

**18th meeting of the Thematic Steering Group for
Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality
under the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)
28 March 2023**

DRAFT MINUTES

Venue: The regional government headquarters in Bologna, viale Aldo Moro 30, 4th floor, room No. 412

Chairs: Mitja Bricelj

Participants: Members of the EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group 3 (TSG 3), representatives of the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner (GODC), Representatives of the European Commission, Project partner Municipality of Izola (SI), project and external experts previously announced.

Nine countries (ITA, SLO, CRO, BIH, MNG, SRB, GR, N.MAC, SM) out of ten were represented at the meeting and participated both in presence and through remote connection. Albania was absent. The Chairs verified the attendance of the members and confirmed that a quorum was established.

The participants were welcomed by the representative of the host partner of the meeting (Regione Emilia-Romagna) who then expressed their best wishes for successful work in the future.

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

The participants were also welcomed by Pillar 3 Coordinator Mitja Bricelj (SI) who apologized for Senad Oprašić (BiH) who was unable to attend the meeting in person but was present online.

The agenda was presented by Chair Mitja Bricelj. At the suggestion of the Italian members, he proposed that item 8 - Revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan be renumbered after item 4, thus renumbering all the other items.

Italy wanted to add an additional item to the agenda, but after clarifications from the Chair, it was noted that the proposed item could be included in the items already proposed. They asked the Chair to circulate in the future all the documents related to the agenda items of TSG3 meetings, preferably when sending out the agenda and in any case in advance to the meeting. In this way, participants can more easily prepare for the meeting and report on the activities to their superiors. In addition, Italy asked for more coordination with the country hosting TSG3 meetings. In particular, when the draft agenda is prepared and before sharing it among the other TSG3 members, a preliminary exchange of views with the hosting Country should take place. In this way, the agenda could be adapted to location availability and take into consideration specific needs by institutional representatives of the hosting country.

Miha Bricelj noted the requests and said that they would be more careful in convening meetings in the future.

All permanent members agreed to the proposed change to the agenda and the agenda was adopted.

Conclusions under Item 1:

C.1. The agenda was approved with amendment of the original item No. 8 (revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan), which became the new item 4 and the rest of the items of the agenda changed accordingly.

Item 2: Formal adoption of the Minutes of the 17th meeting of TSG-3, 23-24 November 2022

The minutes of the 17th meeting of TSG3 (November 2022) were presented by the Chair Miha Bricelj and Iztok Škerlić. They explained that the minutes had been previously completed by the Italian and Croatian members and that all changes were included in the presented document. Italy noted that they only reworded the sentence on virtual participation to better reflect the decision of the members approved at the meeting.

The amendments were accepted and the minutes were approved.

Conclusions under Item 2:

C.2 The Minutes of the 17th TSG3 meeting were approved with the integrations from Croatia and Italy.

Item 3: Amendment of the ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2022

The Chair gave the floor to the rapporteur, Iztok Škerlić, for a brief presentation of the amendment to the Annual Progress Report for the year 2022. The Chair opened the discussion. Italy confirmed that the amendments included in the draft report were aimed to reflect changes that were also included in the minutes of the 17th TSG3 meeting.

Conclusions under Item 3:

C.3 The Annual progress report for the year 2022 was approved with the integrations from Italy.

Item 4: Recap of TSG3 events since the last meeting

The Chair presented the results of the EUSAIR Pillar Coordinators Technical Meeting held in Sarajevo (BiH) on 5 October 2022, and the 18th Governing Board, which took place on 6 October 2022, also in Sarajevo (BiH).

Members asked for some clarifications regarding the Governing Board decision, announced by the coordinators by email before the meeting, on holding the meetings exclusively on site, thus excluding the hybrid modality. Participants were informed that the Governing board meeting was interrupted after the first day, so the GB did not adopt a position and there was no decision on the issue, that will be discussed in April, when the session will be resumed.

Therefore, Italy stated that unless a decision by the Governing Board, the hybrid modality is to be considered as an ordinary modality for TSG3 meetings, also considering that it represents the ordinary way of proceeding of other Pillars.

The chair summarised the workshop on the preparation of the Action Plan for Biodiversity and Marine Protection with special reference to the establishment of marine protected areas in the Adriatic part. He stated that the main issues are the guidelines for the revision of the contingency plan for the Adriatic Sea and its completion in January 2024. This is a joint project in terms of sustainable blue economy, which will continue in the Central and Southern Adriatic.

Iztok Škerlić added that this is the first time in the history of European strategies that a project of this type has received additional funds from the EU Commission and that we will try to expand the project to other parts of the Adriatic. He also presented a summary of the workshop on the preparation of the Action Plan for Biodiversity and Marine Protection with special reference to the establishment of marine protected areas in the Adriatic. He said that the project COSFI-MAR is underway and will be implemented soon. The project proposed by the Greeks will combine two annexes into one and will be implemented as one project. With these two projects, we will complete the flagship development for this programme period as the Facility Point project is coming to an end.

