-2027; and
- requests the Secretariat to develop a proposal for absorbing the remaining unutilized positive balance of the Mediterranean Trust Fund, excluding the Working Capital Reserve, in the following two biennia (2026-2027 and 2028-2029).

Ministerial Session

Opening: On Thursday, COP President Bricelj opened the Ministerial Session.

Delegates watched a video, from host country Slovenia, that showcased successful examples of integrated coastal and river basin management, carried out through regional cooperation. The video concluded “there is no green solution without blue wisdom.”



Maša Kociper, Slovenia’s State Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister

Maša Kociper, Slovenia’s State Secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister, spoke on behalf of Alenka Bratušek, Minister of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning of Slovenia. Illustrating the effects of climate change in her country, she recalled the catastrophic 2023 summer floods which caused widespread destruction amounting to some EUR 10 billion in damages. She highlighted the Mura-Drava-Donava transboundary protected area with its combined flood reduction system. Calling for increased involvement of experts and youth, she shared her Minister’s encouragement: “Let us not be afraid of the scale of challenges.”

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, commended Slovenia on its regional actions. She said the MAP is a shining example of how common challenges can spur collective action. Among its successes, she highlighted the [Regional Plan on Marine Litter Management](#) and the large MPAs recently established by Algeria, Libya, and Albania, encouraging Parties to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of coastal areas will be effectively conserved and managed. Calling for the effective implementation of the region’s own post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Global Framework on Chemicals, she stressed that “the solutions lie within reach.”



Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Deputy Executive Director of UNEP



Robert Golob, Prime Minister of Slovenia

Robert Golob, Prime Minister of Slovenia, pointed to the many interests that converge in the Adriatic Sea, a region where ships, railways, roads, and pipelines “lead to the heart of Europe,” and praised the Barcelona Convention as a global example of how to address environmental and social challenges. He highlighted Slovenia’s “water diplomacy” as a tool for regional integration in Europe and said it would be, together with climate change, at the core of the country’s actions as a newly elected member of the UN Security Council.

Tatjana Hema, UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention, said the “time has come” to take stock of acceleration pathways towards a greener economy in the Mediterranean region. As an iconic example of species conservation efforts that have ecosystem-level benefits, she highlighted the meadows of Mediterranean sea grass *Posidonia*, which feature in the COP 23 logo.

Report on activities carried out in the framework of UNEP/MAP since COP 22: The Secretariat provided an overview of this report, focusing on actions taken under the different programmes of the 2022-2027 MTS. On efforts to move towards a pollution- and litter-free Mediterranean sea and coast, she drew attention to pilot projects to remove marine litter and the strengthening of regulatory frameworks. On biodiversity, she noted work on MPAs and on specific species such as the fan mussel *Pinna nobilis*, the Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus*, and various marine turtle species. On climate resilience, she underscored efforts to better understand its impacts on the environment and development.

ITALY commended the [MAP Components](#) for their efforts and achievements. LIBYA stressed the importance of pilot projects in capacity building and training.

Panel session on “Green transition in the Mediterranean: From decisions into actions”: This panel was moderated by Jihed Ghannem, UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention.

Almotaz Abadi, Deputy Secretary General for Water, Environment and Blue Economy at the UfM, outlined actions undertaken by the UfM to advance a blue-green transition in the Mediterranean, including through stimulating political will, inclusive dialogue, and capacity building.

Jean-Charles Orsucci, mayor of the municipality of Bonifacio on the island of Corsica, France, shared a video on the conservation of *Posidonia* meadows along the Corsican coastline. Many of these were destroyed by the mooring of ships, but a local project is now successfully reversing this. Orsucci spoke on the need to connect local responses with regional initiatives, and reversely, translate regional commitments into local action.

Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, climatologist at the University of Ljubljana and member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), drew attention to the water shortages that arise from higher temperatures, noting their impacts on renewables such as hydropower. She said “climate change is a magnifying glass: it makes all problems grow.” Emphasizing the role of healthy ecosystems as carbon sinks, she said this alone—in addition to motives related to food security, biodiversity, and tourism—is a reason to protect marine ecosystems.

Michael Scoullou, MIO-ECSDE, spoke about reorienting agricultural practices to decrease their polluting impact on the Mediterranean through the concept of the [Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus](#), which advocates for integrated policies towards a green transition.

