MEDITERRANEAN 30x30

MARINE AGREEMENT BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO PROTECT 30% OF THE SPANISH MEDITERRANEAN BY 2030

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Summary

In response to the twin global crises of climate and biodiversity loss, the European Union and its member states have committed, through the EU Biodiversity Strategy,¹ to protect at least 30% of its seas by 2030, with one-third of what is protected (i.e., 10% of EU seas) under strict protection.

These targets aim not only to preserve biodiversity but also to restore it, if necessary, and to increase the resilience of ecosystems to the current and future effects of climate change.

The undersigned Spanish environmental organisations present a clear, coherent proposal for Spain to achieve the protection goals committed to in the Spanish Mediterranean.

Introduction

In a world increasingly aware of the need to preserve our natural and marine environments, the protection and conservation of the seas and oceans is a fundamental priority. This is even more important considering the current double crisis of climate and biodiversity loss, both of which threaten the Mediterranean Sea in particular.

Data confirming this crisis and highlighting the need for action includes the following:

- Basin-wide annual average temperatures are already 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level.²
- The Mediterranean region is considered one of the richest in biodiversity, with more than 17,000 species representing 18% of the world's known marine species.³ At the same time, this marine biodiversity is among the most threatened on the planet.⁴
- A large proportion of Europe's threatened marine habitats is found in the Mediterranean (32%), with 21% listed as vulnerable and 11% listed as endangered. This is accompanied by a rapid decline of seagrass ecosystems.⁵
- In terms of fisheries, the Mediterranean is **one of the most overfished marine regions in the world**, although recent years have seen signs of improvement.⁶
- About **150 million people** live by and depend on the Mediterranean for their livelihood.⁷
- The overall value of the Mediterranean's natural assets is estimated to exceed €4.66 trillion; the estimated annual economic output of the sea is at least €375 billion.⁸
- In the Spanish Mediterranean, the impacts of mass tourism, cruise ships, and the urban growth of the coastline over the last few decades are contributing to its deterioration.9

The EU, in line with international commitments, has set an ambitious target: to ensure that at least 30% of the EU's seas are protected by 2030, and that at least 10% of these – one-third of what is protected – is under strict protection. In other words, excluding extractive activities so that biodiversity can thrive optimally, increasing the seas' resilience to the effects of climate change, ensuring the preservation of marine ecosystems, and returning these spaces to as pristine a state as possible.

Our initiative is forged in response to this call for action, with a special focus on the Spanish Mediterranean Sea. Convinced that the preservation of our seas is fundamental to ensuring ecological balance and promoting long-term sustainability, we, the undersigned environmental organisations, commit ourselves to actively contributing to the achievement of these goals. Our proposal is clear: Through a combination of environmental policy promotion, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strategic communication we will lay the basis for a future in which the Spanish Mediterranean Sea prospers and becomes an inexhaustible source of life, wellbeing, and culture for our society.

This document details specific objectives and key actions to meet the established goals. Coordinated work along the lines defined in this proposal is our guarantee of progress towards a sustainable future for the Mediterranean Sea. Its protected, valued, and respected areas are fundamental pillars of our relationship with the sea that surrounds us and on which we depend so much.

We aspire to lay the basis for the Spanish Mediterranean to become an inexhaustible source of life, wellbeing, and culture.



Proposal

1) Commitments to protection, restoration, and recovery

To comply with the commitments adopted by Spain in the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems and biodiversity in the Spanish Mediterranean, it is imperative to comply with legislation and achieve the objectives set:

Actions towards 30x30

Designate and effectively protect at least 30% of the Spanish Mediterranean marine area as marine protected areas (MPAs), as defined by Law 42/2007, of 13 December 2007, on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity (SCIs, SACs, SPAs, MPAs, RMIPs, ASPIMs, and biosphere reserves), by 2030 ("30x30"). Meet the intermediate commitment to protect 25% by 2025 and the roadmap for its achievement, made by the Spanish government in June 2022.¹⁰

To this end, it is necessary to:

- Ensure such designation and consequent protection through effective management plans and conservation measures, agreed and managed in a participatory manner, in accordance with the obligations derived from EU and international regulatory frameworks and in accordance with the Declaration on the Climate and Environmental Emergency in Spain (January 2020¹¹) and the EU's Biodiversity Strategy 2030.¹²
- Ensure that such designation takes into account the representativeness of habitats, species, and ecological coherence and interconnectivity, always in accordance with the guidelines derived from the EU's regulatory framework. In turn, strengthen the quality of the areas as an effective network, ecologically representative and coherent with conservation and restoration objectives.
- Guarantee the provision of the necessary resources for the commissioning and implementation of the studies and work needed to identify new protection areas by 2025, as well as to fill knowledge gaps in the interconnectivity and representativeness of habitats.

