Concept Note COP31 side event

One Sea, Shared Action:
Civil Society Driving Climate Resilience in the Mediterranean

Day: 13/11/2026
Time: 11:30 - 12:30 (Türkiye local time, GMT+3)
Place: Mediterranean Pavilion, Blue Zone
Organised by: Organised by the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP) with Eco-Union, EPLO, Fondazione Marevivo, Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection and Permanent Secretariat of the Pelagos Agreement.

1. Background:

The Mediterranean is more than a sea; it is a shared home, a vital source of livelihood, and a crossroads for diverse communities. However, rising temperatures, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and an increase in extreme weather events are placing unprecedented pressure on its people and ecosystems. Since these challenges transcend national borders, building climate resilience requires more than isolated interventions—it demands cooperation, the integration of local knowledge, and sustained collective action. Civil society organizations, community groups, researchers, and citizens are already transforming shared concerns into tangible results, from protecting coastlines and restoring nature to supporting vulnerable populations.

As a global biodiversity hotspot, the Mediterranean is one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change. Pressures on ecosystems and communities are further intensified by growing coastal populations, intensive tourism, and competing demands for marine and coastal resources. Moreover, climate change exacerbates land-based marine pollution and coastal erosion through more frequent floods and extreme weather events.

Adopting a Circular Economy can reduce the environmental, climatic, and energy footprints of human activity in marine and coastal areas, thereby strengthening the protection of biodiversity and marine ecosystems. Simultaneously, the Blue Economy provides opportunities to generate sustainable employment, foster innovation, and enhance coastal resilience. Tourism, one of the region's most prominent Blue Economy sectors, can drive this transition if its development prioritizes healthy ecosystems, resilient communities, and inclusive local economies. In this context, a new approach to marine conservation is emerging—one that moves beyond the protection of individual habitats and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) toward the holistic management of entire ecosystems.

2. Objective and focus

The event aims to strengthen cooperation and scale up action towards a more sustainable and equitable coastal and marine economy across both shores of the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The side event will focus on:

- The circular economy and the links between climate change and marinepollution;
- Sustainable, inclusive and resilient blue tourism;
- Ocean literacy, capacity-building and integrated beach management;
- Ecosystem-
  based management and the protection of marine protectedarea (MPA) networks

3. Format

The one-hour panel will begin with introductory remarks from the UNEP/MAP Coordinator, followed by four presentations highlighting the connections between the blue and circular economies, sustainable tourism, coastal stewardship and marine conservation.

The opening presentation will explore the role of the Blue Economy in the green transition, focusing on how circular-economy approaches can help advance climate neutrality.

The second presentation will consider how tourism can contribute to a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient Mediterranean, with a focus on the MED Blue Tourism Flagship Initiative.

The third will showcase work on Morocco's Mediterranean coast, examining how ocean literacy, capacity-building and integrated beach management can support healthier and more resilient coastal environments.

The final presentation will address the shift towards ecosystem-based marine conservation. Using the Capri Marine Protected Area as an example, it will highlight the importance of ecological connectivity and the natural processes that sustain marine biodiversity. It will also introduce a five-step proposal for developing a connected network of Marine Protected Areas, strengthening regional cooperation and helping achieve Good Environmental Status across the Mediterranean.

Together, the presentations will set the scene for a discussion with the audience on how these interconnected approaches can support a more sustainable and resilient Mediterranean.

Partners and contributors include representatives from Eco-Union, an environmental Think and Do Tank, coordinator of the Blue Tourism Initiative; EPLO Institute of Circular Economy, Environment, Energy and Climate (CECCI); Fondazione Marevivo; Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection; Permanent Secretariat of the Pelagos Agreement and UNEP/MAP, Mediterranean Action Plan Secretariat of Barcelona Convention with INFO/RAC, its Regional Activity Centre for Information and Communication.

