

# **The Young Person's Guide to the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Barcelona Convention**

**Learn how 21 countries and the  
European Union work together to protect  
the Mediterranean Sea and Coast  
and achieve Sustainable Development**

**UN**   
environment  
programme



**Mediterranean  
Action Plan  
Barcelona  
Convention**

Copyright © 2022 United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)  
[unepmap@un.org](mailto:unepmap@un.org) [www.unep.org/unepmap](http://www.unep.org/unepmap)

## REPRODUCTION

This communication product may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder, provided acknowledgement of the source is made. The Coordinating Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme's Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source. No use of this publication may be made for resale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the copyright holder.

## DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Moreover, the views expressed do not necessarily represent the decision or the stated policy of the United Nations Environment Programme, nor does citing of trade names or commercial processes constitute endorsement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"The Young Person's Guide to the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Barcelona Convention" was produced under the supervision of Tatjana Hema, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator, by Jihed Ghannem, UNEP/MAP Public Information Officer, and Anastasia Vergiris, UNEP/MAP Information Assistant, with contributions from members of the MAP Coordinating Unit and the MAP Regional Activity Centres whose expertise and insights helped shape this communication product.

Special thanks are extended to Dorra Maaoui, Erol Cavus, Franck Lauwers, Gabino Gonzalez, Joanne Foden, Julien Le Tellier, Lucille Guiheneuf, Luisa Rodriguez Lucas, and Souha El Asmi.

Design and Layout: Phoenix Design Aid / Eszter Saródy

# **The Young Person's Guide to the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Barcelona Convention**

**Learn how 21 countries and the  
European Union work together to protect  
the Mediterranean Sea and Coast  
and achieve Sustainable Development**



**Mediterranean  
Action Plan  
Barcelona  
Convention**

# A MESSAGE TO EDUCATORS

**THE** full implementation of the Barcelona Convention, its Protocols and associated strategies and action plans continues to be the shortest path to living in harmony with nature in the Mediterranean region, which faces a triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity decline and pollution.

Today's youth are tomorrow's citizens and leaders. An early assimilation and uptake of the UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention system are key to ensuring a sustainable and resilient future in the Mediterranean region.

The Young Person's Guide to the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Barcelona Convention\* is meant

as a simplified introduction to fundamental legal texts and issues that, when encountered in their original wording, can be daunting to a young audience. The illustrated pages of the guide explain the meaning and purpose of essential legal texts in simplified language. It is our hope that this will spark interest in young, inquisitive minds. The guide is primarily aimed at readers aged between 11-17 years old.

This publication may serve as an induction to more advanced material, including the course on the Barcelona Convention offered by InforMEA, which will further enrich the young learners' Mediterranean green credentials.

We hope that educators working with youth around the Mediterranean basin will find this guide useful as a basis for extra-curricular activities, such as roleplays and Model United Nations (MUN) simulations, or as a self-tutorial for students.

Thank you for your support to raising awareness of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system's mandate and objectives for healthy marine and costal ecosystems that underpin sustainability and resilience in the Mediterranean region.

**Tatjana Hema**  
**Coordinator of the Mediterranean**  
**Action Plan of the United Nations**  
**Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP)**



*\* Disclaimer: This guide is not meant as a surrogate for or as an alteration of the Barcelona Convention, a legal text that has reached its final form through formal intergovernmental negotiations under the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP).*

# TIPS FOR YOUNG READERS

The Convention for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal region of the Mediterranean, known as the Barcelona Convention, is a multilateral legal agreement among 21 Mediterranean countries and the European Union covering the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal area in a strong context of cooperation and sustainable development.

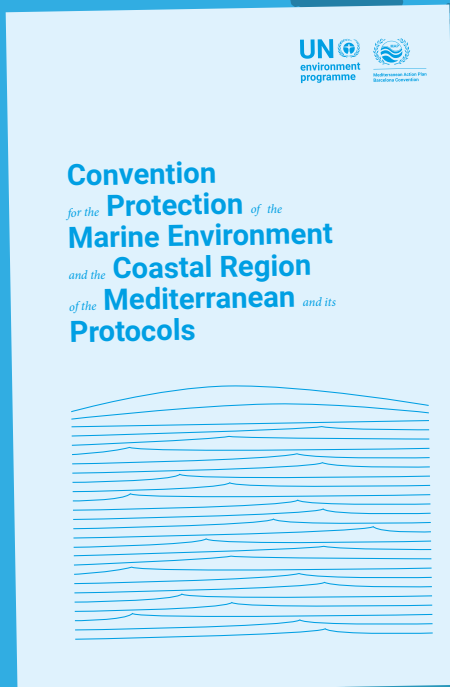
The Barcelona Convention was adopted in 1976 in Barcelona, Spain. That is where the Convention's name comes from.

You will find in the first chapter of this guide information on UNEP/MAP and the role it played in ensuring that coastal countries (located around the rim of the Mediterranean Sea) agree to protect the Mediterranean through a treaty (another word for convention).

## HAPPY READING!


## CONTENTS

A message to educators .....	2
THE STORY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN .....	5
The Mediterranean Sea and coast .....	5
Modernity came at a cost .....	6
The plastic problem .....	7
Waste became part of the lifestyle .....	8
The many facets of pollution.....	9
The gathering storm .....	10
How pollutants come from the land and end up in the sea .....	11
A sea change.....	12
Rules to protect the Mediterranean ....	13
Beyond the sea.....	14
Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean.....	15
Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mediterranean .....	16
THE BARCELONA CONVENTION AND THE SEVEN PROTOCOLS .....	17
Dumping.....	18
Prevention and emergency .....	19
Land-based sources and activities.....	20
Biological diversity and Specially .....	21
Protected Areas .....	21
Oil and gas extraction from the seafloor .....	22
Hazardous wastes .....	23
Coastal zone management.....	24
THE BARCELONA CONVENTION EXPLAINED ARTICLE BY ARTICLE .....	25
BE THE CHANGE THAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.....	32



The Coordinating Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme / Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)–Barcelona Convention Secretariat is based in Athens, Greece.

Here is where you can find the original text of the Barcelona Convention:

 [www.unep.org/unepmap/who-we-are/barcelona-convention-and-protocols](http://www.unep.org/unepmap/who-we-are/barcelona-convention-and-protocols)

Try reading it article by article using the explanations provided in this guide. Otherwise, you can go through the guide first and then discover the original articles in the Barcelona Convention. If you need more information, send us an email at

 [unepmap@un.org](mailto:unepmap@un.org)

Make sure you indicate "The young person's guide" in the subject line of your email.

We will be happy to answer your questions.

## THE UNITED NATIONS (UN)

is an international organization established on 24 October 1945 to promote international cooperation.

## THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

is the leading global environmental authority that works with countries and other UN agencies to protect the environment around the world.

# THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND COAST

The Mediterranean Sea has inspired storytellers, poets, artists and adventurers for millennia. It has seen the journey of Ulysses, written by ancient Greek epic poet Homer in the 8th Century before the modern era. That's more than 2800 years ago!

Its glittering waves have carried ships full of goods, ideas and ambitions since humans learned how to harness the wind.

Its history is one of war, peace and great civilizations that rose and fell on its shores. Phoenicians transformed it into a giant *agora*, the Greek word for market, and built fleets and harbors along its shores. The Roman empire, which straddled it, referred to it as *Mare Nostrum*, a Latin expression meaning 'Our Sea'.