Actions towards 10x30

The designation of at least 10% of the Spanish Mediterranean marine area as MPAs with strict protection category by 2030 (10x30), and 5% by 2027.

To this end, it is necessary to:

- Ensure that the category of strict protection corresponds to Categories Ia and Ib as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)¹³ or the equivalent established by the European Commission.
- Ensure the conservation and/or restoration of the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and ecosystem processes. In these areas, natural processes shall not be disturbed by human pressures that threaten the overall ecological structure and functioning of the area, regardless of the source of such pressures.

• Guarantee the provision of the necessary resources for the commissioning and implementation of the studies and work needed to identify new strict protection areas by 2027, as well as to fill knowledge gaps in the interconnectivity and representativeness of habitats.

Actions for the restoration of ecosystems

The restoration to a favourable conservation status of at least 20% of the marine and coastal ecosystems included in the protection list of the Habitats Directive¹⁴ that are degraded due to anthropogenic activities.

To this end, it is proposed to do the following:

- Determine the optimal conditions necessary for the proper functioning of each type of eco system and its habitats, including factors such as underwater noise, water quality, species richness, and biomass, by 2025.
- Identify areas with marine and coastal ecosystems susceptible to restoration by 2025 at the latest, with passive restoration as the main method.
- Approve plans and strategies for the conservation and recovery of habitats by 2026 in accordance with Law 42/2007 of 13 December 2007 on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity.
- Put the necessary resources and measures in place to ensure that at least 30% of degraded marine and coastal ecosystems are on a restoration pathway by 2030.

Actions for the recovery of species

The protection, conservation, and recovery of those species that require it due to their unfavourable status and/or their role in maintaining the balance of marine ecosystems and their contribution to the provision of ecosystem services.

To this end, it is proposed to:

- Implement, by 2025 at the latest, the development of monitoring plans for vulnerable species and habitats included on the List of Wild Species under Special Protection Regime.¹⁵
- Develop and implement the required national recovery plans for those Mediterranean species listed in the National Catalogue of Threatened Species¹⁶ with vulnerable or endangered status, including angel sharks (three species of the genus Squatina cited in the Mediterranean *S. aculeata*, *S. oculata*, and *S. squatina*; all critically endangered), the nacre (*Pinna nobilis*), the Balearic shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*), the Audouin's gull (*Larus audouinii*), the osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), the Mediterranean shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), the shag (*Gulosus aristotelis*), mysticetids, deep-diving cetaceans, and small cetaceans.
- Not limit the list of species to that of the Spanish Catalogue of Threatened Species/LESPRE, but should also take into account IUCN assessments or those most appropriate to the stocks concerned, as in the case for the European eel (Anguilla anguilla).
- Comply with the legal regime for the protection of protected species under the European Union's Habitats Directive.¹⁷

2) Commitments for sound management

The following commitments are proposed to ensure that MPAs effectively meet their conservation and sustainable use objectives, thereby contributing to the health of marine ecosystems and the wellbeing of marine-dependent communities. These commitments are based on the development and implementation of adaptive management tools developed with appropriate public participation.

The overall objective of this commitment is the adoption of the necessary management instruments, including effective and ambitious conservation measures, for all MPAs, as well as the revision of the current management plans, in the following terms:

- 80% of MPAs designated before 2024 have approved and/or revised management plans by 2027.
- 100% of the MPAs designated by 2025 have approved and/or revised management plans by 2030.

General management actions

- Develop management plans pursuing appropriate, concrete, and time-bound conservation objectives related to the ecological requirements of each site, including appropriate ecosystem-based management measures and considering each impact.
- Ensure management instruments are developed and implemented in a participatory manner.
- Achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) through compliance with the 11 Qualitative Descriptors set by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).¹⁷

Concrete management actions

A. MANAGEMENT OF IMPACTS

Design and implement measures to address pressures affecting MPAs in management plans to regulate the use of the sites. This includes the elaboration of pressure maps and the development of indicators based on the map and in accordance with the Marine Strategies (MMSS), for which the adaptation and use of the 11 descriptors of the MMSS is essential.

Measures for specific issues to be taken in all MPAs include the following:

Fishing

- Allocate access and distribution of fishery resources to benefit inshore fisheries, where sustainable, including social and environmental criteria in the allocation, such as number of workers or injection into the local economy, increased selectivity, or reduced impact on the bottom, following scientific recommendations to end overfishing.
- **Protect and restore marine ecosystems** including areas potentially relevant from a fisheries point of view, such as Habitat Restoration Areas of Interest for Fisheries or Marine Reserves.
- Strongly support the transition to carbon neutral and lower-impact fisheries through EU funds, ensuring fair and equitable access to funding for inshore and small-scale fisheries.