Concerning the revision of the contingency plan for the Adriatic Sea and its completion in January 2024, Italy informed that REMPEC (the Regional Activity Centre of the Barcelona Convention on Marine Pollution, Emergency and Response) is working on the Contingency Plan for the Adriatic and that it will release the final text before the end of 2023. Therefore, Italy stated that there should be a strong coordination between the two initiatives, and in particular that any other project should be supportive of the REMPEC initiative, also considering that REMPEC is the competent authority on the issue for the Mediterranean region. Italy concluded that considering the timeline of the REMPEC activity, there is no need for developing and implementing a second project in the Southern Adriatic.

Eva Kos (SI) presented a conclusion of the 19th Governing Board held in Brussels (B) on 15 March 2023.

Conclusions under Item 4:

C.4 The members were informed about the activities of TSG3 since the last meeting and the recap of the Technical meeting of the EUSAIR Pillar coordination, presented by Mitja Bricelj and the 19th Governing Board meeting on 15th March 2023, presented by Eva Kos.

Item 5: Revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan

The Chair gave the floor to the rapporteur, Eva Kos, to present the Revision of the EUSAIR Action Plan. She presented the state of strategic consultation, what happened at the level of the revision working group and at the level of the national coordinators.

The Italian partners emphasized that before we expand the projects to other parts of the European community, it is necessary to check whether the projects comply with the legislation and the guidelines adopted at the COP. Procedurally, they also added that it would be necessary to inform the members about the progress of the action plan every 3 months.

After the presentation, Senad Oprašić pointed out that for BiH, circular economy and Youth are very important topics. He suggested that an initiative should be taken to establish two more pillars that would connect with the 4 basic pillars.

Italy expressed its concerns about the establishment of two more pillars. They fear that adding new pillar would lead to even more confusion between the topics. They suggest that additional topics could

be developed to complement the already established pillars. In addition, they reminded the speaker that the proposal by Slovenia to include in the Pillar on Environmental Quality a topic on ballast water is not very coherent as ballast water issue is already covered by topic 1, “The Marine Environment”. They rather suggested to include ballast water issue as a sub-topic of “Marine Environment”.

Italy also requested to modify the action of the AP concerning the Contingency Plan from “Development and implementation” to “Implementation” since REMPEC, the relevant authority on the theme, is already working on its development.

Partners from San Marino asked whether the action plan emphasizes freshwater management. The Chair said that this topic is already included in the topic of Coastal water.

Conclusions under Item 5:

C.4 The members were informed of the Revision of the EUSAIR Action plan presented by Eva Kos.

Item 6: Presentation of the 8th EUSAIR Forum in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the TSG 3 Panel session on the 8th EUSAIR Forum

The Chair introduced the agenda for the next 8th EUSAIR Forum and asked those present if they had any comments on the agenda. He noted that TSG3 will have its own panel on 25 May 2023. Those present discussed the topic of the panel and suggested the following title: TSG3 Event - Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention through RBM, ICZM and MSP.

Conclusions under Item 6:

C.5 The members were informed about the last tentative Agenda of the 8th EUSAIR forum in Sarajevo by Iztok Škerlić, based on the document received by the Bosnian Presidency on 19 March 2023.

C.6 The members agreed that the title of the TSG 3 parallel session on the 8th EUSAIR Forum is going to be: TSG3 event – Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention through RBM, ICZM and MSP

Moreover, the Coordinators confirmed that a specific slot will be devoted to the CAMP Otranto project as per Italy’s request.

Item 7: Preparation of the Action Plan for the contribution to the objectives of nature protection, set out in the Communication of the European Commission: EU Biodiversity Strategy until 2030

The Chair gave the speakers a presentation of the Action Plan preparation process. Mitja Grbec presented the results of phase 1 of the preparation of the Action Plan, which has already been completed. He said that phase 2 would focus on the coast of the Northern Adriatic and the sea near Bosnia and Herzegovina. Marko Starman briefly presented the research problem and the legal framework on which the Action Plan will be based. He said that in order to prepare the Action Plan, they reviewed all previous projects carried out in the framework of EUSAIR. TSG3 Members asked for some clarifications since they were not aware of the development of an Action Plan for the Adriatic and asked the Chair which document or decision was the basis of its preparation. The Chair said that the Action Plan is being prepared based on the conclusions of the last EUSAIR Forum. The participants, that were not aware of this conclusion, also pointed out that the Forum was not the appropriate context to take such an important decision. They also stated that the document cannot be referred to

as an action plan, also considering that an Action plans includes implementation costs, which the partners have not agreed on.