The briny water had remained clean for thousands of years, until new lifestyles and technologies changed the relationship between humans and nature in the Mediterranean.

# MODERNITY CAME AT A COST

A cascade of inventions in the late 18th century transformed life and opened new possibilities. Steam, coal and petrol replaced muscle and wind and allowed vehicles and vessels to move faster with little human effort. Most importantly, the technological revolution and the wealth that it helped generate changed lifestyles around the rim of 'our sea'.

Fuels obtained from oil—the black, slimy substance that humans learned to extract from the Earth's depths—for use as a source of energy, made ships and cars move faster and faster. Electricity brought comfort and prosperity. Coastal cities got bigger and bigger as trade flourished. Travel became easier. Travelling for leisure (tourism) boomed because many of those who lived far from the sea wanted to enjoy the Mediterranean sun and beautiful beaches.



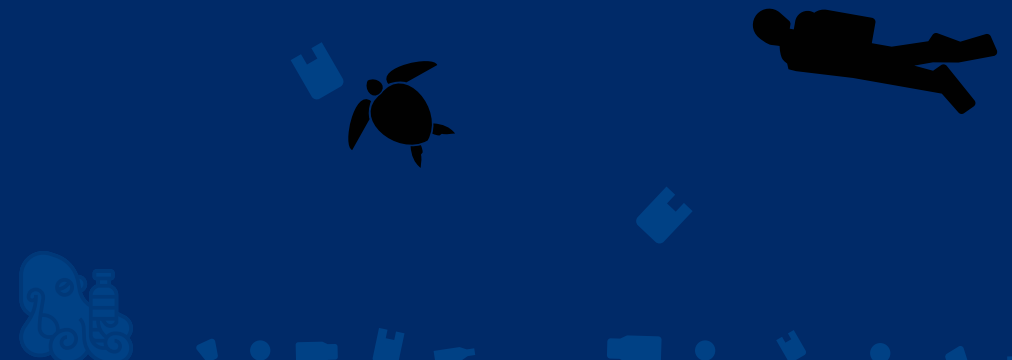
# THE PLASTIC PROBLEM



Since plastic litter started piling up everywhere, it has become abundantly clear that single-use plastic is a curse, not a blessing. It is not unusual to see empty plastic bags fly in the air like grim kites, or float in the sea like jellyfish ghosts.

When plastic came along, it was regarded as the best invention ever. It's light, handy, and flexible. You could use it for everything, from furniture to cutlery. Why carry a glass around when you can sip your drink from a cup that you don't have to wash after use? It is also cheap.

So cheap, in fact, that you could throw it away after use. The term "single use plastic" was coined for items that replaced what people used to eat and drink from: glasses, glass bottles and china crockery. These are still perfectly affordable and convenient, but they somehow went out of fashion. Many young people today do not know that a plastic-free lifestyle used to be the norm.




# WASTE BECAME PART OF THE LIFESTYLE



The modern peoples of the Mediterranean developed a liking for buying new things. Large fields, where copious amounts of pesticides and fertilizers are used, started catering to their new eating habits. The produce has become so abundant that it often ends up in the trash.

After millennia of thrift, with astute ways of storing food and making tools and objects that last, waste (in all its forms) became part of the lifestyle. Heaps of discarded goods emerged.



Trawling, dragging a giant fishing net on the seafloor, caught large quantities of fish but destroyed their natural habitat. Fishers with smaller boats started pulling up empty nets as the fish populations declined due to overfishing.

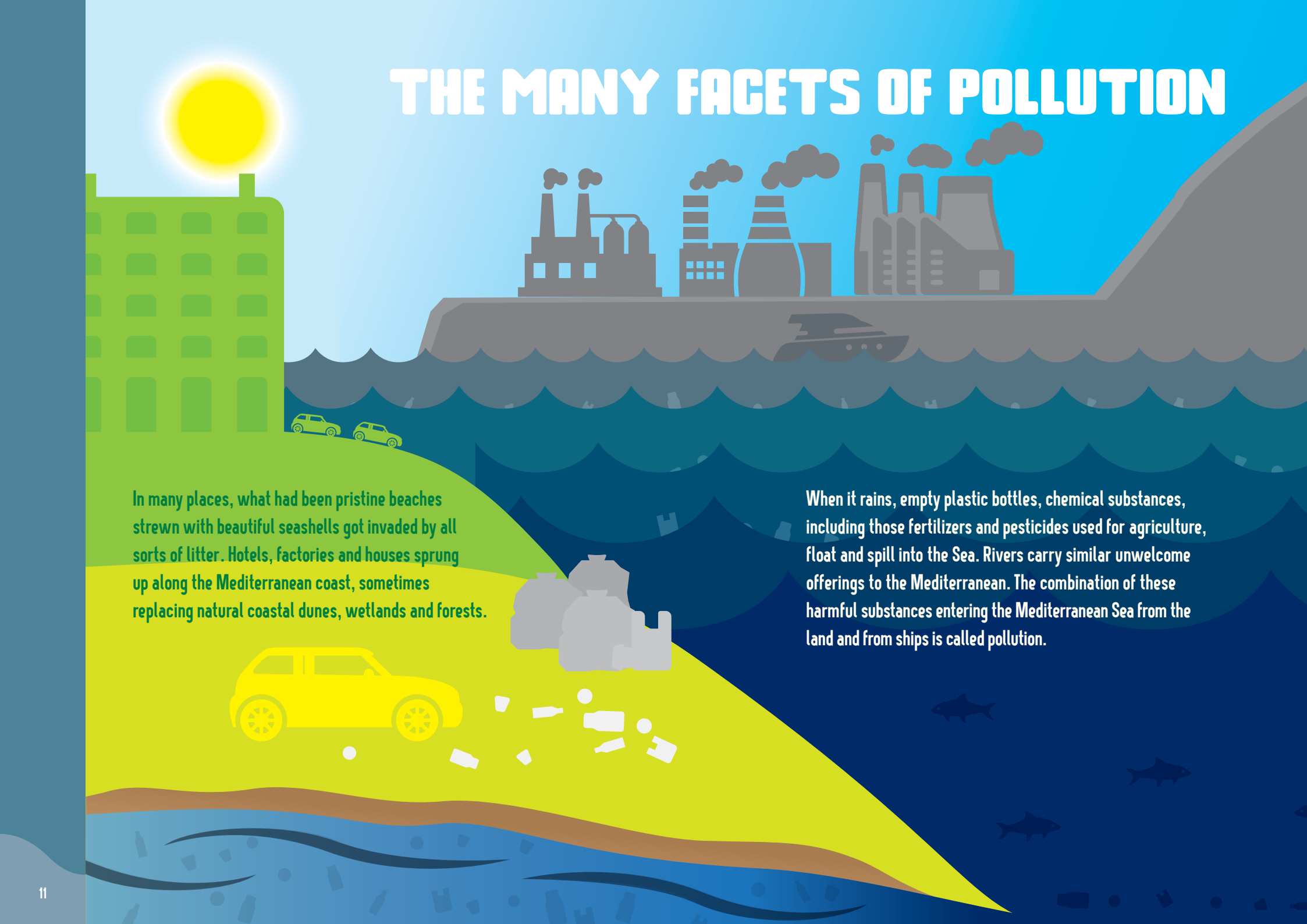
It is estimated that  
**184 million tonnes  
of solid waste**

are generated in the Mediterranean region every year. When you divide that staggering amount of waste by the number of people living around the Mediterranean, you will find that **each person generates approximately 370 kilograms per year.**

**DID YOU KNOW**



# THE MANY FACETS OF POLLUTION



In many places, what had been pristine beaches strewn with beautiful seashells got invaded by all sorts of litter. Hotels, factories and houses sprung up along the Mediterranean coast, sometimes replacing natural coastal dunes, wetlands and forests.