- Tackle the problem of accidental fishing with firm advances for the implementation of the National Plan for the Reduction of Bycatch in Fishing Activities, defining concrete actions, with a participatory approach. In addition, it is necessary to incorporate sharks, rays, and invertebrates into the Plan, as they are among the groups of species most vulnerable to accidental fishing.
- Develop and implement a Fair Transition Plan by 2026 that simultaneously incorporates impact mitigation and fishing effort reduction tools for a gradual and equitable transition to a sustainable fishing model, ensuring the proper functioning of MPAs and the well-being of fishing communities.
- Adopt a fishing regulation by 2025, under national fisheries law, to limit bottom fishing on sensitive habitats in MPAs of the Natura 2000 Network designated by such habitats, through appropriate zoning.
- Fight the problem of ghost fishing with the support of the Lost Gear tool.¹⁸

Pollution

 Implement measures to meet the targets set by the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan¹⁹ in MPAs mainly from discharges and from introduced energy, in particular light and impulsive and continuous underwater noise.

Underwater noise

- Ensure that civilian and military underwater noise-generating activities, within certain thresholds, are subject to Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) ²⁰ and that EIA includes underwater noise in accordance with the Guidelines for the Environmental Assessment of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Family²¹ and CMS Technical Series Publication No. 46.
- Ensure that the threshold values for impulsive and continuous underwater noise approved by the MSFD Technical Group on Underwater Noise established by the European Commission for Descriptors D11.1 and D11.2 of the MSFD are adopted.

Collisions

 Adopt, in those marine areas subject to a management instrument for conservation reasons, mandatory and effective measures to eradicate or minimise as far as possible the risk of ships colliding with cetaceans or other marine fauna.

Following the resolutions of international conventions to which Spain is a contracting party,²² in those areas where diverting the routes of vessels is not a viable option to avoid collisions, it is necessary to reduce the speed of vessels to below 10-12 knots (ACCOBAMS Resolutions 7.12 and 8.18).²³ Numerous scientific studies have concluded that the risk of collision with lethal effects on cetaceans decreases as vessel speed is reduced and that the risk is very low in the given speed range and below.²⁴

Quality of waters

 Improve the quality of coastal waters by complying with obligations under the EU regulatory framework and pursuing zero discharge into the marine environment, eliminating all waste water discharges through improved sanitation systems.

B. SURVEILLANCE

Effective surveillance is essential to ensure compliance with regulations and the implementation of management measures, preventing illegal activities such as unauthorised fishing or the control of pollution sources. Its implementation contributes greatly to both the effectiveness and proper functioning of MPAs and the sustainable use of marine resources.

Actions

- Invest in state-of-the-art technology to ensure efficient real-time control and surveillance of MPAs. Ensure real-time public access to control and surveillance data.
- Increase the allocation of financial and human resources for monitoring, including the creation of a specialised and multidisciplinary state body (with expertise and capacity to report, monitor, control, and sanction in any discipline).
- Enhance collaborative arrangements between government agencies to coordinate and conduct joint surveillance operations.
- Implement vessel speed monitoring systems via the automatic identification system (AIS) or vessel monitoring system (VMS). This requires the mandatory installation of AIS or VMS type tracking devices on all types of vessels, including those under 300 gross tons.

Temporary objectives

- Conduct a review of MPA monitoring and control resources to address possible deficiencies and establish MPA monitoring and follow-up by 2025 at the latest.
- Ensure that by 2028 all MPAs have adequate monitoring and control resources as soon as they have an approved management plan.

C. TRACKING

Adequate monitoring allows the effectiveness of implemented conservation measures to be assessed, ensuring that biodiversity and habitat preservation objectives are met. It is also essential for scientific research and long-term monitoring, as it allows the understanding of changes in ecosystems and adapting management strategies accordingly. It also facilitates the early identification of potential threats, such as illegal activities or environmental changes, so that corrective measures can be taken in time.

In addition, constant monitoring contributes to transparency, engages local communities, and helps educate society about the importance of marine conservation, promoting greater commitment and support for the protection of these precious spaces.

Actions

- Rigorously monitor management plans and review regularly to ensure that conservation objectives are met.
- Scientifically monitor MPAs using appropriate indicators, taking into account those defined in the MMSS.²⁷
- Implement innovative technologies for the surveillance and monitoring of MPAs, ensuring their optimal functioning.

Temporary objectives

- By 2025, define and implement a harmonised and coordinated monitoring plan for all MPAs with a management and management instrument, taking as a reference the "criteria for monitoring and evaluation" of the RAMPE Master Plan²⁵ and the EEMM monitoring programme.²⁶
- Define for each MPA the specific monitoring indices based on the RAMPE Master Plan Guidelines established for 2028.