Yeganeh Forouheshfar, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, reflected on the costs associated with a green transition, noting that, while the war in Ukraine has accelerated the use of renewable energy sources in Europe, the region is still very reliant on fossil fuels. Highlighting the high potential for their use, she also stressed the high vulnerability of the Mediterranean region.

G. Ahmed Yassin, youth leader and co-founder of Banlastic Egypt, provided a perspective of his organization’s actions on banning single-use plastic by some 600 youth volunteers under the age of 25, and its linkages with youth groups in other Mediterranean countries. He underscored the importance of sharing experiences and solutions, working with governing bodies, connecting with fundraising sources, and seeking alliances.

Questions from the floor related to: non-indigenous invasive species; grid storage capacities; use of wastewater; and turning ideas into businesses in the blue and green fields. Delegates



Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, climatologist at the University of Ljubljana



Students from Italian high school, Liceo Ginnasio Tasso, Rome

and panelists further debated whether policies should focus on degrowth in developed countries and moving away from GDP as an indicator of how well economies are doing, with one panelist noting this was “the elephant in the room.”

Students from a high school in Rome, Italy, shared their concerns and hopes for the future, noting it is hard to make their voices heard. They underscored the feeling of anxiety shared by a whole generation worldwide in the face of the multiple planetary crises. Blaž Lipovšek, Sava Youth Parliament, said it is time to involve young people in environmental decision making, and to seek connections beyond borders.

COP President Bricelj wrapped up the panel session, noting: the necessary technology and knowledge for a green transition exist; “switching to green” requires connecting silos; and change is only possible if we alter the decision-making framework and focus on cooperation and common sense.

Statements: The plenary heard statements by Parties, and international and non-governmental organizations.

CYPRUS voiced support for the identified priorities essential to the wellbeing of the Mediterranean and illustrated national experiences. LIBYA stressed the importance of monitoring and the learning opportunities linked to pilot projects. SPAIN highlighted that the region sees the coming together of different peoples and cultures with a mutual understanding of the challenges the area faces and a common responsibility to care for it. GREECE explained the many steps taken nationally to transition towards climate neutrality and protect the Mediterranean.

The EU welcomed the Portorož Ministerial Declaration as a tool to reaffirm collective political commitment towards addressing issues affecting the marine ecosystem of the Mediterranean region in a fair, equitable, and inclusive way. He said the costs of a green transition should include solidarity between countries to address broader interests.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA outlined national benefits in applying modern environmental solutions, such as Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, and called for the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes. CROATIA reflected on the “price tag” of preserving beaches, and favored harmonized marine



Elizabetha Kos, Croatia

and coastal monitoring and decision making based on scientific knowledge.

EGYPT, via a Ministerial video message, reflected on the many global environmental challenges that put future generations at risk, and their linkages with issues in the Mediterranean. FRANCE said the coming years will be key in the fight against the triple planetary crises. She underscored that the Mediterranean region is one of the hotspots of the climate crisis and announced that France will commit EUR 1.4 million to support implementation of the Convention.

ITALY called for decisions to be translated into actions “without hesitations, to be concrete and achieve results.” Drawing on the enthusiasm and willingness of Youth Groups, he stressed the “time has come to run and not to walk.” LEBANON underscored the most important role of the Barcelona Convention is to bring Parties together to address the degradation of our common environment. MALTA noted the MAP system as the platform for the formulation of a clear policy and legal framework to protect the Mediterranean environment. MONTENEGRO called for a strengthened science-policy interface and a swift green transition. MOROCCO underscored that the great challenges faced by the region require strong partnerships, the exchange of experiences, and the mobilization of resources.

TUNISIA reminded delegates how the RACs have positively contributed to the work of the Barcelona Convention and congratulated Türkiye for the creation of the RAC on climate change. ISRAEL said his country has made significant steps towards implementing the Convention on issues such as eliminating land-based and marine sources of pollution, as well as developing research and innovation.

TÜRKIYE reflected on efforts to rebuild after the earthquake on 6 February 2023, which affected over 14 million people in his country. Noting climate change is now a security issue which requires urgent action, he drew attention to several national projects and policies.

