



# EMODnet



European Marine  
Observation and  
Data Network

## EMODnet Seabed Habitats

**EASME/EMFF/2018/1.3.1.8/Lot2/SI2.810241**

**Start date of the project: 25/09/2019 – (24 months)**

**EMODnet Phase III extension**

## **A review of stakeholder needs for combined, harmonized data products for seabed habitats in Europe**



## Disclaimer

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## Document info

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# 1 Introduction

As EMODnet Seabed Habitats continues to grow the most extensive collection of [habitat maps](#) and [point observations](#) of seabed habitats in Europe, the opportunity has arisen to build new composite products that show the best available evidence on the extent and distribution of various seabed habitats in Europe, or specific marine regions of Europe. By “composite data products”, we mean those that combine data from multiple sources into a single data product. For example, in 2019 we produced three new composite data products that combined data from the existing library of habitat maps to show the best available evidence on three Essential Ocean Variables in European waters (O’Keefe and Lillis, 2019):

1. Areal extent of live hard coral – [view on EMODnet Seabed Habitats interactive map](#)
2. Areal extent of macroalgal canopy – [view on EMODnet Seabed Habitats interactive map](#)
3. Areal extent of seagrass meadows – [view on EMODnet Seabed Habitats interactive map](#)

As part of WP3 (Composite Data Products), we would like to find out what the requirements are in each region for additional products. The outcome of this review will dictate the specific deliverables to be produced under D3.08 and D3.09, which were described generically in the tender proposal as:

- “D3.08 Combined, harmonized data products showing the best evidence for extent and distribution of habitats defined in other classifications and lists in Europe, with metadata, depending on stakeholder needs – due M23” and
- “D3.09 Report detailing the construction of the data products defined by stakeholder needs – due M24.”

# 2 Scope

The sorts of products that is within the remit and capacity of EMODnet Seabed Habitats to produce would be those that:

- Describe seabed habitats
- Are focused on one or more European sea areas
- Include point observations and/or polygons from habitat maps

Depending on the outcome of the review, it may not be possible to produce all requested products in this phase due to resource limitations. However, all requests will be noted and, if necessary, considered for future phases of the project.

# 3 Method

The main customers of such products are likely to groups and commissions with responsibilities for environmental protection across international borders. These sorts of organisations, listed below, were approached first. Our review was supplemented by ad-hoc and informal conversations with other groups and individuals, which are summarized in the Results section.

The most important organisations to be approached proactively were the secretariats of the four regional sea conventions (RSC) involving European countries. To facilitate this, we allocated specific project consortium members to be the liaison points for each RSC (see Table 1)

**Table 1: RSCs and the EMODnet Seabed Habitat consortium member responsible for liaison.**

Region	Name of Regional Sea Convention Secretariat	EMODnet Seabed Habitats liaison
Atlantic/Arctic	Oslo-Paris (OSPAR) Commission	JNCC

<b>Baltic Sea</b>	Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)	SYKE
<b>Black Sea</b>	Black Sea Commission (BSC)	IO-BAS
<b>Mediterranean Sea</b>	Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA)	ISPRA

The first step was to review the text of the letters of support provided to the consortium by the RSC Secretariats as we were preparing our bid for the project. Some of these letters mentioned specific activities that the project could carry out that would be useful – see Appendix.

Our initial intention was to arrange a face-to-face meeting with each RSC but the Covid-19 situation made this difficult, so RSCs were approached by email and teleconferencing. Each RSC works in a different way, and each EMODnet Seabed Habitats liaison person has a different sort of relationship with their corresponding RSC. Therefore it would have been difficult to have a standard approach to these discussions. Instead, each liaison person was free to use their existing knowledge, contacts and relationships to frame the discussions.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Atlantic/Arctic region

The OSPAR letter of support (Appendix section 7.1) states “There are already established links between OSPAR and EMODnet Seabed Habitats. Through JNCC, the UK are the custodians of the **OSPAR Threatened and/or Declining Habitats database**, which is made available to the public via the EMODnet Seabed Habitats portal. In addition to this, the **OSPAR common indicator assessment of physical damage** has been partially constructed from data available from the EMODnet Seabed Habitats”.