When it rains, empty plastic bottles, chemical substances, including those fertilizers and pesticides used for agriculture, float and spill into the Sea. Rivers carry similar unwelcome offerings to the Mediterranean. The combination of these harmful substances entering the Mediterranean Sea from the land and from ships is called pollution.

# THE GATHERING STORM



Climate change is causing average temperatures to rise worldwide. The Mediterranean is warming 20 per cent faster than the global average. The air is getting hotter, rain is getting scarcer in some parts, while storms are becoming stronger and more frequent.

Boats and cars, but also power plants where electricity is produced, kept burning fossil fuel at increasing rates in the Mediterranean and around the world. The smoke that they spew makes people sick and causes the planet to warm.

Sea level is expected to rise and will most likely affect the low-lying coastal areas.

When carbon dioxide dissolves in seawater, the water becomes more acidic and thus less hospitable to marine animals such as corals, mollusks (like octopus), and crustaceans (like crabs) as it affects their development and makes them vulnerable.

# HOW POLLUTANTS COME FROM THE LAND AND END UP IN THE SEA

As cities have grown bigger, so has the volume of wastewater. This is all the water coming from the city's sinks, washbasins, baths, showers and toilets. Normally, municipalities collect that dirty water in special plants where it gets treated before being discharged into the sea. Sometimes, the treatment is not good enough and polluted water laced with harmful substances ends up in the Mediterranean Sea.



There are many other forms of pollution, including the chemicals that factories making all those 'disposable' things release in the environment.

Pollution in all its forms breaks the natural balance of nature. It harms the fauna and flora of the Mediterranean Sea and coast. Sometimes it destroys natural habitats where marine animals and plants live and breed.

Fed by the fertilizers washing from farms on land to the sea, algal blooms suck all the underwater oxygen and stifle marine creatures. Sometimes, species carried by ships coming from far-flung corners of the world are capable of surviving and reproducing, thus invading the Mediterranean Sea. Such invasions become a threat to native species, especially when the invaders turn out to be avid predators.

# AND END UP IN THE SEA



## SOS

The Mediterranean Sea and coast started feeling the pressure. But the early signs of strain and distress appeared in the second half of the 20th century and luckily caught the eye of those who cared to see. As early as the 1970s, shortly after the United Nations Environment Programme was created, pollution grew so big that Mediterranean countries started to worry about the future of the Sea they share. And then, the most extraordinary thing happened.



# A SEA CHANGE

In 1975 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) brought Mediterranean countries and the European Community (which later became the European Union) together in an effort to protect the Mediterranean. The **Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP)** was born.

When UNEP asked them to talk and join forces to save the Mediterranean, the countries could have shrugged and said: “it’s not me, it’s the others”, or “why should I spend money to clean the Mediterranean for the others?” – but they didn’t and a great journey to heal the Mediterranean started.



The idea of signing a treaty of a special kind – a **Multilateral Environmental Agreement** – emerged. (Multilateral means that all countries work together in a harmonious manner.)

# RULES TO PROTECT THE MEDITERRANEAN

UNEP/MAP conducted environmental studies that shed light on the impact of pollution on the Mediterranean Sea and coast. When they realized what was happening, the Mediterranean countries agreed to work together under a set of rules that would apply to all. In 1976, the countries and the European Community adopted the **Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution**, which has since then been known as the **Barcelona Convention**.

The 21 coastal countries and the European Union accepted the obligations set out in the Barcelona Convention. They are referred to as the **Contracting Parties**.

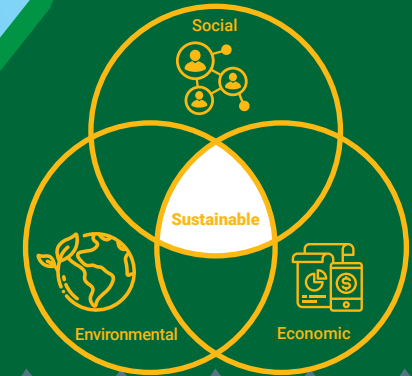
UNEP/MAP worked with the Contracting Parties on a set of rules to protect the Mediterranean environment. The challenge was that, although the countries shared a fondness of the Mediterranean and wanted to protect it, everyone had their own needs and understanding of what had to be done.

- 
- |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| §1. | §3. | §5. |
|     |     |     |
|     |     |     |
|     |     |     |
| §2. | §4. |     |
|     |     |     |
|     |     | §6. |
|     |     |     |

UNEP/MAP worked with the Contracting Parties on monitoring the marine environment and on assessments. Assessments are studies conducted in the field by scientists and experts to detect changes in the environment and establish their cause.

One important objective was to see if the newly introduced rules that the Barcelona Convention had brought were reducing pollution and improving the state of the Mediterranean Sea. It soon became clear that more had to be done to reduce pollution at its source, mainly on land.

# BEYOND THE SEA



In 1995 the Contracting Parties agreed to update the Barcelona Convention to put the principle of sustainable development at the heart of what they do together to protect the Mediterranean.

**Sustainable development** is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The principle of sustainable development emerged from the **Earth Summit** that the **UN** organized in **Rio de Janeiro** in **1992**, which changed the way the world looked at the planet and its resources.

Sustainable development was therefore integrated in the revised Barcelona Convention text, recognizing the need to balance social and economic needs with environmental considerations.

Yes, Mediterranean countries would continue to improve the lives of their citizens, but now they would do so while recognizing that natural resources are not limitless. Now, they would consider the impact of development on ecosystems.

The new text of the Barcelona Convention also included, for the first time, references to the coasts. The amended Barcelona Convention applies not just to the Mediterranean Sea, but also to its coast. Its title was also amended from **Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution**, to **Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean**.





# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

## The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development

**+** In 2016 the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025 (MSSD). Its aim is to ensure that

social and economic development and environmental protection go hand in hand in the Mediterranean region. The Strategy was devised by the Mediterranean Commission on

Sustainable Development (MCSD). The MCSD brings together representatives of the Contracting Parties and of organizations working on sustainable development in the

Mediterranean region. The MCSD provides advice and recommendations on sustainable development to the governments of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention.



[www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/mediterranean-strategy-sustainable-development-mssd](http://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/mediterranean-strategy-sustainable-development-mssd)

**Sustainability is about living in harmony with nature. Governments have a central role to play.**

**+** Here are six examples illustrating the complexity of the issues that governments have to address to ensure that citizens' needs are met without harming the environment. Strategies such as the MSSD can help them navigate these complexities and find solutions.

