



SCALING-UP NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS INTO PRACTICE TO ENHANCE THE RESILIENCE OF MEDITERRANEAN COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE: RESCOM

Policy brief for the attention of the Contracting Parties and Observers to the Barcelona Convention

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At the forefront of climate change, the Mediterranean coasts are more than ever before the region's most endangered areas. Sea-level rise, storms, water scarcity, and habitat degradation threaten ecosystems and coastal communities alike. The contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and observers at COP24 in December 2025 need to urgently address the alarming effects of climate change on coastal ecosystems, communities and economies as a top priority.

Recent policy developments under the Barcelona Convention, aligning with a favorable international policy framework with clear objectives and quantified restoration targets (e.g. EU Nature Restoration Regulation), provide a perfect momentum to put in place effective tools and instruments to assist Mediterranean countries to develop and implement coordinated coastal restoration for more resilient coastal ecosystems.

This policy brief provides a set of recommendations to the Parties and Observers to the Barcelona Convention, from the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium (MBC) and its RESCOM project to help Parties to the Barcelona Convention to scale up and operationalize Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for coastal resilience.

NbS offer integrated, cost-effective solutions to climate, biodiversity, and socio-economic challenges, delivering benefits that go beyond traditional restoration approaches (IUCN, 2020). These recommendations include:

- 01. Elaborating and adopting a Regional Restoration Action Plan**, under the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp) renewal, with quantified targets and common indicators aligned with EU and global frameworks;
- 02. Establishing a Mediterranean Restoration and NbS Knowledge Platform** under UNEP/MAP to share data, best practices, and lessons learned complementary to existing hubs;
- 03. Securing predictable and long-term financing** through innovative mechanisms that mobilize public and private resources; and
- 04. Completing national frameworks that support effective implementation of NbS**, supporting Parties with guidelines, capacity-building programs, and pilot projects to integrate NbS into cross-sectoral national planning instruments, ensuring measurable targets and accountability.

ALIGNING REGIONAL POLICY FOR NBS SCALE-UP, INITIATING A REGIONAL RESTORATION ACTION PLAN

In the last decade, several international policy instruments have been developed providing a strong legal basis to uphold Mediterranean commitments to put in place effective Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to tackle climate change more effectively.

The Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015), the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), setting clear and measurable ecosystem restoration target (30%) (also endorsed by the Parties to the Ramsar Convention at COP15 through its 5th Strategic Plan 2025-2034), the UN Decade for the restoration of ecosystems and the recent EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) with even more ambitious restoration objectives, all provide a comprehensive legal and political framework upon which the Barcelona Convention and its protocols should align upon. At the regional level, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) 2030 GreenerMed Agenda and other initiatives such as the FAO Silva mediterranea Committee reinforce these global and EU commitments by promoting NbS and translating them into regionally tailored actions (UfM, 2021).

Mediterranean countries are therefore expected to reflect all these commitments in their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), disaster risk-reduction strategies and National Restoration Plans under the EU NRR.

Recently, ecosystem restoration has been more clearly featured under the Barcelona Convention. COP 22 (2023) adopted the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO), adapted from the GBF and integrating NbS objectives.

The Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2027 also includes restoration-related indicators. Looking ahead, COP 24 (Cairo, December 2025) will consider new instruments such as the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD 2026–2035), the Ecosystem Approach Roadmap and Policy (EARP 2026–2035), and the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework (RCCAF 2026–2035), which explicitly call for NbS implementation at national and local levels. Crucially, the renewal of the EARP proposes developing a Mediterranean Action Plan for Restoration, signalling a strategic opportunity to institutionalize NbS through a basin-wide restoration framework. Similarly, the RCCAF, supported by the new Regional Climate Change Centre in Türkiye, offers a platform for cross-sectoral integration of NbS beyond the ICZM Protocol.

Despite these positive developments, the absence of quantified restoration targets aligned with the GBF objective (30% by 2030) risks weakening national commitments, particularly in countries facing competing socio-economic priorities. To bridge this gap, regional frameworks must be linked to concrete targets and operational tools. Together, these instruments provide a robust legal mandate and clear opportunities for scaling NbS in Mediterranean coastal planning, but their full potential will only be realized through effective implementation, coordinated governance, predictable financing, and cross-sectoral partnerships capable of moving from pilot projects to systemic, landscape-scale restoration.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerned by the continued degradation of Mediterranean coastal ecosystems, the Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium draws on the findings of the MBC members and experts article “[Nature-based Solutions in the Mediterranean Region: A look back and moving forward - ScienceDirect](#)” (Ernoul & Hetherington, 2025) to highlight urgent challenges and opportunities.

The Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium stressed the urgency for the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention to act on the following priorities to support national and local authorities, practitioners, and coastal areas site managers in delivering effective, coordinated, and scalable NbS interventions across Mediterranean coastal ecosystems:

1. Elaborating and adopting a Regional Restoration Action Plan:

Barcelona Convention (1995)	Implied via "enhancement" and "rehabilitation"
SPA/BD Protocol (1995)	Explicit in preamble; implied in species recovery and invasive species control
ICZM Protocol (2008)	Clear references to restoration of coastal ecosystems and habitats
LBS Protocol (1996)	Implied via rehabilitation of degraded zones
Post-2020 SAPBIO (2021)	Explicit goals and targets for ecosystem restoration; 42 actions aligned with UN Decade
Post-2020 MPAs & OECMs Strategy (2021)	Restoration integrated into vision, strategic pillars, and implementation framework

The last Ministerial Declaration adopted at the COP23 in Portorož (2023) commits to “*Halting degradation and restoring marine and coastal biodiversity. Achieving 30% effective conservation and management of coastal and marine areas by 2030.*”

However, a common Action Plan on Restoration that would harness the efforts and provide a common framework to scale-up NbS is still missing. NbS offers a unique opportunity to unify fragmented policy instruments under a coherent regional vision, reinforcing the Mediterranean’s identity as a shared sea and positioning the region as a leader in NbS governance. Their formal adoption as a flagship priority under the Barcelona Convention would consolidate regional leadership in ecosystem-based resilience and restoration, while helping countries meet multiple obligations across biodiversity, climate, and disaster risk agendas. Hence the MBC members invite Parties to:

Rec.1.1

Task the relevant RACs (PAP-RAC, CC-RAC, Plan Bleu, SPA-RAC) to elaborate, in collaboration with other regional bodies, a Regional Restoration Plan, building on the initial discussions under the EcAp renewal for a Mediterranean Action Plan for Restoration in the view of adopting it at the COP 25. This plan should integrate NbS together with a multi-ecosystem approach and ensure cross-sectoral coordination through the RCCAF framework.



One of the key principles of such a Regional Restoration Plan could stress the critical participatory dimension of planning and management in all NbS-related coastal projects, with clear guidelines for stakeholder mapping and conflict-sensitive consultation, recognizing customary rights and integrating local ecological knowledge and fair benefit-sharing into NbS design and monitoring.

MBC members stand ready to share any relevant information and advice to that end.

Such a regional Restoration Action Plan would also allow to have a common monitoring and reporting system on the restoration and NbS efforts. MBC members invite Parties to:

Rec.1.2

Adopt a common set of indicators (ecological, socio-economic, and climate risk reduction) including quantified restoration targets. Ensure alignment with GBF (30% by 2030) and EU NRR, and integrate reporting into MAP's compliance system.

MBC members stand ready to share any relevant information and to work with the relevant RACs to that end.

2. Establishing a Mediterranean Restoration and NbS platform:

Sharing lessons learned between Parties and empowering national authorities, stakeholders and local communities is essential for legitimacy, sustainability, and long-term stewardship of NbS. Hence the MBC invite the Parties to:

Rec.2.1

Create a Mediterranean NbS Knowledge Platform under UNEP/MAP in collaboration with other regional bodies for sharing data, best practices, case studies, and lessons learned and feed into MedECC assessments. Such a platform that could be hosted by the CC-RAC in close collaboration with the PAP-RAC, the SPA-RAC, the Plan Bleu and the International Union for Conservation of Nature would embody the synergy sought by the Decision IG.27/9 and would highly ease the access to the best practices and capacity-building initiatives.

Such a platform would enable the NbS design and implementation reflect multi-ecosystem dynamics, with integrated planning across land, coast, sea, and freshwater systems reflecting natural connectivity across land, river basin and coastal ecosystems. Valuable guidelines could be more accessible and global expertise could help operationalise change on the ground.

MBC partners stand ready to share any relevant information, data and case studies to feed the platform.

3. Securing predictable and long-term financing:

Restoring degraded areas and especially coastal areas with their multiple connectivity dimension needs time (>20 years) (Dudley N. et al. 2021) and very often financial engagements over several decades to provide the expected outcomes. It is a huge investment that is much underestimated. Scaling NbS requires predictable, long-term financing and innovative tools to mobilize private capital and align incentives. MBC members invite Parties to:

Rec.3.1

Allocate dedicated budget lines and package NbS projects to meet eligibility climate and biodiversity finance (e.g. GEF, GCF, Adaptation Fund, EU Multiannual Financial Framework), ensuring funding covers long-term monitoring beyond project cycles. Leverage regional instruments such as the UfM GreenerMed Agenda and explore a Mediterranean NbS Investment Facility to pool resources and de-risk projects.

