



22 MAY 2020
INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Our solutions are in nature

Marking the International Day for Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean: our solutions are in nature

The United Nations proclaimed 22 May as the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. The slogan chosen for the [2020 edition of IDB](#) – “Our solutions are in nature” – emphasizes the importance of working together at all levels to build a future of life in harmony with nature.

As we grapple with COVID-19 in the Mediterranean region, it is essential that we continue working on sealing the pathways through which pathogens can jump from animal hosts to humans. This can be achieved by restoring the health of strained ecosystems and by halting the relentless encroachment on nature.

Ecosystem integrity can help regulate diseases by supporting a diversity of species so that it is more difficult for one pathogen to spill over, amplify or dominate. But a soon-to-be released UNEP/MAP report on the state of the environment and development in the Mediterranean confirms that ecosystems in our region are in dire straits.

At Sea, 78 percent of assessed stocks are currently fished at biologically unsustainable levels. In the Western Mediterranean, 87 percent of stocks are overfished and at risk of being depleted. *Mare Nostrum* is also one of the most polluted by marine litter, mainly plastic, that is stifling marine creatures and making its way into their organisms through the ingestion of microplastics.

Marine vegetation has not been spared either: *Posidonia Oceanica* Meadows – known as the lungs of the Mediterranean – is on the decline. A study conducted in 2015 (Telesca, L. et al.) revealed that the regression of meadows amounted to an estimated 34 per cent in the last 50 years due to “the cumulative effects of multiple local stressors”.

On land, the Mediterranean region is home to more than 510 million people with one in three living in the populous coastal areas. Squeezed between a rock and a hard place, the Coast must cope with relentless urban pressure coupled with the rising impacts of climate change. According to [MedECC](#), a science-policy interface that we support jointly with the Union for the Mediterranean, our region is warming 20 percent faster than the global average.

Now is a good time to consider options for [building back better](#) in the Mediterranean. Decisions being taken now will have long-lasting impacts and will determine whether we will be able to secure a healthy, safe and resilient future.

Our Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) is in the process of aligning the post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of the Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAPBIO) – devised under the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD Protocol) of the Barcelona Convention – with [the post-](#)

[2020 Biodiversity Framework](#) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This is an important process because, in line with a coordinated and participatory approach, it will lead to prioritizing and planning urgent action at the national and regional levels to achieve the sustainable management of Mediterranean biodiversity beyond 2030.

Under the SPA/BD Protocol, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have established a growing network of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs). Overall, there are 39 SPAMIs among the 1,233 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other area-based conservation measures located in the Mediterranean.

Currently, only 8.9 percent of the Mediterranean is under protection and more needs to be done to improve the management of MPAs and to expand them so as to meet the [Aichi Biodiversity Target 11](#) under CBD.

In order to build back better in our region, UNEP/MAP will continue to advocate firm action on the part of the Contracting Parties to alleviate pressure on nature in alignment with their commitments under the Barcelona Convention.

Decoupling development from environmental degradation in all its forms can be pursued by upscaling [sustainable consumption and production](#) for a green renaissance in *Mare Nostrum*.

See infographic below

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS & BIODIVERSITY

SPA/RAC

THE MEDITERRANEAN, A RICH BIODIVERSITY UNDER THREAT



of the global ocean's volume.



marine species described



of the species are endemic. [1]

Posidonia meadows have declined by 34% over the last 50 years. [2]

1/4 of Mediterranean marine species live in this habitat.

More than 500,000,000 litter items are currently lying on the Mediterranean seafloor. [3]



endemics are threatened with extinction. [4]



of fish stocks are harvested at unsustainable levels. [4]

HOW TO TURN THE TIDE

- **Expand MPA coverage**, in particular no-take zones, and enhance their ecological representativity and connectivity
- **Establish systematic management planning** considering integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and marine spatial planning (MSP)
- **Support the effective and equitable management of MPAs**, by actively involving local stakeholders, civil society organizations and socio-economic actors, and strengthening the science-policy interface.
- **Set up appropriate legal and governance frameworks** and make adequate funding available

[1] Coll M et al. (2010) The Biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea: Estimates, Patterns, and Threats. PLoS ONE 5(8):e11842.
 [2] Telecca, L., Belluscio, A., Criccoli, A., Andizzione, G., Apostolaki, E. T., Fraschetti, S., Alagna, A. et al. 2015. Seagrass meadows (Posidonia oceanica) distribution and trajectories of change. Scientific reports, 5, 12395.
 [3] IUCN 2018. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2018-2. <http://www.iucnredlist.org>

[4] FAO. 2018. The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, Rome. 172 pp.
 [5] Marine Litter Assessment in the Mediterranean. UNEP/MAAP Athens, 2015.
 [6] Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans and University of Nice Sophia Antipolis. 2016. The Science of Marine Protected Areas (3rd edition, Mediterranean). www.picoweb.org. 22 pages.



www.spa-rac.org
www.unepmap.org

When well managed and enforced, MPAs can maintain and restore biodiversity. [6]