

MEDCOAST's Rhodes Declaration

The Tenth International Conference on the Mediterranean Coastal Environment, MEDCOAST 11 was organised in Rhodes, Greece during 25 – 29 October 2011. Manuscripts of ninety-three papers, covering a wide range of subjects related to coastal and marine management were published in 2 volume-conference proceedings totalling 996 pages. The papers were presented in keynote, oral and poster sessions.

We, one hundred and seventeen participants of MEDCOAST 2011 conference, representing twenty-five countries, in appreciation of the charms of the Island and Town of Rhodes and warm Greek hospitality and;

- Being aware of uniqueness and fragility of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea coastal environment and importance of these areas for economic development of the riparian countries and the wealth of the populations;
- Noting the efforts of the Mediterranean countries under the framework of the UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and of the Black Sea countries through the Bucharest Convention towards regional collaboration for improving integrated coastal management capabilities and being encouraged by the Barcelona Convention's new ICZM Protocol for the Mediterranean and its entering into force in a short time span;
- Appreciating the interests of the European Union and the GEF for contributing to capacity enhancement of the non-EU states of the Mediterranean and Black Sea countries in order to better manage their coastal and marine areas and witnessing the significant progress achieved by PEGASO, the project financially supported by the EU under the FP7 scheme and the MedPartnership project of GEF, both aiming to enhance ICZM in regional context;
- Observing that motivations for economic development often overtaking conservation and protection concerns and resulting in unrecoverable, important losses especially in developing countries thriving for fast economic growth;
- Being concerned by low levels of decentralised collaboration for environmental protection and management of coastal areas over both basins and by insufficient involvement of the scientific community in the governmental and inter-governmental programs and projects;
- Congratulating the bronze jubilee (the tenth event) of the bi-annual conference series on the Mediterranean Coastal Environment and applauding the twenty-year long MEDCOAST efforts for sharing of data, information, knowledge and experience over two basins and her region-wide capacity building activities that have contributed to advancement of integrated coastal management in the Mediterranean and Black Sea countries;

Unanimously agree to highlight the following observations and recommendations for attention of national, regional and international institutions dealing with coastal and marine issues, and of concerned individuals:

1. As it was recommended also by MEDCOAST's Alexandria Declaration in 2007, collaboration over the Mediterranean and the Black Sea basins must be extended beyond the intergovernmental programs. Creation and functioning of decentralised networks aiming at cooperative efforts to improve coastal and marine management practices should be encouraged by the international programs and donor institutions. In this context, collaboration schemes similar to the Mediterranean programs of the European Union that created a significant momentum in the region for decentralised co-operation in the first half of the 1990's, should be reinstated. The effort for setting up the Medposidonia programme is welcomed in this context. Instruments need to be developed to substantiate interaction of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea institutions and networks as it has been realized by MEDCOAST since her first event in 1993.
2. Since the ICZM Protocol for the Mediterranean implies significant challenges and obligations to the riparian countries for bringing their management schemes and practices to conform to the regional legislation, the timely and successful application of the Action Plan to be pursued by the Mediterranean Action Plan for implementation of the ICZM protocol is of extreme importance. Collaboration with national and other regional actors including the scientific community and NGOs for applying effective actions in the implementation process must be sought. Progress and achievements in management schemes must be closely monitored and compliance of the riparian countries with the regional legislation in general and with the ICZM Protocol in particular must be effectively enforced.
3. Public awareness and human resources are essential prerequisites for initiating and implementing local and national ICZM programs. Regional projects that focus on training and education on ICZM specific to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea should be given priority for financial support by the European Union and other donor institutions. Pan-Mediterranean and Black Sea graduate programs on ICZM should be developed and implemented by networks involving institutions from both EU and non-EU countries. Short term training of public employees involved in ICZM related activities would facilitate the timely and effective implementation of the ICZM Protocol for the Mediterranean. The MEDCOAST Institute that has been providing such an opportunity for both the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions since 1994 is a worthy example of this type of training.
4. The pristine coastal and marine sites that possess important ecological, cultural and aesthetic values must be strictly protected against destructive development, and some of these areas should be left aside for the benefit of future Mediterranean and Black Sea communities. Further coastal and marine protected areas must be created and managed by using the ecosystem approach in both basins. Progress of maritime spatial planning and networks of coastal and marine protected areas would no doubt be effective developments to enhance the practice of coastal and marine conservation.
5. Development of tools and techniques for coastal and marine management and generation of the essential data and information at the basin scale should be promoted. Collaboration of basin wide scientific institutions through existing or new networks should be encouraged. The PEGASO project of the European Union is a significant collaborative effort in this direction. Successful development of this project will no doubt encourage the follow up initiatives. The mechanism of the PEGASO project is especially noteworthy since the wide consortium behind the project includes institutions from the non-EU countries.