

In the Mediterranean, deep seabed encompasses some unique habitats such as hydrothermal vents, seamounts, submarine canyons and deep coral reefs characterized by high biodiversity and endemism. In addition, oceanographic features and large-scale water movements like upwelling, gyres or fronts create critical habitats for the development, reproduction and feeding of many pelagic species. They are also supporting a wide range of components of the trophic chain from planktonic species to top predators like bluefin tuna, pelagic sharks and cetaceans. But these ecosystems are under several pressures due to human activities.

In the framework of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan, the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA) implements a process since 2008 to assist the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to promote the setting up of a representative network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean open seas, including the deep seas.



The Action

The Mediterranean enjoys, through the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and the Barcelona Convention, a legal and institutional framework that is particularly favorable to the fulfillment of the commitments related to the setting-up by 2012 of a network of marine protected areas, including on the high seas, in accordance with the relevant international legal framework and the objectives of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In this case, the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD Protocol), adopted in 1995 by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, provides for the establishment of a List of Specially Protected areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI List) in order to promote the conservation of natural areas and protection of threatened species and their habitats, taking into consideration that the SPAMIs can be established both in marine and coastal areas under sovereignty or jurisdiction of the Parties and in areas situated partly or wholly on the high seas.

To date, the SPAMI List includes 25 sites, giving them their recognition by the 21 riparian countries of the Mediterranean as marine protected areas. Only the Pelagos Sanctuary includes within its limits coastal waters of the three riparian countries, France, Italy and Monaco, as well as a high sea area.

Since 2008, the Joint Management Action of the European Community with the United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan aims to promote the establishment of a representative ecological network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean, through the SPAMI system, in the open sea areas, including the deep seas.

Broadly speaking, the Action aims at enhancing the governance of the areas that lie in the open seas using a sub-regional approach, in order to ensure the conservation of the biodiversity of these areas and guarantee the sustainable use of their marine resources.

The Action is based on the best available scientific information as well as the advice of

scientists, resource managers, and a wide range of stakeholders being focused on ecosystem health and integrity, in particular the representative of the Mediterranean countries.

The Action is implemented by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (UNEP-MAP-RAC/SPA) and financially supported by the European Commission according a two phases process:

- **Phase I:** Identification of priority conservation areas in the Mediterranean open seas, including the deep seas (2008 – 2009)
- **Phase II:** Support to the Parties to the Barcelona Convention for the establishment of MPAs in open seas areas, including the deep seas (2010 – 2011)

A **Steering Committee** provides scientific and technical guidance on the development of the project and validates the main outputs. The Steering Committee chaired by the RAC/SPA is made of representatives from the following international and regional organizations:



UNEP's Division for Env



oy Implementation - Regional Seas Programme (UNEP/DEPI) a

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO)



International Maritime Organization



European Commission (EC)



Coordinating Unit for the

Mediterranean Action Plan (MEDU, UNEP/MAP)



General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)



Secretariat of the Agreement

on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea



Secretariat of the OSPAR Convention



Secretariat of the Pelagos Sanctuary



Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)



International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN Med)



Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM)



World Wide Fund for Nature's Mediterranean Programme Office (WWF MedPO)