

Med-RAS - Identifying Priority Representative Areas and Species in the Mediterranean Sea to Conserve

Main recommendation of the advisory meetings (05/02/2009 & 06/02/2009)

- Need of involving governments and IUCN members in the Med-RAS.
- In parallel to Med-RAS initiative, RAC/SPA is preparing a regional initiative at the level of the Mediterranean High Sea.
- The fundamental implication and collaboration with RAC/SPA in order to avoid replication of efforts.
- Added value of Med-RAS is to limit its methodology to the territorial waters of the Mediterranean, and to give special importance to the eastern and southern part of the Mediterranean basin where important habitats are underrepresented and under protected. This would make it perfectly complementary to the RAC/SPA efforts.
- Med-RAS needs to work according to the Barcelona Convention at any time in order to push governments to apply the set methodology for prioritizing areas for conservation in the Mediterranean Sea.
- In the next RAC/SPA steering committee, taking place on the 17th of March 2009, regional baseline oceanographic and biodiversity data and information will be presented; in addition proposed criteria and regional existing gaps will be discussed. Med-RAS will be represented in this committee. Here comes the need to have a clear MoU between RAC/SPA and IUCN on data sharing and adapting the same criteria for both methodologies to avoid work replication. This meeting will set:
 - A proposition of a subdivision of the Mediterranean into different ecoregions will also be discussed. The work of Spalding et al. 2005 will be taken into consideration as well as the marine framework strategy directives (agreed on by all European members). Once these ecoregions are identified,
 - The criteria that will be used to identify priority conservation areas (ecologically and biologically significant marine areas) will be discussed. The proposed criteria are based on the criteria discussed during the Azores meeting in 2007 and adopted by the CBD. They need to be harmonised with older criteria that were adopted by the Barcelona Convention, in order to be adapted to the Mediterranean Sea. And as a follow up on this work,
 - Based on the identified areas, further scientific criteria will be applied (annex III of the Azores meeting) for selecting areas to establish a representative network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean.
- In case the application of the ecoregional approach could create problems in the Mediterranean, a way of dividing the Sea, that was applied by Finding Sanctuary, was to use multi-layers representing different features (socioeconomic, political, biological) and use your decision support tool (Marxan) for further divisions based on the set priorities. Based on the

importance you give to the different set criteria, you would end up with a sort of classification of different kinds of MPAs or zones based on what impacts you want in different zones.

- There are different criteria to follow. Med-RAS will adopt the CBD conditions, which start by identifying ecologically and biologically significant areas (EBSAs). Once the EBSAs are identified, a classification of the biogeographic regions is set. The third step will be the identification of a representative network of Marine Protected Areas by applying the ecosystem based management approach (EBM).
- Some highlighted questions: How to deal with large areas where no data are available? What are the species that are important, how to choose the species that you need to use? What are the indicator species important to take into consideration for EBSAs?
 - Expeience 1: In the GBR, the regularization and the broad operating (biophysical and socioeconomic) principles OP were the building blocks that were applied to develop the MPA network. Using these outcomes and the existing network of MPAs gave the draft outcome. This highlights the driving principles being the important existing and known key features to protect. The approach used was starting with the available data and then build upon.
 - Expeience 2: According to the CBD, the representativeness of ecological and biological uniqueness should be the starting point. Knowledge about key species (ex. Presence of Tuna) could be the base to start, together with habitat models. The step after would include the biogeographic principles.
- In the Mediterranean Sea, important criteria to consider are the integrity and the connectivity where more efforts should be done for articulating them.
- Main gaps of information present in the Mediterranean are the biodiversity data, where very little information and surveys are present concerning the fisheries for example.
- In “data poor” areas, a suggestion would be to overlay critical habitat of main taxonomic groups to identify priority areas of conservation. Work needs to be done at the level of ecoregion, where previous experience showed that distribution data of different taxonomic groups coincided with others, proving that, even with this type of data, we can already identify important areas for conservation.
- In case of broad scale data, it is important to start with the data that we have available. According to the North Sea experience, it was sometimes important to have a policy of “protecting a little bit of everything” in case of poor data. By this, politicians and people showed more acceptances. In the case of the Indian Ocean, WWF used proxis and satellite images showing animal aggregations as a solution.
- Concerning the EBSAs, they were recommended to be used in a broad representativity approach in addition to the policy of “protecting a little bit of everything” if needed. As for the question of which type of key species to use to define important areas to protect, the pragmatic answer would be to use the available data (especially in “data poor” areas) giving special importance to species that we already know they need special protection.

- It is important to exchange ideas between different experiences, but the Mediterranean case should be addressed with special care due to its peculiarities (political diversity, unbalanced data). In addition, this shall be a very important example for other regions to learn from. An idea would be to present it as a case study in next CBD meeting next October in Canada.
- It is very useful to identify criteria for the water column classification of the Mediterranean.
- A proposition of selecting a pilot site in the Mediterranean Sea in order to try out the best methodology applied there.
- In the Med-RAS, we should assure the minimum data for the “data poor” areas in order to develop the methodology. Whereas, in the “data rich” areas, the methodology would lead to more precise results as more data are available for the analysis. The level of uncertainties will be different and the analysis can have different results (it is surely an interesting case study). MedRAS could be a very interesting case study on how the CBD criteria are attempted to be inquired that could be presented in the next CBD meeting in Canada.
- As a starting point, especially in the areas where few data are present, it is good to start with bathymetry layer, you can model how complex this bathymetry is, and then from that you can get complex habitats. From biological surveys you get species richness correlations and with this you can model complex data. A relatively easy thing to do is to start with bathymetry, to turn it into complexity, and by that you have 2 things: Depth and complexity. You can do this with datasets and quickly things can change. Take data; see how you can use them, and the proxis that you can use.
- Getting over the point data: define models to use in order to refine this data.
- Start with what you can do, and things become much more manageable.
- It is important to take “uncertainty” and future predictions as a parameter in the analysis when planning.
- In the Mediterranean, the involvement of regional organizations is very important, leading then to the involvement of people.
- Elaboration of MoU with the main partners with whom we want to collaborate and share data.

Next Steps:

- Important documents to be circulated among advisors is 1) the recommendations set by advisors during both meetings of February 2009, and 2) a road map to reach the established goal of Med-RAS with some additional information as a map showing the suggested ecoregional subdivisions, and a list of baseline material as a pelagic classification. This would help advisors to have clearer ideas of what could be best done with the present material.
- In order to have a better efficiency at the level of the advisory committee, it will be important to provide the advisors more hints about the available data, information, and proxis that are important to develop for the Med-RAS. Among these data:
 - the proposed division of the Mediterranean Sea,
 - The data present or could be shared for the Med-RAS,
 - The critical habitat maps,
 - Documents of other experiences like the Finding Sanctuary.

- From the side of IUCN, a mobilisation of concerned IUCN commissions like the Species Survival Commission (SSC) is needed to provide us with important biological data (i.e. place critical species on maps at the level of the Mediterranean or even the ecoregions if possible). In addition, we should get in touch with other biological data providers like the ACCOBBAMS, Birdlife International... in order to share species data and habitat maps whenever present. Furthermore, sign an MoU with RAC/SPA for a stronger collaboration among the 2 initiatives and data sharing, as well as the implementation of this initiative in the Mediterranean countries.
- Further limited group discussions with some advisors maybe useful (by skype) in the near future.