D. GOVERNANCE

An appropriate governance strategy is essential to establish and maintain well-functioning MPAs. It contributes to cooperation, enforcement of regulations, community participation, and adaptability, essential elements for the long-term preservation of marine biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystems. To ensure the fulfilment of the objectives described in this document, as well as the correct development and implementation of management measures, governance plays an inescapable role.

Actions:

- Implement real, effective, and transversal participation in all stages towards the achievement of the 30x30 and 10x30 objectives in the Spanish Mediterranean Sea, in terms of designation, elaboration, and revision of management plans and monitoring.
- Encourage the creation of spaces for dialogue and participation, and establish them on a permanent basis. Ensure the diversity of actors in these spaces for participation (academic sector, NGOs, economic sector, professional fishing, recreational activities, local communities, etc.).
- Guarantee coherence and inter-administrative coordination in the management of MPAs.
- Create or assign governance bodies for the MPAs based on existing structures representative of the territory and with effective and transversal participation.
- Establish or assign scientific and technical advisory bodies for each MPA.
- Create or assign a monitoring body designed in conjunction with local communities (scientists, environmental NGOs, associations, regional governments, and island and local authorities, as well as other stakeholders) for each MPA.
- Accompany the management plans with work plans that specify the objectives of each measure in stages. This facilitates the monitoring of compliance and ensures ecosystemic management considering cumulative impacts.
- Provide spaces for participation and dialogue with sufficient financial resources and staff to ensure their functioning.
- Train staff and ensure external and independent facilitation in participatory spaces.
- Enable training opportunities in co-management and management aimed at sectors relevant to each MPA.
- **Encourage** the creation and development of **educational programmes** and materials.

Temporary objective

100% of MPAs have a monitoring and control body and advisory body by 2028.

E. RESOURCES

The objectives and actions described in this document can only be realised with the necessary financial support. Adequate financial resources are essential to ensure that MPAs are effective and sustainable over time. This implies not only to the initial investment in the creation of these areas, but also the continued commitment of funds for management, surveillance, monitoring, and governance activities. Therefore, an essential action is to increase the percentage of investment in marine conservation and protection in the national budget.

Actions:

- Strengthen and optimise human resources and public services related to marine conservation, including but not limited to biodiversity, MPAs, fisheries, surveillance, and the monitoring, control, and enforcement of existing regulations.
- Implement a marine natural capital accounting system that integrates data on the state of our marine habitats and species, as well as the economic value of the goods and services provided by the marine environment. This will allow us to visualise the interdependence between the state of the marine environment and the economy.
- Allocate a state budget line to ensure adequate public participation in the management of MPAs.
- Allocate a state budget line to promote information, education, and training on marine conservation.

Temporary objective.

 Assess and determine the basis, including administrative and budgetary needs, for the creation of a state agency dedicated to the management, monitoring and control of the different categories of MPAs in Spain by 2025.

Roadmap

Year Milestone

The Spanish government declares at least 25% of Spain's marine area as MPAs.

The Spanish government ensures the necessary resources to ensure effective monitoring of MPAs.

The Spanish government defines a monitoring plan for each MPA with an adopted management instrument based on the "criteria for monitoring and evaluation" of the RAMPE Master Plan.

The Spanish government assesses and determines the budgetary needs for the creation of the state agency dedicated to the management of marine areas.

The Spanish government identifies all marine and coastal ecosystems susceptible to restoration.

The Spanish government launches the development of monitoring plans for vulnerable species and habitats.

The Spanish government adopts a fishing regulation, under the national fisheries law, to limit bottom fishing on sensitive habitats in MPAs of the Natura 2000 Network designated by such habitats, through appropriate zoning.

The Spanish government approves and promotes the development of plans and strategies for the conservation and recovery of vulnerable or critically endangered habitats and species.

The Spanish government approves and implements the elaboration of a Just Transition Plan that simultaneously incorporates impact mitigation and fishing effort reduction tools for a gradual and equitable transition towards a sustainable fishing model, ensuring the proper functioning of the MPAs and the welfare of fishing communities.

The Spanish government reaches the target of having declared at least 5% of Spain's marine area under strict protection.

The Spanish government approves 80% of the management plans.

The Spanish government ensures resources, effective monitoring, and control of MPAs.

The Spanish government defines the monitoring indices for each MPA based on the established guidelines.

The Spanish government ensures that 100% of MPAs have a monitoring body and consultative bodies.

The Spanish government approves 100% of the management plans.

The Spanish government reaches the 30x30 target: to have declared 30% of Spain's marine area as MPAs, with one-third of what is protected under strict protection.

The Spanish government manages to meet all the objectives of the Mediterranean Roadmap 30x30.

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