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# ECAP SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE (SPI) BRIEF

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Achieving the Good Environmental Status of the Mediterranean marine and coastal ecosystems – this is the goal of the Ecosystem Approach, a strategy initiated by the Barcelona Convention UNEP/MAP. The success of this approach will largely depend on how well scientists and decision makers interact in monitoring and assessing the status of ecosystems to elaborate evidence-based and adequate policies. Reason enough to focus on how to improve this science-policy interface.

For the past forty years, UNEP/MAP and the Barcelona Convention have provided a unique political and legal framework for environmental protection, with all Mediterranean riparian countries and the European Union as Contracting Parties. Pursuant to several decisions of the Contracting Parties, specific efforts were made during the past decade to implement the ecosystem approach (EcAp) with the objective to achieve the Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Mediterranean.

The GES has been defined through eleven Ecological Objectives (EO) and their achievement is being monitored with the help of 27 indicators. These indicators are at the basis of EcAp's Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program (IMAP) meant to be applied to the whole Mediterranean Sea and coast.

To enable the implementation of the EcAp process and in particular IMAP, it appears crucial to bridge existing gaps between the scientific and policy making spheres. Therefore, one of the key activities of the second phase of EcAp, the EcAp MED II project 2015-2018 supported by the

European Union, focuses on the strengthening of the interface between science and policy. A first workshop has been organized in December 2015 by Plan Bleu to unite key stakeholders and define the functioning and activities of a Science-Policy Interface (SPI) for IMAP.

## Why does environmental policy need science?

To be robust, environmental policy needs to be based on sound evidence, which may be transposed in the environment field as scientific evidence on the state of the environment and trends in environmental indicators (Zamparutti and MILIEU, 2012). This is especially true given increasing public demand for transparency and accountability and increasing environmental evolution. Scientific evidence is needed to underpin coherent environmental policy and is a key factor in generating acceptance and legitimizing policy intervention. The increasing complexity of environmental policy making suggests that stronger science policy interfaces for environmental policy are necessary.



## What is a science-policy interface (SPI)?

SPIs are the many ways in which scientists, policy makers and others link up to communicate, exchange ideas, and jointly develop knowledge for enriching policy and decision making processes and/or research (Young et al, 2013). SPIs can be very formal structures, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), or the newly created Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Many research projects include a specific component for improving the interactions between the project, policy makers and other stakeholders and ways in which results are communicated to policy actors – this is also an SPI. Many SPI, however, are less formal structures. A workshop with policy makers and scientists, and maybe other stakeholders, can be an SPI, so can a field trip.

Science Policy Interfaces have been intensively studied in the EU funded SPIRAL project for the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), showing many similarities with the UNEP/MAP initiative EcAp. Together with the recommendations from the initial workshop on SPI for EcAp/IMAP, main elements of SPI best practice are listed in Box 1.

## SPI for UNEP/MAP, EcAp: Stronger Ecosystem Approach related science-policy interface in the Mediterranean

Science-Policy Interface is also a core issue for the Mediterranean, which was highlighted in many EcAp related meetings (including CORMONs, EcAp Coordination Group Meetings). In order to progress on and implement IMAP on a regional basis, it is an absolute necessity to ensure links with other ongoing monitoring frames and projects, EU initiatives (such as MCC), including projects with experimental and data collection related activities (such as [IRIS –SES](#)). In addition, it is key to ensure that their outcomes will be reflected in regional policy developments related to IMAP and in case they are timely, also in the country specific EcAp monitoring implementation plans.

A scientific Workshop on biodiversity, co-organized by UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention and the EU [PERSEUS-project](#) showcased that in case of targeted pre-defined questions, based on clear policy needs and identified scientific gaps, various research projects could give specific needed inputs into the EcAp policy process while overcoming some capacity and knowledge gaps in non-EU countries.