#### 4.1.1 OSPAR Threatened and/or Declining Habitats database

Through its involvement in the OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on the Protection of Species and Habitats (ICG-POSH), JNCC is responsible for maintaining and publishing the composite data product showing the extent and distribution of habitats on the OSPAR list of threatened and/or declining species and habitats. This task has been carried out by JNCC since before EMODnet began and, as such, should not be called an EMODnet deliverable. However, EMODnet Seabed Habitats has helped to improve this product in several ways:

1. It has provided an online interactive mapping platform for users to view, filter and interrogate the product, increasing its visibility and usefulness;
2. Project partners have offered their services to the national leads responsible for collating data on threatened and/or declining habitats in their waters, to increase the capacity available to find and format the data; and
3. Through data submissions to the EMODnet library of habitat maps and point observations, we can contribute additional data to the database by forwarding the data to the national leads.

#### 4.1.2 Maps for the OSPAR common indicator assessment of physical damage

Through its involvement in the OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on the Coordination of Biodiversity and Monitoring (ICG-COBAM), JNCC has been asked to produce a composite data product showing the extent of seabed habitats in the NE Atlantic, classified to level 3 of EUNIS version 2007-11. This product is needed for the assessment of the OSPAR common indicator named “[Extent of Physical Damage to Predominant and Special Habitats](#)”, which aims assesses the degree of overlap between seabed habitats and human pressures that impact those habitats.

A similar product was produced by JNCC for the 2017 OSPAR Intermediate Assessment by combining the library of EUNIS habitat maps from surveys and the version of EUSeaMap available via EMODnet Seabed Habitats at the time.

An update to this product is needed in time to run a similar assessment in the run-up to OSPAR's 10-yearly Quality Status Report. The quantities of data and length of processing time needed for such a task is getting increasingly large, and as such, for the new request we have recommended that this be delivered through the EMODnet Seabed Habitats project. This will ensure that:

1. JNCC can make the resources available to carry out such a task (no funding is provided by OSPAR for this work); and
2. We increase the resource capacity by calling upon other project consortium members to contribute.

### **Specific deliverables added to the project plan:**

- *D3.08a Combined, harmonized data product showing the best evidence for extent of habitats classified to level 3 of EUNIS v2007-11 in the OSPAR area, with metadata.*
- *D3.09a Report detailing the construction of the OSPAR EUNIS data product described in D3.08a.*

### **Product specification for D3.08a** Data format: vector polygon and points

- Scale/resolution: best possible
- Extent: OSPAR area (NE Atlantic Ocean)
- Attribute table schema: The same as in the previous version
- Classification system: level 3 of EUNIS v2007-11
- Deadline for completion: March 2021
- Data to include:
  - EUNIS habitat maps from survey in the OSPAR area
  - EUSeaMap 2019, clipped to the OSPAR area
- Method for dealing with overlapping polygons: Same mapping rules used in the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017 described in OSPAR [CEMP guidelines](#)

### **Product specification for D3.09a:**

- A document written in the EMODnet report template, describing the data sources and methods used to construct the product. It should contain enough information for a user to understand what data was used, and for somebody to reproduce the process in future. It should be published on the EMODnet Seabed Habitats website. Deadline: August 2021.
- A summary of the method that can be used as part of the OSPAR report describing the method used for the OSPAR common indicator assessment of physical damage. Deadline: Likely to be November 2021.

## **4.2 Black Sea**

The letter of support from the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretary (Appendix section 7.2) did not include any specific requirement for composite data products for seabed habitats.

In a recent conversation by email, the Black Sea Commission (BSC) Permanent Secretary confirmed their support for the project and activities. The Secretary are available to provide advisory services and arrange the discussion and dissemination of EMODnet results within their scientific network and during BSC' AGs meetings.

They suggested that the on-going activities could be discussed within BSC' relevant Advisory Groups relevant Advisory Groups.

There is a clear need for updating habitat classifications and mapping benthic habitats in the Black Sea, as stipulated in the Black Sea Biodiversity and Landscape Protocol (2011) and its Annexes II and III, Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS SAP, 2009), Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP, 2017-2022) and Black Sea Commission Work Program for 2019/20. Specifically, the Secretariat detailed the following general needs:

- The Black Sea Biodiversity and Landscape Protocol requires that “\_The Contracting Parties shall adopt a list of landscapes and habitats of the Black Sea importance that may be destroyed, or important by their nature, cultural or historical value that constitute the natural, historical and cultural heritage or present other significance for the Black Sea region\_”;
- Black Sea Strategic Action Plan (BS SAP, 2009) describes the need to “\_undertake 5 yearly regional update of the list of conservation status of threatened coastal and marine species as well as list of critical habitats for these species\_”;
- The Black Sea Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (BSIMAP, 2017-2022) under “Conservation of Black Sea Biodiversity and Habitats” foresees a series of preparatory actions including:
  - Pressures (e.g. including physical loss or damage of habitats)
  - Assess initial status and determine Good Environmental Status (GES) of marine habitats
  - Agree on classification of habitats and landscapes
  - Revise the List of habitats of Black Sea importance (Annex 2 TDA, priority habitats for restoration and conservation)
  - Maps of indicated pressures, maps of habitats (reflecting the spatial and temporal changes)
- ANNEX 9 of BSIMAP proposes the following PRIORITY THEMATIC STUDIES to be implemented in 2017-2022:
  - For EQS 2 Conservation of Black Sea Biodiversity and Habitats:
  - Species conservation status and update of Annex 2 of Black Sea
  - Biodiversity and landscape Conservation Protocol;
  - Habitat mapping and classification.
- The BSC work program for 2019/20 foresees that BSC PS will provide “Continuation of the work on habitats classification and mapping” with output “Maps, updated list of habitats of Black Sea importance”.

However, the Secretary informed us that due to on-going delays in relevant BSC Advisory Groups' (CBD and FOMLR AGs) activities, this work is currently being suspended. In conclusion BSC Secretary is very interested in continuing the dialogue with EMODnet Seabed Habitats in order to identify the areas of possible future cooperation on seabed habitat data, products and classifications. However, the Secretariat cannot at present provide details on habitat products required for the Black Sea.

### 4.3 Baltic Sea

The HELCOM letter of support (Appendix section 7.3) states that “HELCOM welcomes the possibility to give advice to the consortium on the scope and definition of products and also to monitor development of products and services that are planned to be in line and support both the regional and international data needs”.

At a 2017 stakeholder workshop organised by EMODnet Biology, HELCOM presented their 'wish list' for biodiversity data products. Some points related to seabed habitats from that presentation include:

- They need to know the difference between data from monitoring and one-off surveys
- The [Baltic Sea Impact Index \(BSII\) tool](#) needs the following set of maps:
  - Broad-scale habitats
  - Natura 2000 habitats



- For Red List assessment they need "Distribution maps of species, biotopes and biotope complexes"
- For marine spatial planning they need "ecosystem component maps"
- Ideally, they would like biotope distribution maps covering the whole convention area using levels 5/6 of the HELCOM Underwater Biotopes (HUB) classification system.

HELCOM has already collated Baltic-wide datasets for Natura 2000 habitats (available on their [Map and Data Service](#)), but they are rasterised.

Further discussions with the HELCOM secretariat took place in a dedicated remote videoconference on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020. The main outcomes of the meeting, in terms of products and data needs, where:

- EUSeaMap broad-scale habitat map was used for cumulative impact assessments in the 2<sup>nd</sup> holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 2), hence it might be useful again for the next holistic assessment (HOLAS 3). A project on establishing data flows for HOLAS 3 just started and major efforts on data collation are planned for 2021. The delivery of EMODnet Seabed habitats products by September 2021 is timely and fits nicely with the HOLAS 3 timeline.
- Regarding the deliverable 3.05 "A combined, harmonized data product showing the best evidence for the extent of biogenic substrate in Europe, with metadata" we clarified that HELCOM is mostly interested in bottoms with epibenthic bivalves and shell gravels as their status is decreasing, and some data on those are available as they have been gathered as part of the Red List assessment.
- HUB level 5/6 biotope distribution maps for the whole Baltic are still considered useful and could be created from EUSeaMap. However, there are concerns on how well HUB is integrated in the updated 2019 EUNIS. We decided that we will need to work together to investigate further and assess suitability of the approach (as part of deliverable 1.09), before considering producing the Baltic wide HUB maps (potential deliverable 1.11).
- We agreed it would be beneficial to work together on the collation of Natura 2000 datasets. HELCOM proposes that EMODnet Seabed habitats should further discuss ways of collaborating with [EN-BENTHIC working group](#).

Since the Meeting with HELCOM, SYKE contacted the chair of HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic Habitats and Biotopes (EN-BENTHIC) – Both the chair and HELCOM Secretariat found the collaboration very valuable and agreed in principle to invite EMODnet Seabed Habitats to one of the next EN-Benthic meetings to discuss specific products requirements, feedback and joint data collation.