4. Agenda

11:30–11:35 Welcome and setting the scene

Ms. Tatiana Hema, UNEP/MAP Coordinator/ Mr. Arthur Pasquale, INFO/RAC Deputy Director

11:35 –11:45 Circular economy and the links between climate change and marine pollution

Mr. George Kremlis, Member of the board of Directors of the EPLO

11:45 –11:55 Towards a Sustainable, Inclusive and Resilient Blue Tourism in the Mediterranean - MED Blue Tourism Flagship Initiative

Ms. Giulia Balestracci, Project Officer & Coordinator of Blue Tourism Initiative, Eco-Union

11:55 –12:05 Ocean literacy, capacity building and integrated beach management on Morocco's Mediterranean coast

Mr. Ayman Cherkaoui, Director of the Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training

12:05–12:15 From habitat protection to ecosystem management and protection: MPA networks for a healthy Mediterranean Sea

Mr. Pier Paolo Celeste, Head of Marevivo International

12:15–12:25 Open exchange with the audience

12:25–12:30 Discussion and final remarks

Ms. Tatjana Hema

Coordinator, UNEP/MAP - Barcelona Convention

Tatjana Hema is Coordinator of UNEP/MAP. An expert in marine and coastal governance, pollution and sustainable development, she brings extensive scientific and diplomatic experience, including senior roles in Albania and the UN.

Mr. George Kremlis

Member of the board of Directors of the EPLO

Member of the Board of Directors of the EPLO, Director of the EPLO Circular Economy, Environment and Energy Institute and Ambassador of EPLO to Bulgaria. George Kremlis is the Chairman of the Greek Initiative at UN level on protecting cultural and natural heritage from climate change impacts. He is a member of the Board of the European Public Law Organisation and the Director of its climate and circular economy Institute. He is as well the Ambassador of the EPLO to Bulgaria. He was until 2023 a member of the environmental and social advisory council of the EBRD and is also currently the Chair of the Bureau of the Espoo Convention and of the SEA Protocol, Chair of the MoPs in 2019, elected Chair for the MoPs in December 2020 and re-elected Chair for the period 2021-2023 and the period up to 2027. George Kremlis is Honorary Director of the European Commission, where he has spent the major part of his career as Advisor in the Legal Service and Head of various legal and policy Units in DGENV.

Ms. Giulia Balestracci

Project Officer & Coordinator of Blue Tourism Initiative, Eco-Union

Giulia Balestracci is Policy and Project Officer at eco-union, a Barcelona-based environmental think-and-do tank. There she coordinates international and EU-funded projects on blue tourism and the green economy across the Mediterranean and beyond, including the global Blue Tourism Initiative. She works on sustainable blue tourism, ocean governance, coastal resilience and climate change adaptation, and on the link between science and policy. Her work on coastal planning draws on integrated coastal zone management, marine spatial planning and coastal processes. She has worked with the EU, UNEP and the World Bank, as well as governments, NGOs, research centres and coastal communities in the Mediterranean and the Western Indian Ocean. She holds two master's degrees in sustainable tourism planning and management, and she is doing a PhD on blue tourism and ocean governance at Rovira i Virgili University.

Mr. Ayman Cherkaoui

Director of the Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training

Ayman Cherkaoui is the Director of the Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training, the academic arm of the Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection. He also serves as Deputy Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law, and Lead Counsel for Climate Change at the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and Coordinator of the Mohammed VI Prize for Climate and Sustainable Development. An Obama Foundation Africa Leader, Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leader, and Ambassador for the Adaptation Without Borders initiative, Ayman sits on the international jury of the Elisabeth Haub Award for Environmental Law and Diplomacy and mentors in the UNFCCC/UNDP Youth for Climate programmes. He is Morocco's National Focal Point for the UNFCCC Action for Climate Empowerment framework and previously served two mandates as Regional Facilitator for Africa under the UNEP Major Groups and Stakeholders framework. With an interdisciplinary background spanning climate change, law, finance, and engineering, Ayman has held senior roles including Special Advisor on Climate Change to the COP22 Presidency, Legal Advisor to Morocco's Minister of Environment, and Executive Director of the UN Global Compact Network Morocco. He has collaborated with UNDP, the World Bank, the African Union Commission, GGGI, and GIZ.

Mr. Pier Paolo Celeste

Head of Marevivo International

Pier Paolo Celeste was for 38 years a public servant at the Italian Trade Commission, a Governamental Trade Agency. He has held various positions across different areas of the organization, including business services, international marketing, external relations, and communications. He has carried out over 1,000 missions in more than 65 countries. He served as head of the offices in New York, Warsaw, and Moscow, and acted as coordinator for the USA and North America. He served as a member of the board of directors at the Working

Compensation Authority, where he chaired the committee on budget, labor relations, public outreach, and the improvement of administrative operations. Actually he is volunteering at Marevivo, managing the International Division.