### Box 1: SPI Do's and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Make it an on-going deliberate process</li> <li>✓ Make it a two-way communication and create opportunities for exchange and learning</li> <li>✓ Co-construct written outputs and accompany them with interaction (meetings, etc.)</li> <li>✓ Mutually respect and be open to different values, worldviews, disciplines</li> <li>✓ Spend time and effort on communication, develop common language, build trust</li> <li>✓ Allocate designated resources for SPI in projects (financial, time, human)</li> <li>✓ Apply CRELE attributes (credibility, relevance and legitimacy)</li> <li>✓ Formalize SPI: Define goals, structure, processes, outputs and outcomes</li> <li>✓ Target and involve main stakeholders and create networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Communicate one-way (writing a scientific paper or giving a talk at a conference alone)</li> <li>✓ Plan research without considering policy needs or set questions for research without involving scientists</li> <li>✓ Communicate only raw data</li> <li>✓ Impose a specific “knowledge culture”</li> <li>✓ Apply a one-size fits all approach</li> <li>✓ Over-rely on key individuals</li> <li>✓ Ignore inevitable trade-offs: (i) clarity versus complexity: conveying simple messages versus communicating uncertainty; (ii) speed versus quality: timely outputs versus in-depth quality assessment; (iii) supply-driven versus demand-driven knowledge production; and (iv) individual time management: interfacing versus doing other things</li> </ul>



Thus SPI for UNEP/MAP, EcAp aims to build on this experience and on the knowledge brokering concept developed by the [STAGES project](#). It also aims to ensure that the outcomes and ongoing work of the various relevant research projects in the Mediterranean region can be effectively channeled into the policy discussions taking place under the Barcelona Convention and that these projects can have an impact on the regional level, beyond the EU. In addition, to ensure that scientific projects will address monitoring challenges in the region, SPI for UNEP/MAP, EcAp also aims to highlight key policy challenges in relation to monitoring, where scientific input is necessary. As such, it will also make the scientific community more aware of policy needs and challenges.

### Specific aims of the EcAp science policy strengthening action:

- ✓ Reflect relevant scientific recommendations and results in the documents prepared by UNEP/MAP (for example in its planned Statut Quality Report) ;
- ✓ Follow-up with targeted communication material, ensuring further knowledge sharing and specific scientific input both to the development of national work (monitoring implementation plans), sub-regional and regional policy-development.

### Box 2: SPI network partners for EcAp/IMAP, present during workshop in December 2015

- ✓ MAP Focal Points from Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Egypt, Lebanon, France, Slovenia (generally representatives of Ministries of Environment).
- ✓ UNEP/MAP and its components Plan Bleu, RAC/SPA, PAP/RAC, SCP/RAC, REMPEC.
- ✓ EU Research projects: SPIRAL, EMODnet, COLUMBUS, STAGES, IRIS-SES, MERMAID, DEVOTES, CoCoNet, PERSEUS.
- ✓ Experts from: ACCOBAMS, ACRI-HE (France), AZTI-Tecnalia (Spain), Belgian Biodiversity Platform (Belgium), BRGM (France), CETMAR (Spain), CIESM (Monaco), CMCC (Italy), CNR-ISMAR (Italy), HCMR (Greece), IFREMER (France), INSTM (Tunisia), IOLR (Israel), ISPRA (Italy), IUCN Med (Spain), MedPAN (France), NIOF (Egypt), UAB (Spain), University of Foscari (Italy), University Mohammed V Agdal (Morocco).