<b>Tourism</b>	✓ Develop coastal tourism to create more jobs in the tourism sector that generate sufficient income for all	! Ensure that tourism does not harm the Sea and coast, for example by reducing marine litter on beaches and pollution by cruise ships
<b>Infrastructure</b>	✓ Build infrastructure (such as roads, bridges and dams)	! Respect nature, prohibit the cutting of trees or changes in natural landscapes, and preserve the coastline by banning construction in vulnerable areas
<b>Transport</b>	✓ Connect cities and people through effective and affordable land and maritime transport	! Lift subsidies on fossil fuels*, which pollute the air and contribute to climate change
<b>Energy</b>	✓ Provide affordable energy to households for heating, cooking and other uses	! Replace burning oil and gas with clean and low-emission electricity. (Sources of clean electricity include renewable energy: solar, wind and hydropower)
<b>Food</b>	✓ Ensure that everyone can afford nutritious food in sufficient quantities	! Use chemical fertilizers sparingly and avoid overfishing
<b>Waste management</b>	✓ Provide affordable goods, electronics and other important products we need in our modern lives	! Reduce waste and ensure sustainable consumption and production

\* Fuel subsidy is an amount of money that governments provide to make petrol and gasoline more affordable to citizen

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



# ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The objectives contained in the MSSD consider the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, also known as the Global Goals. Together, the SDGs form a well-designed plan that can reconcile environmental protection with the much-needed socio-economic development.

By capturing the SDGs and putting them in the Mediterranean context, the MSSD helps decision-makers in the Mediterranean countries, including governments, municipal authorities, companies, and citizens (who regularly make important decisions, for example on what products to buy and whether they should walk or drive to go somewhere), to meet the needs of human societies while living in harmony with nature.



The  **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**  
of the  **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

— adopted by world leaders in September 2015 at a

 **historic UN Summit**

came into force on 1 January 2016.

From 2016 to 2030, the SDGs will be universal (meaning they will apply to all).

All countries will strive to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

# THE BARCELONA CONVENTION AND THE SEVEN PROTOCOLS

The Barcelona Convention comes with seven Protocols. Think of it as a fleet in which the Convention serves as the mothership. Each Protocol is a treaty that is related to the main Convention and brings an additional set of detailed rules on specific themes.

The Protocols complete the Convention and are named after the following seven themes:

-  Dumping
-  Prevention and emergency
-  Land-based sources and activities
-  Biological Diversity and Specially Protected Areas
-  Oil and gas extraction from the seafloor
-  Hazardous wastes
-  Integrated coastal zone management

## TURNING WORDS INTO ACTION

UNEP/MAP has developed several regional plans to help the Contracting Parties implement the Barcelona Convention and its seven Protocols.

Discover them here:

 [www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/thematic-regional-strategies-and-action-plans](http://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/thematic-regional-strategies-and-action-plans)

 [www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/regional-regulatory-measures](http://www.unep.org/unepmap/what-we-do/regional-regulatory-measures)

# DUMPING

An illustration showing a dark grey airplane flying over a dark blue sea. The airplane is dropping several brown rectangular blocks into the water. Below the airplane, a dark grey cargo ship is shown with a stack of similar brown blocks on its deck. The ship is also dropping blocks into the sea. The sky is a light blue gradient, and a bright yellow sun is visible in the top right corner. The sea is depicted with dark blue, wavy patterns.

The Protocol for the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft was adopted in 1976.

In 1995, the Protocol was renamed **Protocol for the Prevention and Elimination of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft or Incineration at the Sea**. It is now known as the Dumping Protocol to the Barcelona Convention.

Dumping refers to the release of material from ships or aircraft into the sea. The Dumping Protocol of the Barcelona Convention forbids all dumping activities with a few exceptions that are described in detail and which do not cause harm to the environment. It also prohibits all burning of wastes and other material at sea.

The Mediterranean Pollution Assessment and Control Programme (MED POL) - a component of UNEP/MAP - assists Contracting Parties in meeting their obligations under the Dumping Protocol.

# PREVENTION AND EMERGENCY

The Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Oil and other Harmful Substances in Case of Emergency (adopted in 1976) was replaced by the Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, which was adopted in 2002.

Known as the **2002 Prevention and Emergency Protocol to the Barcelona Convention**, it aims to prevent and respond to accidents and resulting leakage of harmful substances from those accidents (for example, when ships collide or run aground). It provides the rules that everyone involved in such accidents should follow. These rules apply to ships, oil and gas platforms and ports.

Under this Protocol, the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) plays an important coordinating role, in assisting Contracting Parties to implement the Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention of, Preparedness, and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031).

Beyond accidents, the Protocol also aims to prevent and respond to many forms of pollution from ships:

- oil and chemical spills
- illicit discharges and ship-generated waste
- emissions of harmful gases
- introduction of marine species from other regions of the world
- underwater noise (a problem that affects cetaceans such as dolphins)

# LAND-BASED SOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

The Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land-Based Sources was adopted in 1980. It was amended in 1996 and renamed Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities.

Known as the **LBS Protocol** (the acronym **LBS** stands for **Land-Based Sources**) to the Barcelona Convention, and as its name suggests, it addressed pollution originating on land, in cities, farms and factories and from different human activities.

- ⊕ Under the LBS Protocol the release or discharge of substances that may end up in the marine environment are strictly regulated based on scientific and technical considerations, which include the characteristics and composition of the discharges and their impact on natural systems of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean Pollution Assessment and Control Programme (MED POL) assists Contracting Parties in meeting their obligations under the LBS Protocol.

## SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

A sustainable business provides commercial solutions that create ecological value and/or safeguard the environment while being economically viable (benefits exceed the costs) and socially empowering.

To protect marine biodiversity in the Mediterranean, it is important to prevent all kinds of pollution from spilling into the Sea. We all have a role to play, and our individual decisions can be a step towards a healthier, and cleaner Mediterranean Sea (see Part 3). The Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP/RAC) helps Mediterranean countries make their economies circular by working with governments, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations and companies. Innovation and smart solutions are needed. Who knows? Maybe you will come up with the next big idea to reduce waste and prevent pollution!

## CIRCULAR ECONOMY

In a circular economy waste is reduced and eliminated by sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible.



# BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND SPECIALLY PROTECTED AREAS

The Protocol Concerning Mediterranean Specially Protected Areas was adopted in 1982. It was later replaced by the Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol).



The SPA/BD Protocol to the Barcelona Convention provides rules for the protection of the fauna and flora, and for the establishment of specially protected areas. In protected marine and coastal areas, human activities are regulated more stringently than elsewhere, so that nature gets a respite and can heal itself if it needs to.

Human activities have caused many marine species to dwindle, including several species of marine birds and turtles, dolphins, whales, sharks and rays, as well as the iconic Mediterranean monk seal. Pressure resulting from those activities has led to the degradation of habitats (areas where species live, such as marine caves, seagrass meadows and coralligenous habitats, among others).