The IMO highlighted common areas of work with the Barcelona Convention, such as limiting marine pollution and litter, aspects related to marine shipping, and a focus on a blue



Susana Salvador, ACCOBAMS

economy. ACCOBAMS identified the reduction of impacts from adverse human activities in the Mediterranean as a priority.

MIO-ECSDE said that implementation of the Convention can only be realized through close cooperation with all stakeholders and called for meaningful involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society actors in decision-making processes.

The PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE noted the Mediterranean basin “lies at the very heart of our space and is a core focus of our efforts.” The PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN drew attention to: work on the energy transition, which encompasses nuclear energy; the consequences of transnational organized crime, such as the dumping of toxic wastes in seas and rivers and the intentional sinking of ships; and fake green certificates which promote decarbonization on paper only.

MEDWET drew attention to a “blue belt” of protected areas. The SECRETARIAT FOR THE UfM drew attention to the second UfM Stakeholder Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy to be hosted by Greece on 19-21 February 2024. The AFRICAN OCEAN DECADE TASKFORCE called for a platform to share Mediterranean success stories.

OCEANCARE commended France, Italy, Monaco, and Spain on their designation of the Northwest Mediterranean as a [Particularly Sensitive Sea Area](#), calling this a “progressive move to be replicated in other regions.” Noting the voluntary nature of the associated guidelines, he urged moving towards a mandatory framework for vessel speed reduction to avoid collisions with endangered large whales, citing multiple additional environmental benefits. Recalling that 60% of SDG implementation relies on local authorities, MEDCITIES lamented that these are not mentioned in the Portorož Ministerial Declaration, and stressed the power of political will.

Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award 2020–2021: The Secretariat explained that the [Award](#) recognizes the role and contributions of cities and local authorities in fulfilling the UNEP/MAP vision for a healthy Mediterranean Sea and coast. She noted that by 2050, 70% of the world’s population are



Mario Mascia, Councillor of Genoa Municipality for Urban Planning, Maritime State Property, and Economic Development, City of Genoa

projected to live in cities, and announced that the 2023 Istanbul Environment Friendly City Award goes to the City of Genoa, Italy.

COP President Bricelj presented Mario Mascia, Councillor of Genoa Municipality for Urban Planning, Maritime State Property, and Economic Development, City of Genoa, with the award. Mascia illustrated the city’s efforts in promoting a healthy environment and addressing pollution issues, and invited delegates to view a video about his city. Delegates also saw videos from the two runner-up cities of Izmir, Türkiye, and La Spezia, Italy. UNEP/MAP then presented a closing video about the award, which mentioned that previous awards were given to: Izmir, Türkiye, in 2017; Ashdod, Israel, in 2019; and Malaga, Spain, in 2021.

Portorož Ministerial Declaration

On Tuesday, COP President Bricelj introduced the draft Ministerial Declaration (UNEP/MED IG.26/21). SLOVENIA noted it presents substantive elements for the progress of the Convention. MCSD highlighted the role of the Commission as a multi-partner platform, noting the participation of MAP Focal Points, NGOs, research centers, and youth groups. She said the many challenges faced by the Mediterranean require working in coherence with nature, and underscored the importance of regional assessments.

COP President Bricelj opened the floor to comments. EGYPT suggested favoring the concept of a “multidimensional crisis” over a “triple crisis” noting that the former also encompasses challenges such as waste and desertification. She further proposed referencing other conventions, such as the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW proposed referencing human rights, while MIO-ECSDE stressed the role of partners and stakeholders. COP President Bricelj established an informal working group, facilitated by Slovenia, to advance the document.

On Wednesday morning, Slovenia reported back to plenary noting the group had met three times and resolved all outstanding

issues, while adding a footnote pertaining to Egypt's reservations on the entire draft decision on MSP. ITALY cautioned about having a Ministerial Declaration with reservations, noting it would send a "bad signal" and weaken the Declaration. Delegates agreed to continue their informal consultations.

In the afternoon, Slovenia presented the revised draft text, as agreed by the informal group (UNEP/MED IG.26/CRP.2). EGYPT agreed to remove a footnote stating its reservations on the MSP concept. COP Chair Bricelj thanked delegations for their hard work on this draft Declaration.