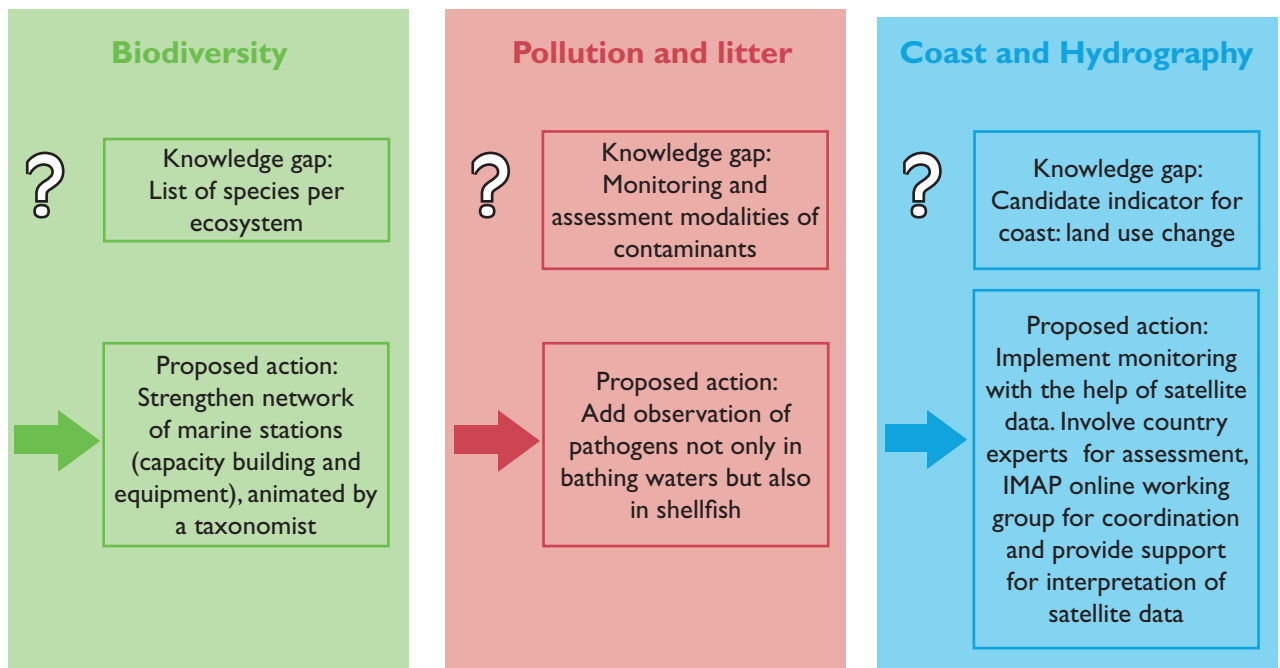


### Specific activities of SPI for UNEP/MAP, EcAp:

During a workshop to kick-start SPI for IMAP in December 2015, Plan Bleu brought together representatives of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, coordinators of research projects, representants of regional scientific bodies and experts in environmental science-policy interfaces as well as UNEP/MAP component representatives. Box 2 provides the list of institutions and organizations present during the workshop. The workshop succeeded in providing a platform for exchange on best practices in terms of SPI in the Mediterranean thus initiating the setting up of a network to support implementation of IMAP.

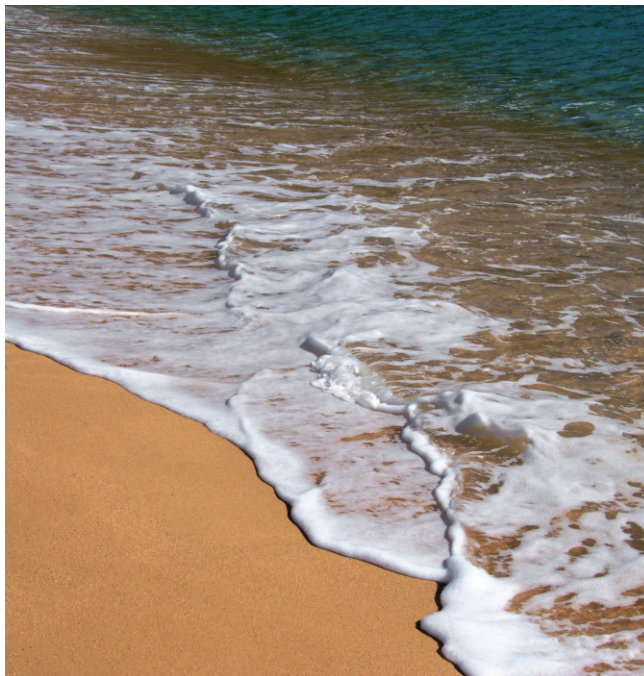


A first set of around 15 key gaps has been identified along with proposed actions to be taken to address these gaps. Three examples are illustrated in Box 3. The key stakeholders convened by Plan Bleu have made it clear that SPI is currently a real issue perceived by scientists and decision makers. The workshop opened up perspectives to develop SPI for IMAP, namely by pointing out the need to further formalize SPI along with structure and processes recognized and to identify dedicated resources to support SPI.



## Next steps

Following the first inception workshop on SPI for EcAp/IMAP, subsequent thematic workshops will be organized to capitalize on SPI recommended practices and formal SPI recognition / structuring. They will focus on documenting and fostering scientific actions required to address the identified knowledge needs that may impede full IMAP implementation and continue the dialogue between scientific experts and policy makers.



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