# Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI)

ACRONYMS | AREAS | COUNTRIES | MARINE | TERMS

## DEFINITION

A series of legally protected marine and coastal sites in the Mediterranean region, designated under the Barcelona Convention.

## DESCRIPTION

The Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMIs) are marine and coastal sites of the Mediterranean, created under the Barcelona Convention Protocol for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) to conserve: "*the components of biological diversity in the Mediterranean, ecosystems specific to the Mediterranean area or the habitats of endangered species, are of special interest at the scientific, aesthetic, cultural or educational levels*". [1]

One of seven protocols under the Barcelona Convention, the SPA/BD Protocol protects natural resources and certain natural sites, preserves the diversity of the gene pool, and safeguards cultural heritage in the Mediterranean region specifically through the creation of a series of SPAMIs. These areas should be representative of the coastal and marine ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity found in the Mediterranean – including Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) - and they safeguard habitats which are intrinsically restricted in areas or are in danger of disappearing, as well as those critical to the survival, reproduction and recovery of endangered, threatened or endemic species of flora or fauna.

## SUPPORTED BY

All Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention). [2]

## YEAR OF CREATION

1995. The Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD Protocol) called

for the creation of SPAMIs and was adopted in 1995, to replace the previous Protocol of 1984. The SPA/BD Protocol entered into force in 1999.

## COVERAGE

Regional (Mediterranean Sea). There are 33 SPAMIs (2014).[3] The designation of SPAMIs is an ongoing process with more sites periodically being added.

## CRITERIA

The following criteria listed in the Annex I to the Protocol of the Barcelona Convention are used in evaluating the importance of an area in the Mediterranean.[1]

1. Uniqueness - The area contains unique or rare ecosystems, or rare or endemic species.
2. Natural representativeness -The area has highly representative ecological processes, or community or habitat types or other natural characteristics. Representativeness is the degree to which an area represents a habitat type, ecological process, biological community, physiographic feature or other natural characteristics
3. Diversity - The area has a high diversity of species, communities, habitats or ecosystems.
4. Naturalness -The area has a high degree of naturalness as a result of the lack or low level of human-induced disturbance and degradation
5. Presence of habitats critical to endangered, threatened or endemic species.
6. Cultural representativeness -The area has a high representative value with respect to the cultural heritage, due to the existence of environmentally sound traditional activities integrated with nature, which support the well-being of local populations.

The following characteristics and factors should be considered as favourable for the inclusion of a site to the list, although they are not strictly criteria:[1]

1. the existence of threats to the ecological, biological, aesthetic or cultural value of the area
2. the involvement and active participation of the public in the planning and management of the area
3. the existence of a body representing the public, professional, non-governmental sectors and the scientific community involved in the area
4. the existence of opportunities for sustainable development
5. the existence of an integrated coastal management plan.

(Further annexes of the Protocol list threatened or endangered species (Annex II) as well as species whose exploitation is regulated (Annex III).[1]

## MANAGEMENT

All accepted SPAMIs have a legal status guaranteeing their effective long-term protection. SPAMIs should have a management body with sufficient powers, means and human resources to prevent and control activities likely to be contrary to the aims of the protected area. In the case of areas situated, partly or wholly, in ABNJ or in a zone where the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction have not yet been defined, the legal status and management plan are provided by the neighbouring Parties concerned.[1] The SPA/BD Protocol stipulates that the Parties develop guidelines for establishing and managing protected areas and lists appropriate measures which the Parties must adopt. These measures include: prohibiting the discharge or unloading of waste, regulating shipping operations,

regulating the introduction of any non-indigenous or genetically modified species, the regulation or prohibition of any activity involving the exploration or modification of the soil or subsoil of an area, the regulation or prohibition of wildlife exploitation activities, and other measures protecting the ecological and biological processes and the countryside. [1] Traditional activities of local populations are exempt from the provisions of this particular protocol, as long as they do not endanger the protected ecosystems.

## BUSINESS RELEVANCE

**Legal and compliance** - SPAMIs are legally protected and constitute the most important network of protected areas recognised by all Mediterranean country signatories to the Barcelona Convention. Under the Barcelona Convention, SPAMIs within territorial seas are required to be granted legal protected status by their sovereign nation, whereas SPAMIs in ABNJ are required to be legally protected by all neighbouring countries. [1] Each SPAMI requires a management plan, where management measures are set. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention agree to ensure that all nationals, companies and ships flying national flags comply with SPAMI management measures. As SPAMIs are legally protected areas, they are included in a number of safeguard standards of financial institutions such as the World Bank [4] that will not finance projects in such areas. There are also several certification schemes, which stipulate various types of restrictions for activities in protected area. For further information, please see Protected areas.

The SPA/BD Protocol is the main tool with which Mediterranean nations comply with their commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

**Biodiversity importance** - Five out of the six criteria for the identification of these areas are based on the importance of the area for biodiversity and therefore these sites are likely to be of high biodiversity value for the Mediterranean region. As site-scale areas, they are highly relevant to business in terms of avoiding risk associated with biodiversity loss and maximising opportunity associated with its conservation.

**Socio-cultural value** - One of the criteria for identification of SPAMIs is cultural representativeness, based on the existence of sustainable and traditional activities that support the well-being of local communities. Some of these sites will therefore hold a high socio-cultural value on this basis. The involvement of local communities in the management of SPAMIs is regulated within the management plan required for each site.

## REFERENCES & WEBSITE


1. SPA/BD Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. (1995).
2. Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean. Barcelona Convention. 1976 (1995 amendment)
3. UNEP, Mediterranean Action Plan & Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas. SPAMI List (2014).
4. The World Bank. World Bank Operational Manual. Revised version 2013. OP 4.04 Natural habitats (2013).



Two-banded seabream (Diplodus vulgaris) in the Medes Islands SPAMI, Spain. Vilainecrevette/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Protected areas

Related pages

Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) (Terms)

Tools

Protected Planet a tool for visualizing information on protected areas at the site level, country level, regional level and global level. This includes information on the IUCN category where known. Protected Planet brings together spatial data, descriptive information and images from the World Database on Protected Areas, WikipediaTM and PanaramioTM.

The Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) provides a visualisation and GIS download tool for protected areas data.

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