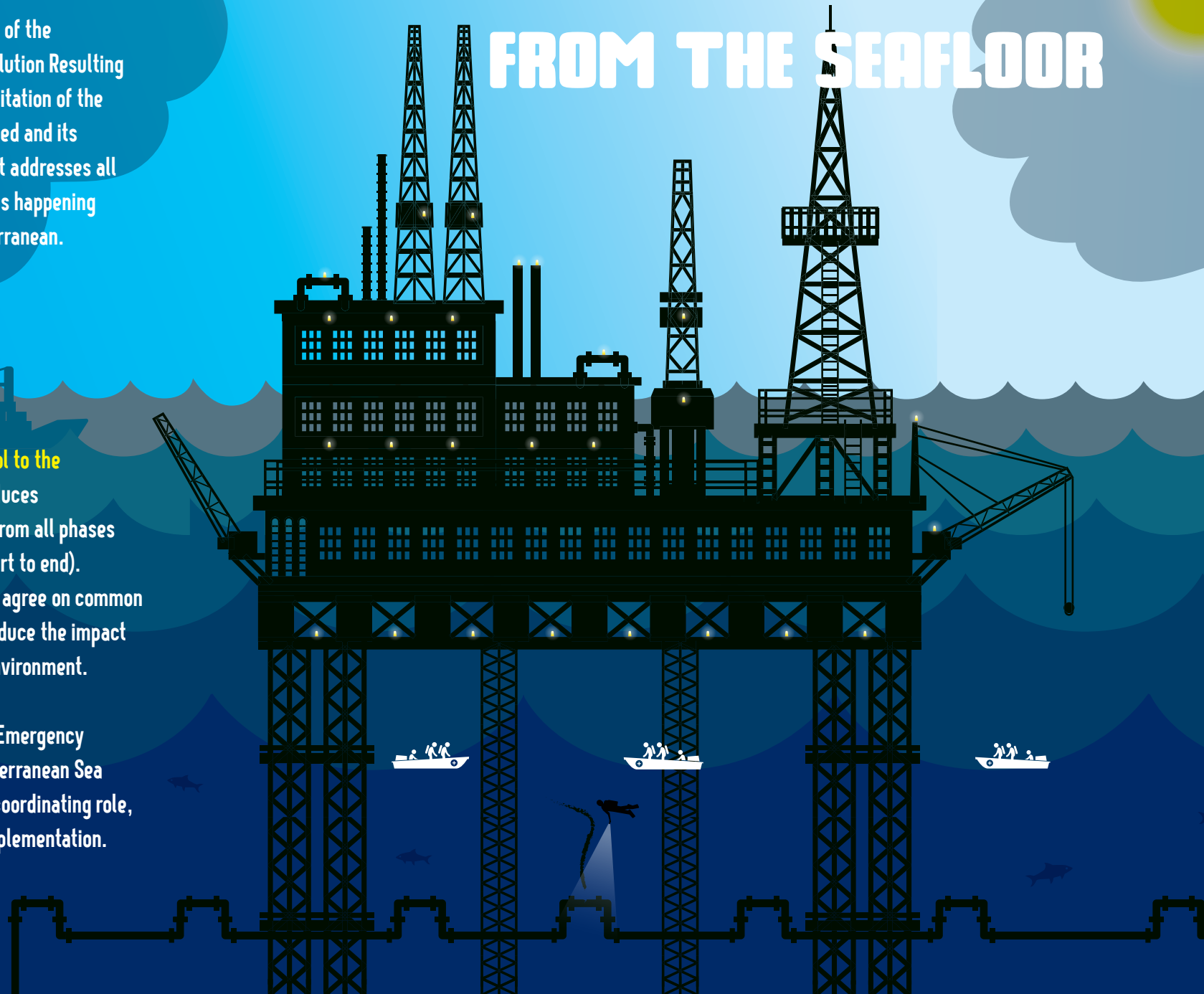
The Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre (SPA/RAC) assists Contracting Parties in meeting their commitments under the SPA/BD Protocol so that we can fix our relationship with nature.

# OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION FROM THE SEAFLOOR

The Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution Resulting from the Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf and the Seabed and its Subsoil was adopted in 1994. It addresses all aspects of oil and gas activities happening at sea (offshore) in the Mediterranean.

Known as the **Offshore Protocol to the Barcelona Convention**, it introduces measures to reduce pollution from all phases of offshore activities (from start to end). It also allows the countries to agree on common standards and guidelines to reduce the impact of offshore activities on the environment.

The Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) plays an important coordinating role, in support of the Protocol's implementation.





The Protocol on the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal was adopted in 1996.

# HAZARDOUS WASTE

+ The Mediterranean Pollution Assessment and Control Programme (MED POL) assists Contracting Parties in meeting their obligations under the Hazardous Wastes Protocol.

Under this Protocol, the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP/RAC) focuses on the phase-out (a term meaning that the concerned substance is banned and no longer used in products), prevention and reduction of the use of toxic substances. SCP/RAC does so by working with governments, firms and civil society organizations for the adoption of regulations (for instance the ban of certain substances that promote safe alternatives to hazardous chemicals).

Known as the **Hazardous Wastes Protocol to the Barcelona Convention**, it aims to protect human health and the marine environment against the adverse effects of hazardous wastes. The Protocol covers the following aspects:

- the reduction and, where possible, the elimination of hazardous wastes generation;
- the reduction of the amount of hazardous wastes being transported across and around the Mediterranean;
- rules applying to cases where movements of hazardous wastes are permissible.



## PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

Eliminating hazardous wastes safely is very costly. It is therefore in everyone's interest to reduce its generation.

**Hazardous chemicals must be prevented from entering our daily life and spreading in the environment.**

# COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT



The **Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean** (ICZM Protocol), which was adopted in 2008, has introduced, for the first time, specific rules to shield coastal ecosystems from the negative impacts of human activities.

The ICZM Protocol to the Barcelona Convention includes measures to strengthen regional cooperation for the protection of specific coastal ecosystems, such as wetlands and estuaries, marine habitats, coastal forests, woods and dunes. It also aims to ensure the sustainable use of the coastal zones in the context of economic development and what is known as the blue economy.

The Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) assists Contracting Parties in meeting their obligations under the ICZM Protocol.

# The Barcelona Convention comprises thirty-five articles.

Articles, which make up the Convention and its Protocols, are short paragraphs written in a special way by legal experts.

The articles are not written as a piece of information for the general public. They are aimed at the Contracting Parties. Each word counts. Specific terms are used to indicate what needs to be done by whom in specific situations.

The Contracting Parties abide by the rules that the Convention provides because they firmly believe that if everyone does, the Mediterranean Sea and the coasts will recover their health for the benefit of all.

## What are these articles about?

# THE BARCELONA CONVENTION explained article by article

## Article 1

explains where in the Mediterranean the Barcelona Convention applies.

The Mediterranean Sea sits in a large area (2.5 million square kilometers) between three continents (Africa, Asia and Europe), so it is important to know where the rules apply. The article also indicates that each country can define where the coast starts and where it ends within its own territory (for example, how far from the sea can an area of land still be considered part of the Mediterranean coast). Article 1 also indicates that Protocols can be applicable to areas outside the geographical coverage of the Barcelona Convention itself (in this case, the text of the Protocol will say so).

## Article 2

clarifies the meaning of two words: "pollution" and "organization".

It is important that everyone has the same understanding of terms that may have different meanings for different people. "Organization", a term you will encounter when reading the Convention, refers to the United Nations Environment Programme.

**Pollution** is the introduction of harmful materials into the environment. These harmful materials are called pollutants. Pollution can affect the land, sea, and air. Plastic is one of the main pollutants found in the Mediterranean.

**Article 3** indicates that the Barcelona Convention must always be applied in conformity with international law.

The Contracting Parties, when applying this Convention and its related Protocols, shall act in conformity with **international law**.

International law is a global set of rules that the members of the United Nations agreed upon to organize relations among themselves. The Contracting Parties may enter into other bilateral or multilateral agreements as long as they do not contradict what is agreed in the Barcelona Convention. Also, the Convention does not change what countries have agreed under other Conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Each day, an estimated 730 tonnes of plastic waste enter the Mediterranean Sea. This is the equivalent of

**52 DUMP TRUCKS**

(carrying 14 tonnes each)

emptying their load in the Mediterranean every day, 7 days a week.

**DID YOU KNOW**

# 4

**Article 4** requests that the Contracting Parties work together and share information and technology to prevent pollution.

Cooperation among the Contracting Parties is very important. Countries with developed economies and those that have experience in, say, protecting endangered species or clean technologies (that do not harm the environment) can extend a helping hand to their neighbours who need it. Article 4 of the Barcelona Convention encourages cooperation among Mediterranean countries on sustainable development in the Mediterranean region, not just on ending pollution or cleaning the sea.

