



## NEW ACTION: Strengthening marine biodiversity conservation in the Southern Adriatic Sea, including the transboundary dimension

### Short description

The new action supports the measure NAZ\_MIS|14 of the draft Italian MSP plan for the Adriatic Sea (in the following: the plan) that aims to identify new marine protected areas. Based on the existing and potential MPAs and the MSP planning units prioritised for nature conservation, this action focuses on the identification of Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs) in the Southern Adriatic Sea to both facilitate the achievement of the 30% and 10% targets for protected areas and promoting transboundary cooperation for biodiversity protection with the neighbouring countries.

### Project partner(s) responsible for the preparation of the new action

CORILA, IUAV, CNR-ISMAR

### Action typology

- (iv) Zoning
- (v) Analysis

### Topics addressed

D1. A coherent network of marine protected areas

### Geographical scope

The action considers the territorial waters of the Apulia Region in the Adriatic marine area (sub-area A/6 in the MSP plan) and the continental shelf area beyond 12 NM to up to the midline (sub-area A/9).



### Sectors/Activity involved

- ✓ Nature protection and restoration
- ✓ Fishing
- ✓ Maritime transport
- ✓ Coastal and maritime tourism
- ✓ Scientific research

### How does the new action support the Green Deal in MSP

The Italian MSP draft plans do not identify new MPAs, or other types of nature protected areas, or the enlargement of existing ones. Neither do they identify any OECMs (Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures) addressing sustainable management of human activities.

However, as described in the Valuable Practices (Task 3.1 – IT VP: *Zoning areas for environmental and natural resources protection*), the plans identify areas where nature protection is prioritised, paving the way for identifying specific spatial measures addressing nature protection. This action aims to identify possible proposals for nature protected areas (MPA, N2K) and OECMs – collectively

defined as AMBTs – in the Southern Adriatic Sea. This will contribute to strengthening the EGD dimension of the plans, in the direction of biodiversity conservation.

In many cases, the MSP Italian draft plan defines planning units prioritising marine conservation, in association with other existing or future maritime activities. Such double (or triple) prioritisation requires a set of measures (temporal, spatial, etc.) to enhance the environmental compatibility of economic sectors and to ensure co-existence with nature conservation objectives. ABMTs are multi-sector tools that comprehensively manage a wide breadth of activities and uses, including marine protection. ABMTs can facilitate the enlargement or the strengthening of the protection status of existing protected natural areas, as well as the establishment of new areas managed in a sustainable way. The action supports the EGD in MSP achievement of 10% (strictly protected) and 30% (non- strictly protected) targets.

### Governance context

The action is part of the implementation of the national MSP plan in which an overarching role is played by the MSP Competent Authority (Ministry of Infrastructures and Transport). However, as indicated in the plan, the measure of the plan this action refers to is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, together with the National Environmental Protection Agency (ISPRA) and the coastal regions.

The action considers different types of management areas (ABMTs), with different scopes and different governance systems that are briefly described below.

1. New MPA designation and extension. The designation of Marine Protected Areas is under the competence of the Ministry of Environment and Energy Security. Marine protected areas can be established starting from a list of candidate areas that are provided by law. The Region and the local municipalities interested in the establishment of the MPA are consulted during the process of designation.
2. Natura 2000 network implementation (SCI/SAC and SPA). In Italy, proposals for SCIs are elaborated by Regions and transmitted to the Ministry of Environment and Energy transition, and from it to the EC. Once designed as SCI, Regions are uncharged to identify conservation objectives and measures to make the SAC operative,
3. Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) designation under IMO. A PSSA is an area that needs special protection because of its significance for recognized ecological, socio-economic, or scientific features that may be vulnerable to damage by international shipping activities. Member Governments wishing to have IMO designate a PSSA should submit an application providing information on the vulnerability of the area to damage from international shipping activities and include the proposed associated protective measures to prevent, reduce, or eliminate the identified vulnerability.
4. Fishery Restricted Areas (FRA) under GFCM. A process is already ongoing under GFCM toward the designation of a FRA in the Otranto Strait. In fact, MedReAct submitted in 2018 a proposal for an FRA named *Deep water essential fish habitats and sensitive habitats in the South Adriatic* to the GFCM's Sub Regional Committee for the Adriatic Sea. More elaborations on the proposal were asked by the interested countries (Italy and Albania). In response to that, GFCM has adopted Resolution 44/2021/3 providing a roadmap for the establishment of a FRA in the southern



## NEW ACTION: Strengthening marine biodiversity conservation in the Southern Adriatic Sea, including the transboundary dimension

Adriatic Sea. GFCM should have examined such a proposal at its annual session in 2023 but no additional resolutions are so far available on this theme.

### Other stakeholders to be involved in the new action

Implementation of this new action will require engagement of the following stakeholders:

1. New MPAs designation and extension: Apulia region, the regional environmental protection agency (ARPA Puglia), coastal municipalities, environmental NGOs such as WWF, Legambiente, etc., fishermen and aquaculturists associations, touristic operators, operators of ports and marinas.
2. N2K implementation process: Apulia region, the regional environmental protection agency (ARPA Puglia), coastal municipalities, environmental NGOs such as WWF, Legambiente, etc., fishermen and aquaculturists associations, touristic operators, operators of ports and marinas.
3. PSSA designation under IMO: Italy and Albania to propose the PSSA designation, following the IMO Revised guidelines for the identification and designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs).
4. GFCM governance for FRA: Italy and Albania competent ministries (fisheries), GFCM offices, representatives from fisheries sector in the area, Apulia (IT) and Vlora (AL) region, and research institutes.