## 4.4 Mediterranean Sea

As the RAC/SPA letter of support (Appendix section 7.4) states, RAC/SPA is responsible for the implementation of the Regional Action Plans for the conservation of marine key habitats, namely:

- **Marine vegetation,**
- **Coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions,** and
- Habitats and species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic engineering benthic invertebrates and chemosynthetic phenomena (also known, collectively, as '**dark habitats**').

The letter of support states that an important action towards achieving these actions plans is a "summary of knowledge on these important marine key habitats and their distribution around the Mediterranean. Also, EMODnet will be useful in the implementation of [the] Ecosystem approach within [the] MAP System as ecological objective 1 (EO1) deals with habitat distributional range". Further discussions with RAC/SPA secretariat took place in a dedicated remote videoconference and by email in June 2020. Specific requirements for the "coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions" composite product were discussed (See below).

In addition, in 2019 the project was approached by a Greek non-governmental organisation called the Archipelagos Institute, who expressed a strong desire for comprehensive composite data products for **seagrass beds** and **coralligenous habitats** in the Aegean and the Mediterranean at large. We had an initial teleconference with them in January 2020, we learnt that is their aim to produce more comprehensive maps of both seagrass and coralligenous habitats, hence we agreed that it would be beneficial to collaborate and avoid



duplication of effort. We have contacted the Archipelagos Institute in June about their progress with data collation and to enquire about their exact requirements for a seagrass and coralligenous product. However, we have not heard back from them yet, and learnt of staff changes within the organisation. We will persist and enquire on progress with their data collation and ways of collaborating in the coming months.

#### **4.4.1 Seagrass meadows**

As mentioned in the Introduction to this report (section 1), EMODnet Seabed Habitats have produced a product showing the Essential Ocean Variable “Areal extent of seagrass meadows” for European seas, as defined by the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS). It is already the intention of EMODnet Seabed Habitats to produce an update to this product by month 24 of the project (September 2021). This update will add new data collated by the project since the last update and revise the method for combining data to address some of the shortcomings identified in the methods report for the previous version of the product (O’Keefe and Lillis, 2019).

#### **4.4.2 Coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions**

Based on the RAC/SPA requirement and the conversations with the Archipelagos Institute, we agreed that the project would lead on the creation of a new product showing “coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions” in the Mediterranean Sea. EMODnet Seabed Habitats is well-placed to produce this product as:

- We have a remit to “Construct products from one or more data sources that provide users with information about the distribution of parameters in time and space create data products” (Task 2 of the tender specification)
- We are custodians of the most comprehensive library of seabed habitat maps in Europe
- We are custodians of the most comprehensive collection of point observations of seabed habitats in Europe
- We have partners with close ties to RAC/SPA, who can ensure that the product is fit-for-purpose.

#### **Specific deliverables added to the project plan:**

- *D3.08b Combined, harmonized data product showing the best evidence for extent and distribution of coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions in the Mediterranean, with metadata.*
- *D3.09b Report detailing the construction of the Mediterranean coralligenous data product described in D3.08b.*

#### **Product specification for D3.08b**

Data format: vector polygon and points

- Scale/resolution: best possible
- Extent: Mediterranean Sea
- Attribute table schema: Not specified
- Classification system: “Coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions” as defined in the [Action Plan for the protection of the coralligenous and other calcareous bio-concretions in the Mediterranean](#)
- Deadline for completion: M20 (May 2021) ahead of the National Focal Point meeting
- Data to include:
  - EUNIS habitat maps from surveys in the Mediterranean, filtered to extract polygons on the habitat of interest
  - Habitats Directive Annex I and Barcelona convention habitat maps from surveys in the Mediterranean, filtered to extract polygons on the habitat of interest
  - Habitat point observations, clipped to the Mediterranean, and filtered to extract data on the habitat of interest

- Method for dealing with overlapping polygons: Not specified

### **Product specification for D3.09b:**

A document written in the EMODnet report template, describing the data sources and methods used to construct the product. It should contain enough information for a user to understand what data was used, and for somebody to reproduce the process in future. It should be published on the EMODnet Seabed Habitats website. Deadline for completion: August 2021.

