

Countries call for blue economy to protect the Mediterranean Sea

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Mediterranean countries and the European Union meeting in Paris have called for a 'blue' economy to be set up to safeguard and promote a clean, healthy, productive Mediterranean environment. The call came as the issued their closing communique - the Paris Declaration - as the 17th Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP17) to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols drew to an end after three days of talks in Paris this week.

In his opening speech, France's Ambassador for the Environment, Jean-Pierre Thébault, who chaired the meeting, said: "In this very symbolic year for the environment, I express the wish that the Mediterranean Action Plan remains ambitious and leads by example, showing the way towards Rio+20." The Paris Declaration reflects this ambition. The 22 countries want a 'blue' economy, a version of the Green Economy that is applied to seas and oceans, and hope to see a strategic policy framework adopted at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil in June.

The world's marine ecosystems provide essential food and livelihoods to millions of people. UNEP's research shows how a switch to the more sustainable Green Economy model could unlock the vast potential of the marine-based economy and at the same time significantly reduce ocean degradation while alleviating poverty. UNEP defines the Green Economy as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. "The time has come for us to rethink how we manage our oceans," said Achim Steiner, executive Director of UNEP and Under Secretary General of the UN. "They are a key pillar for many countries of their economic and social development, and are vital in the fight against poverty. But too many of these essential natural resources are being degraded by unsustainable use, putting the ecosystems services they provide, such as food security and climate regulations for instance, at risk. Management decisions and investments that put the well-being of the oceans are essential if we are to continue to profit from this rich natural resource. A 'blue' economy in the Mediterranean and elsewhere would be a big step on the right path."

The meeting welcomed the progress that had been made in 2011 in reinforcing the fight against deterioration of the Mediterranean sea with the entry into force of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) protocol and the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution resulting from Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf and the Seabed and its Subsoil (the 'Offshore' Protocol). These two-world first protocols recognize the Mediterranean environment as a critical and shared resource, and promote and promote a co-operative and holistic approach to its management.

In the Paris Declaration, the Contracting Parties also:

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Reaffirmed their political commitment to the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal zones through an ecosystem approach to the management of human activities.

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Agreed to develop a coherent, well-managed network of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean, aiming for a target of 10 per cent of marine protected areas by 2020.

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Decided to intensify their efforts to curb marine pollution from land-based sources, such as mercury, Persistent Organic Pollutants and marine litter, by adopting legally binding measures, and reduce pollution from offshore and marine-based activities through regional action plans.

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Adopted the action plan for the implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol, and encouraged all Contracting Parties to ratify it.

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Agreed to work to protect the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction through the implementation of existing instruments and through the development of a multilateral agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

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Supported the preparation by 2014 of a report on the state of the marine environment, including from a socioeconomic perspective.

The Barcelona Convention entered into force in 1978, after Mediterranean countries and the European Community had, three years earlier, adopted the Mediterranean Action Plan, the first-ever Regional Seas Programme under the umbrella of the United Nations Environment Programme. The convention was amended and renamed in 1995; and that version came into force in 2004. The 22 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, the European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey.

Paris Declaration, 10 February 2012 - Version française

Mediterranean Action Plan