The Coordinator blamed the hybrid modality for causing miscommunication problems. Italy took the floor reiterating that it is not the hybrid mode that creates communication problems but the lack of documents, which, as already underlined, should be circulated appropriately and in advance. Italy also added, supported by the other countries, that the document presented could be taken into consideration as an information document but that it could not be considered as an Action Plan.

The partners from San Marino said that all the consequences of protecting the freshwater environment should also be considered. The discussion also showed that those present did not want the document to be referred to as an action plan, so they suggested to the Chair that the document be renamed to: Document (potential "Action Plan") for the contribution of the objective of nature protection, set out in the Communication of the EC: EU biodiversity Strategy until 2030.

Conclusions under Item 7:

C.7 The members were informed about the First Phase development of the Document (potential "Action Plan") for the contribution of the objective of nature protection, set out in the Communication of the EC: EU biodiversity Strategy until 2030.

Item 8: Proposal to update the Activity plan of possible TSG 3 events for 2023

The Chair presented the agenda of meetings, workshops and forums for 2023. He emphasized that Slovenia will host the next meeting of the Barcelona Convention. The Convention will focus on the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and the coastal environment. During the meeting, Slovenia will take over the two-year presidency of the Barcelona Convention. Slovenia proposed to organize a side event on EUSAIR to be included in the programme of the next COP of the Barcelona Convention.

Italy suggested to the Coordinators to develop a concept note on a possible side event to be circulated among TSG3 members for consideration and final decision.

Conclusions under Item 8:

C.8 The members were informed about the future activities of the TSG3 in 2023 and amended the Activity plan of possible TSG3 events in 2023 with the event proposed by Mitja Bricelj during the COP 23 in December 2023 and the event during the 8th EUSAIR Forum in May 2023, by the Emilia Romagna region.

Item 9: Monitoring and evaluation process within WP 3 EUSAIR Facility Point project for TSG 3

The Chair turned the floor over to Iztok Škerlič, who presented the TSG3 EUSAIR monitoring and evaluation process for the project. Iztok Škerlič presented the concept of the action plan for this project (analysis of the current situation regarding MPAs and networks of MPAs (and OECMS) within EUSAIR member states with recommendations for possible improvement and/or expansion. Possible application of the available legal bases in the identified marine areas (EBSS, SPAMIS, ACCOBAMS) and proposals for forms of management and control within the foreseen forms of transboundary cross-border cooperation).

Conclusions under Item 9:

C.9 The Members were informed about the Monitoring and evaluation process for TSG3 within the WP 3 EUSAIR Facility Point project and the possibilities of capitalization of monitoring activities in the future 2021-2027 financial period within the new Facility Point project.

Item 10: Status report and inputs from TSG 3 members on transformation of project concepts into bankable projects

The Chair gave the floor to Duško Čirović to present the final development of the project PET HAB ECO. He presented the main objectives of the project PET HAB ECO, which are to improve the resilience of large carnivore populations on a transnational scale in a territory characterized by human-dominated or fragmented ecosystems, in the face of environmental threats and risks, including those caused by the effects of climate change.

Italy underlined the need for further internal consultations on the main contents of this document.

Conclusions under Item 10:

C.10 The members were informed about the final development of the PET HAB ECO project by Duško Čirović.

Item 10.1: Presentation of recent developments: TSG3 – TSG1 Interpillar project proposal on ICZM/MSP

The Chair turned the floor over to Folco Soffietti to present a joint TSG1 and TSG3 inter-pillar project on MSP and ICZM. Folco Soffietti explained the process of the project and the strategic objectives of the project, which are to build institutional capacity to apply the ecosystem approach to the management of economic activities and the sustainable use of natural and cultural assets in the macro-region. Achieve harmonized implementation of marine and coastal plans through the development of integrated governance at national and transboundary levels. Expand the network of protected marine areas in the region (action plan). Promote a sustainable blue economy and adaptation to CC. The overall objective of the project is a coherent, more efficient, sustainable and equitable use of the marine space and coasts in the AIR and their natural and cultural values. Italy raised the attention of other participants on the budget, which is very high (around 10n mln euro), and asked if the packages could be considered separately to ensure more possibilities of funding.

Conclusions under Item10.1:

C.11 The members were informed about the recent developments on TSG3 – TSG 1 Inter-pillar project proposal on ICZM/MSP presented by Folco Soffietti.

Item 11: AOB

The Chair asked those present if they had any other comments or suggestions. Italy suggested that the mailing list of all TSG3 should be updated and sent to all the partners.

Item 12: Conclusions and next steps

The Chair read out the conclusions of the meeting. Those present agreed with them. There was no discussion on this point. The Chair thanked those present and closed the meeting.