## **5 Conclusion**

We have consulted the four regional sea commissions of Europe and concluded that the priorities for new composite data products to be produced in the 2019-2021 phase of EMODnet Seabed Habitats will be:

- (i) A combined, harmonized data product showing the best evidence for extent of habitats classified to level 3 of EUNIS v2007-11 in the OSPAR area, due March 2021, so that OSPAR ICG-COBAM may carry out an up-to-date assessment of the OSPAR common indicator 'Extent of Physical Damage to Predominant and Special Habitats'.
- (ii) A combined, harmonized data product showing the best evidence for extent and distribution of coralligenous and other calcareous bioconcretions in the Mediterranean, due May 2021, to support RAC/SPA in delivering the Regional Action Plan for the conservation of this key marine habitat.
- (iii) We will also investigate whether hub and EUNIS 2019 match well (D 1.10). Depending on the findings, EUSeaMap will be published in EUNIS 2019 only (good match), or in EUNIS 2019 plus HELCOM HUB (unsuitable match, D1.11).

## **6 References**

O'Keefe, E. And Lillis, H. (2019). Generating Essential Ocean Variables. EMODnet Seabed Habitats report. Available online at: [https://www.emodnet-seabedhabitats.eu/media/1626/c20190514\\_generating\\_eovs.pdf](https://www.emodnet-seabedhabitats.eu/media/1626/c20190514_generating_eovs.pdf)

## 7 Appendix – RSC letters of support

### 7.1 OSPAR



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23 April 2019

**European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet). Thematic Groups: Geology, Seabed habitats, Physics and Chemistry. EASME/2019/OP/0003. Lot 2 – Seabed Habitats**

I confirm the interest of the OSPAR Commission in the proposal by the consortium coordinated by Ifremer in response to the new Call for Tenders of the EU for “European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet). Thematic Groups: Geology, Seabed habitats, Physics and Chemistry, Lot 2 – Seabed Habitats”, in order to continue and further develop the present EMODnet Seabed Habitat project activities and services.

Through its core activities to implement the Convention for the protection of the environment of the North-East Atlantic, the OSPAR Commission monitors and assesses the state of the marine environment. In 2017, OSPAR adopted a new strategy for the management of data and information, committing to ensure visibility and accessibility of data collected within the context of the Convention. We believe that it is critical to improve data sharing and data flows within the North East Atlantic. This is important to support the North East Atlantic Environment Strategy, OSPAR’s role as a platform to facilitate the regional implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive as well as, where possible, for use by other processes.

There are already established links between OSPAR and EMODnet Seabed Habitats. Through JNCC, the UK are the custodians of the OSPAR Threatened and/or Declining Habitats database, which is made available to the public via the EMODnet Seabed Habitats portal. In addition to this, the OSPAR common indicator assessment of physical damage has been partially constructed from data available from the EMODnet Seabed Habitats. We anticipate that the next phase of EMODnet and the greater engagement and dialogue that will be facilitated as a result of this proposal will realise further opportunities to work more closely together both in data sharing between EMODnet and the OSPAR Data and Information Management System (ODIMS), and in product development to support indicator development and assessments.

Should Ifremer and its partners be successfully awarded the contract for the project, we look forward to continuing to cooperate with the consortium and to contribute as much as possible to the project via relevant meetings and workshops.



Susana Salvador  
Executive Secretary

## 7.2 Black Sea Commission



### Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution

*19<sup>th</sup> April, 2019  
Istanbul, Turkey*

#### LETTER OF SUPPORT

##### To Whom it May Concern

**Subject: Letter of Support – EASME/2019/OP/0003**

Dear Sirs,

This letter is to acknowledge that the Black Sea Commission' Permanent Secretariat supports the IFREMER and GeoEcoMar (Romania) proposal to be submitted in the call for tenders "Operation, development and maintenance of a European Marine Observation and Data Network" (EMODnet), referenced EASME/2019/OP/0003 and specifically its Seabed Habitats lot.

Established to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (as defined in Article XVII), the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (BSC) through its Permanent Secretariat acts to promote the implementation of the Convention, makes recommendations on necessary measures and cooperates with competent international governmental and non-governmental organizations to achieve the purposes of this Convention.

Keeping in mind the need to recognise further opportunities for closer working, such as improving links between the EMODnet Seabed Habitats portal and the Black Sea Commission and providing a mechanism and support for Contracting Parties to submit habitat data for future assessments and indicator development, we support the objectives of this project proposal and hope that its successful implementation would considerably contribute to the improvement of the Black Sea marine environment.