During Thursday's Ministerial Session, the Secretariat read the draft text of the Portorož Ministerial Declaration. The COP adopted it without amendment.

Final declaration: In the Portorož Ministerial Declaration (UNEP/MED IG.26/L.3), Contracting Parties commit, among other things, to:

- halt the degradation of marine and coastal biodiversity through the implementation of the Mediterranean region's own post-2020 SAPBIO;
- advance decarbonization;
- ensure the effective and timely implementation of the regional legally binding measures adopted under the Land-Based Sources and Activities Protocol of the Barcelona Convention;
- address plastic pollution including through the promotion of circular approaches and the reduction of single-use plastics;
- make every effort to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed; and
- involve youth in environmental issues and decision-making processes innovatively.

Date and Place of the COP 24

On Friday, EGYPT warmly invited delegates to Egypt for COP 24, to be held in December 2025 in either Cairo or Alexandria.

Other Business

On Wednesday, delegates watched a video showcasing integrated river basin and coastal management in the Gulf of Trieste, which is shared by Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia. The video highlighted the improved conditions in the coastal area as a result of, *inter alia*, spatial planning and the filtering of microplastics from the rivers, through the implementation of EU regulations and the Barcelona Convention.

Delegates were invited to consider the way forward on the amendment of the Annex of the Dumping Protocol with the Secretariat outlining two options: either the Secretariat sending a letter to the depository country Spain, requesting the suspension of the amendments until the entry into force of the Protocol; or preparing a formal decision to suspend the notification procedure. The EU expressed caution about not having the mandate to follow option two and favored option one. ISRAEL concurred and announced the Protocol would be ratified nationally by the end of the year. The Secretariat concluded it would follow option one and inform the depository accordingly.



Students from Liceo Ginnasio Tasso, Rome, Italy, presenting during the side event 'Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation'

Side Events

Side events were an important part of COP 23, with over [forty held](#) over lunchtime and in the evenings throughout the week, and during the larger part of Friday. They convened under eight themes: pollution, including marine litter; legal aspects of implementation and best practices of cooperation; climate change; blue economy; biodiversity and marine protected areas; green transition towards a healthier Mediterranean; civil society participation; and education and youth.

On the latter theme, an all-morning session was held on Friday. This included an event on "Education and youth: the process and actors to secure a sustainable future for the Mediterranean," co-organized by the [Mediterranean Committee on Education for Sustainable Development](#) and the Government of Slovenia. This event was chaired by Michael Scoullos, Chair of MIO-ECSDE.

Delegates heard a presentation on efforts undertaken in Slovenia, where a EUR 17 million training programme on sustainable development is now targeting 20,000 teachers.

Several other regional organizations shared their initiatives in youth education for sustainable development. Among challenges, they cited lack of: flexibility in current school curricula; funding; teacher training; and awareness of youth regarding ongoing activities.

The Secretariat noted that the update of the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development during the next biennium provides an opportunity to further involve youth and education.



(L-R) **Johan Robinson**, Head of UNEP's Ecosystems Integration Branch, **Tatjana Hema**, Coordinator of UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention, and **Mitja Bricelj**, COP President



UNEP/MAP Barcelona COP 23 team

Chair Scoullos made an emphatic statement, stressing there are more young people in the region now than ever before, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean, but the challenge lies in reaching them, meaningfully involving them, and empowering them to make their voices heard.

Adoption of the Meeting Report and Closing

In Friday's plenary, the Secretariat presented the draft meeting report (UNEP/MED IG.26/L.1), which contained all COP 23 draft decisions. A few delegations requested editorial changes to some of the draft decisions, which were subsequently adopted, along with the meeting report, including the PoW and Budget for 2024-2025.

In his closing remarks, COP President Bricelj recalled the Barcelona Convention's journey from Antalya (COP 22) to Portorož, drawing parallels with the migration route of the loggerhead turtle *Caretta caretta*. He commended the collaboration of all participants and the successful outcomes of the meeting.

Bricelj provided examples of inter-regional cooperation and stressed the importance of green corridors. He also enthused about youth and education. "We are on the right track to demonstrate change," he concluded as he opened the floor to comments.