# 5

**Article 5** introduces measures for the prevention and elimination of dumping.

Dumping means throwing waste (of all types and in all forms) off ships and aircraft (yes, some people used to jettison waste from planes). This article also bans the destruction of waste by burning it at sea.



# 6

**Article 6** takes aim at pollution from ships in the Mediterranean.

Here is one example of the issues that this article applies to: ships use vast quantities of fuels. Their engines also use special substances called oils that are not transformed through combustion (the fuel-burning process that happens within a ship to generate the required energy) and leave a residue. Where does that residue go? It should be transferred from the ship to places called "port-reception facilities" where they can be safely removed without polluting the sea.



# 7

**Article 7** aims to protect the seabed from oil and gas extraction

Drilling for oil and gas at sea presents risks of pollution and therefore can be harmful. Precautions need to be taken to ensure that oil and gas extraction from the seabed (what lies beneath the water) is done in a safe manner.

## IT'S ALWAYS RUSH HOUR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Mediterranean Sea is a busy place. Around 220,000 vessels of over 100 tonnes cross the Mediterranean Sea every year.



Here are two important principles that you will find in the text of the Barcelona Convention:

➔ The "Precautionary principle":

ensuring that no harm will be caused to the Sea and the coasts before taking action.

➔ The "Polluter pays principle":

those who are responsible for pollution must pay for all the costs that this pollution causes.



# 8

**Article 8** targets substances that can harm marine and coastal life.

This article requests that action be taken to prevent, reduce and eliminate pollution from farms, factories and other places located on land (land-based sources) where the pollutants are created or used. Such pollutants can reach the sea from dumpsites near the beach or be transported through run-off (the streams caused by rain that carry them to the sea). Some substances are airborne (fumes can travel from their sources—for example an industrial plant located near the coast—to the sea through the air).

Some toxic substances can enter the organisms of living animals (including edible ones such as fish and clams) and never leave them—a process that scientists call “bioaccumulation”.

# 9

**Article 9** focuses on emergencies at sea.

This article requests that the Contracting Parties work together when faced with an emergency affecting the Mediterranean, such as an oil spill. The objective is to reduce or eliminate the damage caused.

Think of an incident where oil accidentally seeps from a tanker into the Mediterranean. The first country that discovers that incident must inform the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC). REMPEC is an institution administered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in cooperation with UNEP/MAP.

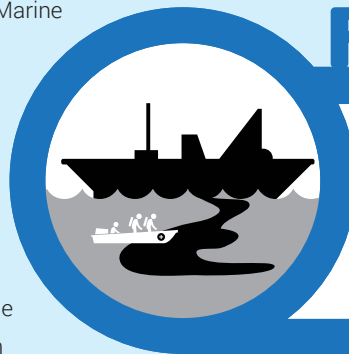
# 10

**Article 10** introduces an important call for the protection of biological diversity.

It focuses on rare or fragile ecosystems, as well as species of wild animals, such as the Mediterranean monk seal, and vegetation, such as the precious native seagrass species known as *Posidonia oceanica* that scientists call “the lungs of the Mediterranean” because it constitutes an important source of oxygen in coastal waters.

The term “**biological diversity**” means the variability among living organisms in terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems (such as rivers, lakes and lagoons). It includes diversity within species (such as the various types of crustaceans), among species and of ecosystems (example: between marine ecosystem/ coastal ecosystem).

## FIREFIGHTERS OF THE SEA



**In case of an emergency, REMPEC can activate the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU): a team of experts that rush to the scene of an oil spill and help countries affected to clean the water and coast safely in cooperation with the local authorities.**

## DID YOU KNOW

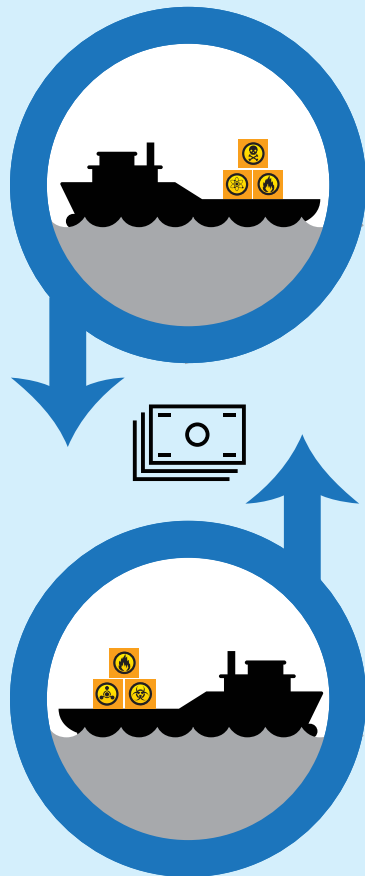
### ALGAL BLOOMS

are a phenomena resulting from nutrients, such as nitrogen or phosphorus, which are substances used in chemical fertilizers in agriculture running off the land into the sea and causing excessive growth of algae. The overgrowth of the algae uses a lot of oxygen causing other marine species to suffer.

# 11

**Article 11** puts the spotlight on hazardous waste.

Sometimes hazardous waste is sent by 'Country A' for disposal in 'Country B' (because it is cheaper or easier to do this in 'Country B'). Article 11 aims to reduce risks of transporting waste containing toxic substances that can be dangerous for the environment.



# 12

If **Article 12** had a name, it would be "monitoring".

It requests that countries monitor (measure and record) pollution within their national borders and that Contracting Parties work together and with international organizations to ensure the monitoring of areas of the Mediterranean Sea that are located outside national borders.

# 13

If the Barcelona Convention were a book, **Article 13** would be the "science and technology" chapter.

The Contracting parties must cooperate on technology and exchange data and scientific information to ensure a clean and healthy Mediterranean Sea and coast. Solidarity is crucial: developing countries (those that are trying to improve their economies to offer living conditions similar to those that citizens of developed countries can enjoy) should receive help on technology and other forms of technical assistance related to the prevention and management of marine pollution.

# 14

**Article 14** – the Barcelona Convention must be reflected in national laws that take care of the Mediterranean.

The implementation of the Barcelona Convention can improve the situation of the Mediterranean environment only if the Contracting Parties introduce legislation that reflects the rules contained in it. Legislation means laws and regulations that citizens, tourists, private companies and others must follow. Compliance happens when behavior and the way things are produced in factories and consumed by customers change to meet those laws and regulations.

It is possible for the Contracting Parties to ask the Barcelona Convention Secretariat (a team of experts working for the Mediterranean Action Plan of the UN Environment Programme) to help prepare the required legislation.

# 15

**Article 15** says that the public, including you, should have access to information on pollution and, more broadly, on the environmental condition of the Mediterranean Sea and coast.

To comply with this article of the Barcelona Convention, the Contracting Parties must provide information to their citizens and allow them to express their opinions on decisions affecting the environment.

This article was a major innovation when it was introduced in the amended Barcelona Convention in 1995. Since then advancements in information and communication technology, including a wider use and greater access to the internet and to connected mobile devices, make this article easier to apply.

**These excerpts from Article 15 illustrate the importance of access to information:**

"The Contracting Parties shall ensure that their competent authorities shall give to the public appropriate access to information on the environmental state in the field of application of the Convention and the Protocols, on activities or measures adversely affecting or likely to affect it and on activities carried out or measures taken in accordance with the Convention and the Protocols."