If awarded, in our capacity of Regional Sea Convention for the Black Sea, the BSC PS could facilitate the exchange of relevant information and knowledge through its respective networks (without any financial responsibilities from our side). The BSC PS may also provide advisory services to the project during its course of studies and act as end-user of the deliverables produced.

Overall, the activities to be undertaken in the frame of this project proposal are considered of interest to the BSC PS and its expert network in the Black Sea region and beyond.

Sincerely,



**Prof. Halil Ibrahim Sur**

**BSC PS Executive Director**



## 7.3 HELCOM

### HELSINKI COMMISSION

Baltic Marine Environment

Protection Commission



21 July 2016

### Letter of Support

Date: 21 July 2016

Our organisation, the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission - Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), has learned of the initiative by the consortium, where Finnish Environment Institute, SYKE, is one of the leading partners, to prepare a tender to the new Call for Tenders of the EU for "Operation, development and maintenance of a European Marine Observation and Data Network" with reference "EASME/EMFF/2016/006" and Lot 2 – Seabed habitats.

One of the main functions of HELCOM is to act as a regional data hub for the Baltic Sea area and produce indicator-based assessments. Thus, HELCOM has been following and contributing to the development of EMODnet, as far as resources allow, for mutual benefits, and we intend to do so also in the future.

The outcomes of the Seabed habitats lot of the previous EMODnet phase have been welcomed by HELCOM as providing access to Baltic wide habitat map products which were used e.g. in the analysis of ecological coherence of the network of HELCOM Marine Protected Areas (HELCOM MPAs). However, further development of the data products is needed in order to increase resolution and make sure that regionally specific features are taken into account in development of the habitat maps. Therefore we welcome in particular the planned update of modelled habitats (EUSeaMap) and possibility for cooperation in this process.

In case SYKE with its partner organizations are awarded the contract for the project, HELCOM will cooperate and nominate experts to the expert meetings and workshops as planned by the consortium, subject to availability of funding. HELCOM welcomes the possibility to give advice to the consortium on the scope and definition of products and also to monitor development of products and services that are planned to be in line and support both the regional and international data needs.

We look forward to further interaction and cooperation with the awarded consortium in the project to enhance EMODnet.

*Monika Stankiewicz*

Monika Stankiewicz

HELCOM Executive Secretary

## 7.4 RAC/SPA



Tunis, 17 April 2019

**Subject:** Letter of support - EASME/2019/OP/0003.

Dear Dr Tunesi,

With reference to the call for tenders "European Marine Observation and Data Network" (EMODnet), SPA/RAC would like to support such initiative and more over be part in the future implementation of the project and participate in its relevant meetings and workshops. In fact, and as you may know, SPA/RAC is in charge of the implementation of the Regional Action Plan for the conservation of marine key habitats namely:

- The Action Plan for the Conservation of Marine Vegetation in the Mediterranean Sea adopted in 1999.
- The Action plan for the protection of the coralligenous and others calcareous bio-concretion in the Mediterranean, adopted in 2008.
- The Action Plan for the conservation of Habitats and Species associated with seamounts, underwater caves and canyons, aphotic engineering benthic invertebrates and chemo-synthetic phenomena, in the Mediterranean Sea (Dark Habitats Action Plan) adopted in 2013.

The first and the most important action provided for is the summary of knowledge on these important marine key habitats and their distribution around the Mediterranean in the form of a georeferenced information system. Also, EMODnet will be useful in the implementation of Ecosystem approach within MAP System as the ecological objective 1 (EO1) deals with habitat distributional range. SPA/RAC could complement the data gathered in other non-European (through MedMPAnet, MedOpenSea, and Medkeyhabitats I and II projects) countries in order to enhance the resolution.

To be in conformity with inspire directive, SPA/RAC, developed an SDI, the Mediterranean Biodiversity Platform(<http://data.medchm.net>). The two portals could be connected in an easy way and information shared for the benefit of the conservation of the Mediterranean. We are already in contact with JNCC to formalise this connection through an MoU (which will be signed soon).

Moreover, SPA/RAC finalised with the Contracting Parties, the Updated classification of benthic marine habitat types for the Mediterranean region and the updated Reference List of Marine Habitat Types for the Mediterranean region. Getting knowledge of the distribution of the habitat types of the reference list could help in their conservation

This said, SPA/RAC is supporting this project "Operation, development and maintenance of a European marine observation and data network" and to participate to its implementation.

Best regards,

**Khalil ATTIA**  
RAC/SPA Director