### Description of the new action

Focusing on the ABMT, the new action firstly identifies drivers, pressures, and impacts exerted in coastal and offshore areas on habitats and biodiversity. In addition, it explores the spatial conservation measures in place and the provisions from the available planning tools, to provide evidence and identification of some proposals for the ABMT candidate areas.

For the coastal sub-area and territorial waters, the analysis foresees the identification of the following ABMTs:

1. extension of the existing MPA of Torre Guaceto to include and manage the already established Special Area of Conservation (SAC) of Torre Guaceto and Macchia San Giovanni (marine areas within national jurisdiction, and terrestrial areas). The extension provides the establishment of new No-Take Zones to reduce fishing pressure in specific areas and support the recovery of fish stocks;
2. designation of the new MPA of Capo d'Otranto - Zinzulusa and Romanelli caves - Capo di Leuca. A procedural process is currently underway by the Ministry of Environment and ISPRA. Eleven (11) coastal municipalities are interested in the designation process with a common goal of supporting the acquisition of detailed data in the area and the completion of the ISPRA technical investigations;
3. designation of a new marine SCI (Dauno seamount)
4. designation of the new FRA *Deep water essential fish habitats and sensitive habitats in the South Adriatic*, to recover overexploited fish stock, minimise impacts on bottom habitats and marine megafauna, linked to bycatch;
5. designation of a new PSSA in the Strait of Otranto between Italy and Albania aiming at reducing ship pollution and the risk of maritime incidents. Measures could include discharge restrictions; mandatory reporting and

installation of Vessel Traffic Services (VTS); equipment requirements for ships, such as oil tankers; measures on ballast water exchange; and reporting on the sighting of charismatic species.

In addition, amendments are proposed to the existing management plans of N2K areas, to better accomplish specific pressures (e.g. coastal tourism). The action focuses on those coastal-marine SAC and SPA N2K facing municipalities in which high touristic pressures (intended as presence/populations) were registered, in particular: Litorale brindisino - SCI (IT9140002), Torre Guaceto e Macchia S.Giovanni - SCI (IT9140005), Stagni e Saline di Punta della Contessa - SPA and SCI (IT9140003), Aquatina di Frigole - SCI (IT9150003), Torre Veneri - SCI (IT9150025), Torre dell'Orso - SCI (IT9150004) and Alimini - SCI (IT9150011). The measures, spatial and temporal, consider the carrying capacity of each site and define, for example, seasonally-based contingent measures to control and regulate the maximum number of daily entries. In addition, new monitoring measures in the area and specific areas in which to install ecological buoys are proposed.

Finally, this action also addresses initiatives in a cross-border area between Italy, Montenegro, and Albania, in the southern portion of the study area, focused on sea turtle monitoring programs. This would pave the way for future designation of a cross-border nature protected area.

### Possible challenges/risks related to the new action

MSP plans in Italy are still under revision and have not been adopted yet. This could delay the process of implementation.

The action encompasses numerous spatial tools and measures, each one engages a plurality of actors (some of them from other countries) and each one has its temporal development. This could lead to a lack of agreement on some of the actions or to delays in implementation.

For transboundary ABMTs there is a need for cross-border consultation between different countries, also non-EU ones. With non-EU countries, challenges are also linked to different legislative instruments (e.g. N2K vs Emerald network).

Finally, since the national MSP plan must be implemented with no additional costs for the State, the impacts of some of the measures (e.g. restriction of some uses) could not be covered with compensations.

### Gaps or challenges that the new action does not consider

Additional knowledge gathering activities are not foreseen by the action. Indeed, additional knowledge on specific ecological elements and environmental impacts in the area would be needed (e.g. more detailed sea-bed mapping, impacts of fisheries on marine megafauna, underwater noise levels, and impacts). This would limit the possibility of identifying specific area-based measures as well as other non-spatial management measures addressing environmental compatibility.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives, which are of utmost relevance in the area, are not directly addressed. Additional knowledge would be required in the direction of identification of climate refugia. Future CC-related scenarios of uses (e.g. fishery, aquaculture) would also be needed. Last, the action doesn't consider the priority with which these ABMTs should be implemented nor the procedural timing.



## NEW ACTION: Strengthening marine biodiversity conservation in the Southern Adriatic Sea, including the transboundary dimension

### Replicability /Elements which can be capitalised

#### PROS:

- ✓ ABMTs are cross-sectorial, flexible tools to be used to reach the Biodiversity Strategy objective of enhancing biodiversity protection within 2030 (10% strictly protected, 30% non-strictly protected areas).
- ✓ The different ABMTs are practical tools to be implemented on a case-base, by selecting the one most suitable to the context, the stakeholders, the governance, etc.
- ✓ ABMTs work cross-culturally on human-environment interactions and this allows for reducing pressures by identifying measures acting on different sectors and activities (e.g., maritime transport, fishing, tourism, etc.).
- ✓ ABMTs also facilitate cross-border dialogue, allowing some potential administrative-regulatory barriers to be overcome (e.g., EU vs. NON-EU countries).

#### CONS:

- ✓ Identification of ABMTs is not legally binding in implementation. The many tools identified may or may not be implemented.
- ✓ No knowledge production is foreseen by the action (e.g., analysis, studies, modeling, mapping, etc.) which focuses on already available tools and knowledge.
- ✓ Proposing a set of different tools (ABMTs) makes the overall process complex in terms of the number of actors to be involved and the different processes of designation to be undertaken. These elements might prevent the full implementation of the action or prolong the time needed for the completion of the process.