EGYPT welcomed future collaboration for a more sustainable Mediterranean. TÜRKIYE thanked delegates for their support for the proposed establishment of a RAC on climate change in Türkiye. Johan Robinson, Head of the Ecosystems Integration Branch of UNEP, congratulated delegates on their hard work, highlighting the numerous decisions taken.

Tatjana Hema, UNEP/MAP – Secretariat, said the Portorož Ministerial Declaration is ambitious and raises the level of commitment, showing the Barcelona Convention contributes to the global sustainable development agenda. She praised delegates for their hard work.

COP President Bricelj closed the meeting at 18.05.

Upcoming Meetings

Second UfM Stakeholder Conference on Sustainable Blue Economy: Three years since the adoption of the landmark 2021 UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE), this Conference will bring together a diverse representation of the stakeholders that make up the Mediterranean SBE community, as key drivers of concrete actions and scalable solutions across the region. **dates:** 19-21 February 2024 **location:** Athens, Greece **www:** medblueeconomyplatform.org/vkc/event/2nd-ufm-stakeholder-conference-on-sustainable-blue-economy-7ae2c6e97c/

UNEA-6: UNEA-6 will convene under the theme "Effective, inclusive and sustainable multilateral actions to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution." **dates:** 26 February – 1 March 2024 **location:** Nairobi, Kenya **www:** www.unep.org/environmentassembly/unea6

15th meeting of the Monaco Blue Initiative: Organized by the Oceanographic Institute and the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, the Monaco Blue Initiative is a platform that brings together major players in Ocean conservation and governance in annual debates to explore solutions to challenges facing our Ocean and to promote a sustainable blue economy. **dates:** 17-18 March 2024 **location:** TBC **www:** www.monacoblueinitiative.org/

2024 UN Ocean Decade Conference: The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) will bring together ocean stakeholders to ensure ocean science supports countries in achieving SDG 14 (life below water). **dates:** 10-12 April 2024 **location:** Barcelona, Spain **www:** oceandecade.org/events/2024-ocean-decade-conference/

10th World Water Forum: The Forum is organized every three years and provides a unique platform where the water community and key decision makers can collaborate and make long-term progress on global water challenges. **dates:** 18-24 May 2024 **location:** Bali, Indonesia **www:** worldwaterforum.org/wwf

Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4): SIDS4 will bring together leaders to assess the ability of SIDS to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs and discuss a new programme of action for SIDS. The Conference will convene under the theme “Charting the Course Toward Resilient Prosperity.” **dates:** 27-30 May 2024 **location:** Saint John’s, Antigua and Barbuda **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/sids2024

Third UN Ocean Conference Stakeholder Meeting: A stakeholder meeting will convene in advance of the Third UN Ocean Conference, which will be held in June 2025, in Nice, France. The meeting serves as a consultation with civil society and will include NGO participation. **dates:** June 2024 **location:** Costa Rica **www:** ocean-climate.org/en/unoc2025/

2024 UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF): The 12th session of the HLPF will take place under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council under the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.” It will include an in-depth review of SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals). **dates:** 8-18 July 2024 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** hlpf.un.org

UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 16): COP 16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity will convene in 2024 at a location to be decided. **dates:** 21 October - 1 November 2024 **location:** TBC **www:** www.cbd.int/meetings/

2025 UN Ocean Conference: This meeting, the Fifth UN Ocean Conference, will be held in Nice, France, in 2025. **dates:** June 2025, TBC **location:** Nice, France **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/ocean2025

Barcelona Convention COP 24: Egypt will host the next meeting of the COP to the Barcelona Convention in 2025, in a location to be determined. **dates:** 2025, TBC **location:** Cairo or Alexandria, Egypt **www:** www.unep.org/unepmap/who-we-are/barcelona-convention-and-protocols

Glossary

ACCOBAMS	Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area
COP	Conference of the Parties
IMAP	Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme
IMO	International Maritime Organization
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan
MCSD	Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development
MED QSR	Mediterranean Quality Status Report
MIO-ECSDE	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
MTS	Mid-Term Strategy
PoW	Programme of Work
RAC	Regional Activity Centre
REMPEC	Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea
SAPBIO	Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPAs	Specially Protected Areas
SPA/BD	Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity
SPAMIs	Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
UNEP/MAP	UN Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan



COP 23 Participants