

Barcelona Convention: New Protocols and Amendments

The European Parliament has approved the Commission's proposals (consultation procedure, without a report) concerning EU Council Decisions on the conclusion of Protocols and amendments to the Barcelona Convention on the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution.

Since signing the Convention in 1977, the EU has brought forward numerous Protocols aimed at strengthening the prevention of marine pollution. In the context of the revision and improvement of the legal provisions of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the contracting parties adopted a new Protocol to the Barcelona Convention in 1995, signed by 16 Mediterranean countries and the Community; this *Protocol on Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean*, replaces an existing Protocol.

The Commission has therefore proposed that the Council approve this revised Protocol and its Annexes covering areas of Community responsibility on the environment.

The amendments included in the revised Protocol are designed to strengthen protection and improve the natural and cultural heritage of the Mediterranean through the designation of specially protected areas and the tightening of conservation measures for endangered species. The text also aims to protect natural habitats and maintain biological diversity in the long term.

The new Protocol includes an Annex covering common criteria for the choice of protected marine and coastal areas, and another concerning endangered species and those whose exploitation should be regulated.

The EU's endorsement of the text will be accompanied by a specific declaration, specifying that the EU is participating in the implementation of provisions outlined in Annexes to the Protocol through the creation of the Natura 2000 network.

The Commission proposes (COM(99)28), that on behalf of the Union the Council should endorse amendments to the *Protocol on the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Marine Pollution*. The proposed changes aim primarily to strengthen protection against pollution from land-based sources and introduce preventative measures – for example, regarding the discharge of untreated domestic and industrial waste containing toxic and persistent substances liable to bio-accumulate.

The new Protocol also contains programmes and measures aimed at addressing pollution from certain land-based sources and activities listed in an Annex.

The Commission further proposes (COM(99)29), that the Council adopt a Decision endorsing the amendments and modifications to the Protocol regarding the prevention and reduction of pollution caused by discharges from ships and aircraft. □