"The Contracting Parties shall ensure that the opportunity is given to the public to participate in decision-making processes relevant to the field of application of the Convention and the Protocols, as appropriate."

# 16

**Article 16** explains what happens after the emergency response to a pollution incident is over.

“Pollution incident” is defined as a discharge of oil and/or hazardous and noxious (harmful) substances that poses or can pose a threat to the marine and/or coastal environment.

Put simply, this article requests that the Contracting Parties work together to establish who is responsible for the accident, who should pay for the damages caused and who should receive compensation.



# 17

**Articles 17, 18 and 19** explain the official arrangements that allow the Contracting Parties to work together.

To whom will the Contracting Parties write to if, say, they wish to discuss a matter related to the Convention?

To UNEP, which provides “Secretariat” services. In concrete terms, this means that UNEP has set up an office (located in Athens, Greece) that processes requests from the Contracting Parties, organizes meetings and notifies them of important events and news.

**Ordinary Meetings of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention take place every two years. What happens if urgent action needs to be taken during that period?**

Representatives of the Contracting Parties from the various parts of the Mediterranean are elected to serve on the ‘Bureau of the Contracting Parties’. The Bureau can examine important issues on behalf of all Contracting Parties. This has the advantage of keeping the system working smoothly with no need for waiting for the next Meeting of the Contracting Parties that could still be months away.

# 20

**Article 20** calls for the meetings of the Barcelona Convention to be as open and transparent as possible.

Observers can attend to present important information or report issues to the Contracting Parties. For example, a non-governmental organization can draw attention to the need to do more to adapt to climate change impacts, such as the rise of acidity in seawater or how face masks discarded after use are affecting the environment. As you can expect, not anyone can walk into the meeting of the Contracting Parties and present themselves as an observer; there are rules.

Observers can be countries that are not Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, or they may be intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations.



# 21

**Article 21** leaves the door open for new Protocols that could be added in the future.

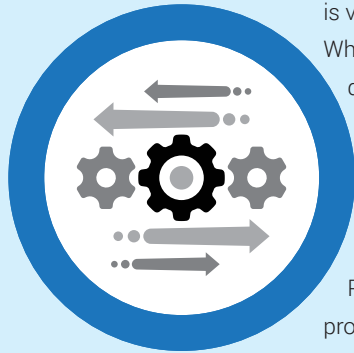
By now you already know that the Barcelona Convention has seven Protocols. What if a new problem would require an additional Protocol? Article 21 explains how a conference can be organized for the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to adopt additional Protocols.



# 22

**Articles 22-23** explain how the text of the Convention and its Protocols can be updated, if needed.

Contracting Parties can propose changes (called 'amendments') that can be examined and, possibly, accepted ('adopted') in a conference that all Contracting Parties must be invited to attend.

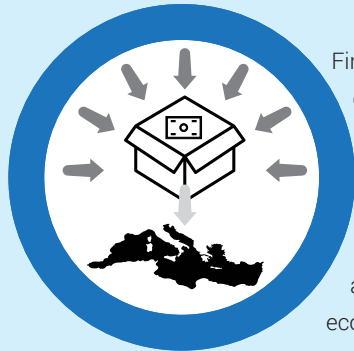


# 24

**Articles 24-25** provide useful indications on practical aspects to ensure that the Contracting Parties work together smoothly.

Imagine that you are in charge of a meeting that representatives of the Contracting Parties and several Observers attend. Usually, meetings have a tight timetable and programme. How to ensure that the discussion is well organized? How is voting on a proposal organized? Who pays for the work that must be done to prepare and organize the meetings? Articles 24-25 are here to explain.

They indicate that the Contracting Parties must adopt 'Rules of procedure' for their meetings and agree on 'Financial rules'.



Financial rules are about the sums of money that the Contracting Parties should contribute to the Mediterranean Trust Fund – a collective pot that serves to pay for UNEP/MAP's work for clean and healthy marine and coastal ecosystems.

# 26

**Article 26-27** explain the kind of information that the Contracting Parties must provide on the activities they undertake to implement the Barcelona Convention.

Reporting is very important: it means that the countries are taking steps to reflect the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols in their own laws and rules, and that they are requiring their citizens to respect the marine and coastal environment. The purpose of the reports is to find out if each Contracting Party is doing what they have agreed to in the Convention and Protocols.



# 28

**Article 28** – what if two or more Contracting Parties do not agree on what the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols mean in certain situations?

The article indicates that, if they disagree on the meaning of some parts of the text, the Contracting Parties should settle the dispute (a legal term meaning a disagreement) through negotiation or other peaceful means (so that it doesn't turn into a conflict) that are mentioned in this article.



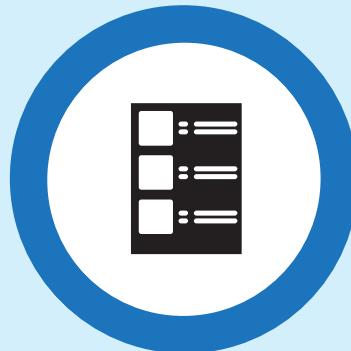
The **Compliance Committee** is an official group of elected individuals recognized by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. Their job is to ensure that countries comply with the rules stated in the Convention and its Protocols.



# 29

**Article 29** – the Barcelona Convention and the Protocols are bound together because they complete each other.

This article clarifies that it is not possible to become a Contracting Party to the Convention unless you become at the same time a Contracting Party to at least one of the seven protocols.



# 30

**Articles 30 to 35** provide the rules on:

The signature of the Convention and its Protocols: how it should be done and the steps to follow.

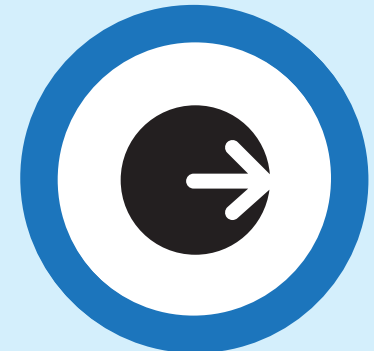
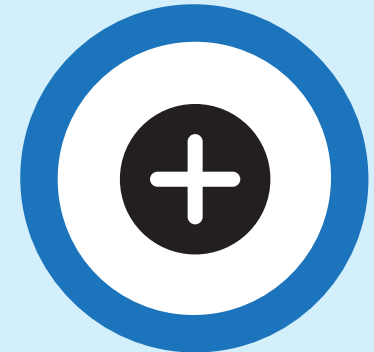
Ratification, acceptance, or approval are different ways in which the Contracting Parties can make it official that the rules contained in the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols apply to them.

Accession: how additional countries can become Contracting Parties.

Entry into force: how the Convention and its Protocols become national law. In practice, it means that doing something against what is written in the Convention and its Protocols would mean breaking the law of the land.

Withdrawal: what to do if a Contracting Party changes their mind and wants to leave the agreement.

The responsibilities of the Depository: The Government of Spain is the Depository of the Barcelona Convention and, as such, has duties towards the Contracting Parties that are listed in Article 35.



# Simple steps you can take to help protect the Mediterranean Sea and Coast

Read this guide to the Barcelona Convention and share it with your friends.