Rec.3.2

Diversify funding sources through fiscal incentives (tax relief, subsidies), Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), and blended finance combining public grants, outcome-based payments, and private capital. Consider innovative mechanisms such as tourist levies in high-pressure coastal areas and regional guarantee schemes to attract private investment.

4. Complete national frameworks that support effective implementation of NbS:

Successful NbS require operational integration of NbS into cross-sectoral national planning instruments, with clear mandates, budgets, measurable targets and accountability mechanisms, and as preferred mitigation/adaptation options in land-use planning strategies and permitting systems. Hence MBC members invite Parties to:

Rec.4.1

Develop guidelines under the Barcelona Convention to assist Parties in integrating and mainstreaming NbS into national legislation, permitting systems and budgetary frameworks, complemented by capacity-building programs and technical assistance under UNEP/MAP to ensure practical uptake.

Rec.4.2

Promote hybrid solutions where necessary, ensuring grey infrastructures are designed to complement, not replace, natural systems, and support pilot projects under UNEP/MAP to demonstrate effective integration of NbS in coastal planning.



NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS WORK BUT NEED TO BE COMBINED AND IMPLEMENTED URGENTLY AT SCALE:

Across the Mediterranean, MBC member organisations have already demonstrated the viability of NbS through field-tested interventions.



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Posidonia seagrass restoration in the Marine Protected Area of Capo Carbonara in Sardinia, Italy - one of the RESCOM project's pilot sites - protects for instance shorelines, enhances marine biodiversity, and supports fisheries, demonstrating the multi-ecosystem benefits of marine interventions.

In Türkiye's Gediz Delta, restoring an old river branch is designed to improve freshwater flows, reduce salinity, and revitalize wetland habitats while sustaining traditional grazing practices.



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In Lebanon and Morocco, the RESTOR'MED FORESTS project aimed in implementing sustainable management actions for forest ecosystems, in order to make them more resilient and functional, while training technical staff and raising awareness among local populations.

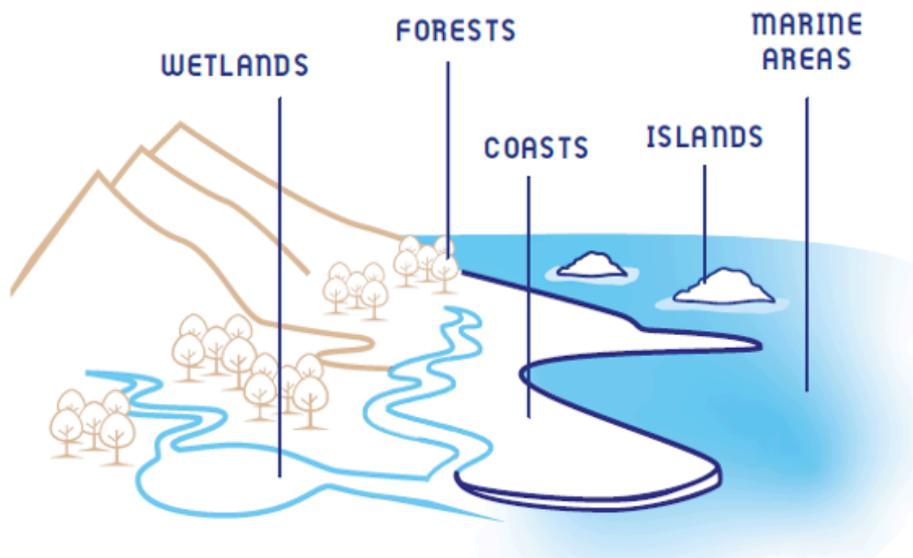
Similarly, dune rehabilitation projects, such as those planned in Divjaka-Karavasta National Park in Albania through the MBC's RESCOM project, combine revegetation with protective measures to stabilize fragile coastal landscapes and limit coastal erosion.



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NbS' effectiveness is particularly evident when applied through a multi-ecosystem lens, recognizing the interconnectedness of coastal landscapes and the ecological processes that sustain them. These examples show that NbS can be adapted to marine, islands, wetlands, forests and other coastal ecosystems, delivering measurable ecological and socio-economic gains when implemented at scale.



A multi-ecosystem approach for more coherent and relevant projects, which includes the mixed ecosystems of the Mediterranean, from forests, wetlands and coasts to islands and marine areas.

The Mediterranean Biodiversity Consortium (MBC), through its flagship **RESCOM project**, is already translating policy into practice by operationalizing a multi-ecosystem NbS approach at basin scale. With nine pilot sites across eight Mediterranean countries, RESCOM demonstrates tangible restoration efforts, builds local capacity, and fosters knowledge exchange to anticipate emerging threats. These early actions show that coordinated regional governance, science-based planning, and stakeholder engagement can turn commitments into systemic, landscape-scale resilience, setting the foundation for scaling NbS across the Mediterranean.



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