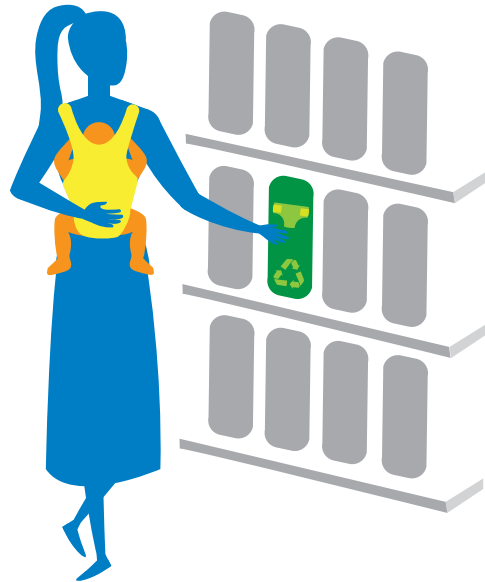
If you live in a Mediterranean country, ask an adult (example: your teacher or one of your family members) to help you contact your local and national authorities.

Ask them to engage in initiatives that don't harm the Mediterranean. You can write to the mayor of your city, the governor of your region and to other officials about what your country is doing to meet obligations under the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.



**Shop smart!** Speak with adults in your family. Tell them that their choices in the market matter. Ask them to make informed choices and choose products that respect the environment.

If you have a baby in the family, speak with the parents about **better diaper options**, including new, environmentally responsible disposable brands.



**Kick the plastic habit:** Avoid straws, cups, spoons, and earbuds. Bring your own refillable water bottle and a nice reusable carrier bag.



Do some **research** and find out **if your favorite brands of cosmetics and personal care products contain harmful microplastic ingredients.**



## DID YOU KNOW

## USING BATH PRODUCTS OR COSMETICS

that contain microplastics can put the Mediterranean, ourselves, and our family at risk. Sea animals absorb or eat microplastics; these particles can then be passed along the marine food chain. It is likely that we also ingest microplastics.

Learn more:  <https://www.cleanses.org>

Try to **reduce waste**, since most waste ends up in the sea.  
 Ask about **recycling options** near you.  
 Recycling paper, plastic, glass, and aluminium reduces waste.




When you go to a seafood restaurant, always ask whether they have **sustainable dishes** on the menu. Let them know that you care about the Mediterranean.



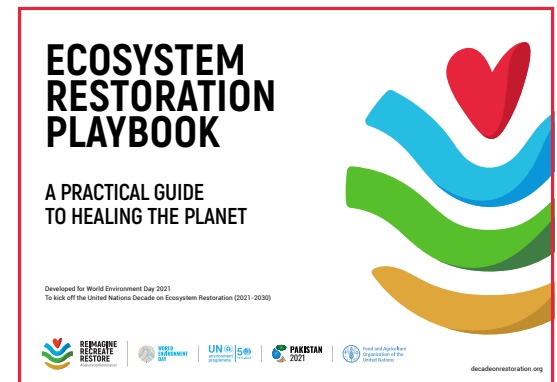
If you can, organize a beach cleaning campaign with your friends on Mediterranean Coast Day (25 September). Let us know by sending us an email and photos of your event at [unepmap@un.org](mailto:unepmap@un.org).



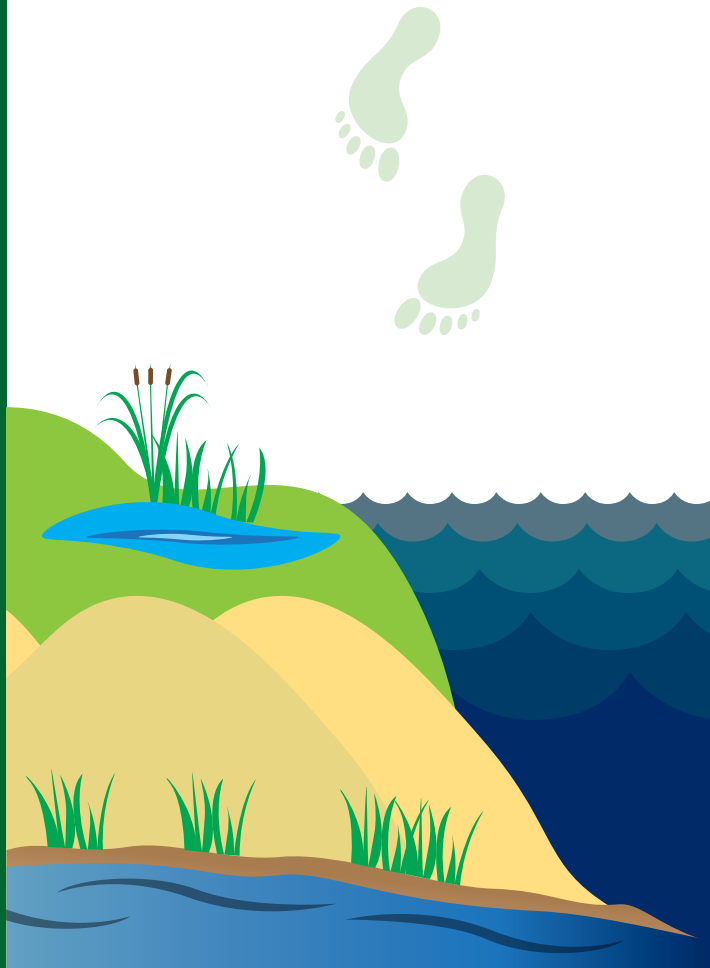
Learn more about the  United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and look for opportunities to take part in “citizen science” activities in your country.

Check-out the available material on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the United Nations – a fun and engaging way to learn about the SDGs and what you can do to make them a reality. Please download and share with your friends!

 <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/student-resources/>

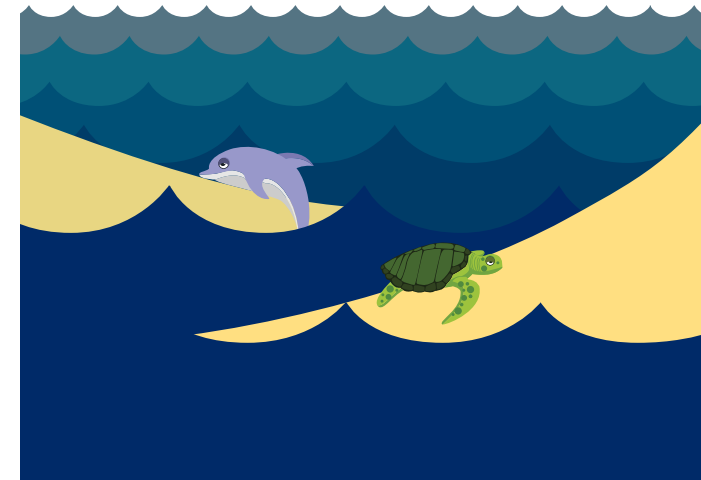


Get involved in the  United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) : join the movement and download the  Ecosystem Restoration Playbook



Ask about **coastal and marine protected areas** near you. Explore them with your family if you can and appreciate the beauty of their natural landscape. Ask your teacher to explain the meaning of **biodiversity conservation** and why it matters.

**Identify the institutions** that look after coastal and marine life in your country. If you spot a sea turtle, a dolphin or another marine creature in distress on the beach, ask an adult to contact the experts who know how to take care of them.



If you are old enough to use social media, **follow us on** **Twitter** [@UNEPMAPNews](https://twitter.com/UNEPMAPNews) and your favorite social media platforms through the hashtag: [#BarcelonaConvention](https://twitter.com/BarcelonaConvention).



Mediterranean  
Action Plan  
Barcelona  
Convention

