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Transnational monitoring strategy

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WORK PACKAGE 1

OUTPUT 1.3

Transnational monitoring strategy

Work Package	WP 1 – Joint development of the transnational strategy for the monitoring sentinel species	
Output	O.1.3 – Transnational monitoring strategy	
Date of submission	31/08/2026	
Description	This output sets out the strategy that the transnational collaborative partnership will have developed in order to foster cooperation and harmonisation of monitoring practices at the transnational level but also at the local and regional levels. This output will be shared with at least 150 research centers, marine protected areas and others involved in monitoring and conservation.	
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Status	Final version	
PPs involved	All partners	
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Introduction

The Adriatic-Ionian basin hosts a wide **diversity** of habitats, where the growing overlap between marine biodiversity conservation and human socio-economic activities, such as tourism, fisheries, aquaculture and maritime traffic, poses increasing management challenges.

To address these challenges, the SAMESEA project selected **three sentinel species** – the common bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), the loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*). Acting as biological indicators, these species provide valuable information for assessing ecosystem conditions and supporting the development of management measures aimed at mitigating interactions between human activities and marine biodiversity.

In this context, a targeted, well-designed and jointly agreed **monitoring strategy** is essential to achieve three main objectives:

- Strengthening cooperation among the institutions and organizations involved in monitoring and conservation;
- Harmonizing monitoring methods and protocols;
- Standardizing data collection, management and reporting to ensure information is comparable and interoperable across countries.

This document sets out the **Transnational Monitoring Strategy**, explaining its rationale, guiding principles and objectives, its development process, and how it will harmonize monitoring practices across the seven **EUSAIR countries** participating in SAMESEA: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Greece.
This Output is based on the results of the activities carried out to identify high-risk areas for sentinel species (Activity 1.1), to create the coordination model and monitoring protocols (Activity 1.2), and to implement the widespread monitoring pilot action (Activity 1.3).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A **TRANSNATIONAL MONITORING STRATEGY** AIMS TO HARMONIZE AND STANDARDIZE MONITORING PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS FOR SENTINEL SPECIES, ENCOURAGING CROSS-SECTORAL AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION IN THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION.

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Guiding Principles

The Transnational Monitoring Strategy is based on core principles established by **Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD) and by **Maritime Spatial Planning** (MSP).

CBD PRINCIPLES

- **Conservation** of protecting plant, animal, and microorganism species alongside their natural habitats;
- **Sustainable use** of natural resources;
- Fair distribution of advantages from natural resources.

MSP PRINCIPLES

- To adopt the **Ecosystem-Based Management approach** to protect marine biodiversity;
- To **integrate human activities needs** to perform their coordinated management;
- To **implement adaptative plans** in space and time;
- To **ensure the partecipative process** by different stakeholders;
- To avoids gambling with nature when scientific data is uncertain or incomplete;
- To consider **connection** between terrestrial activities and coastal or marine zones.

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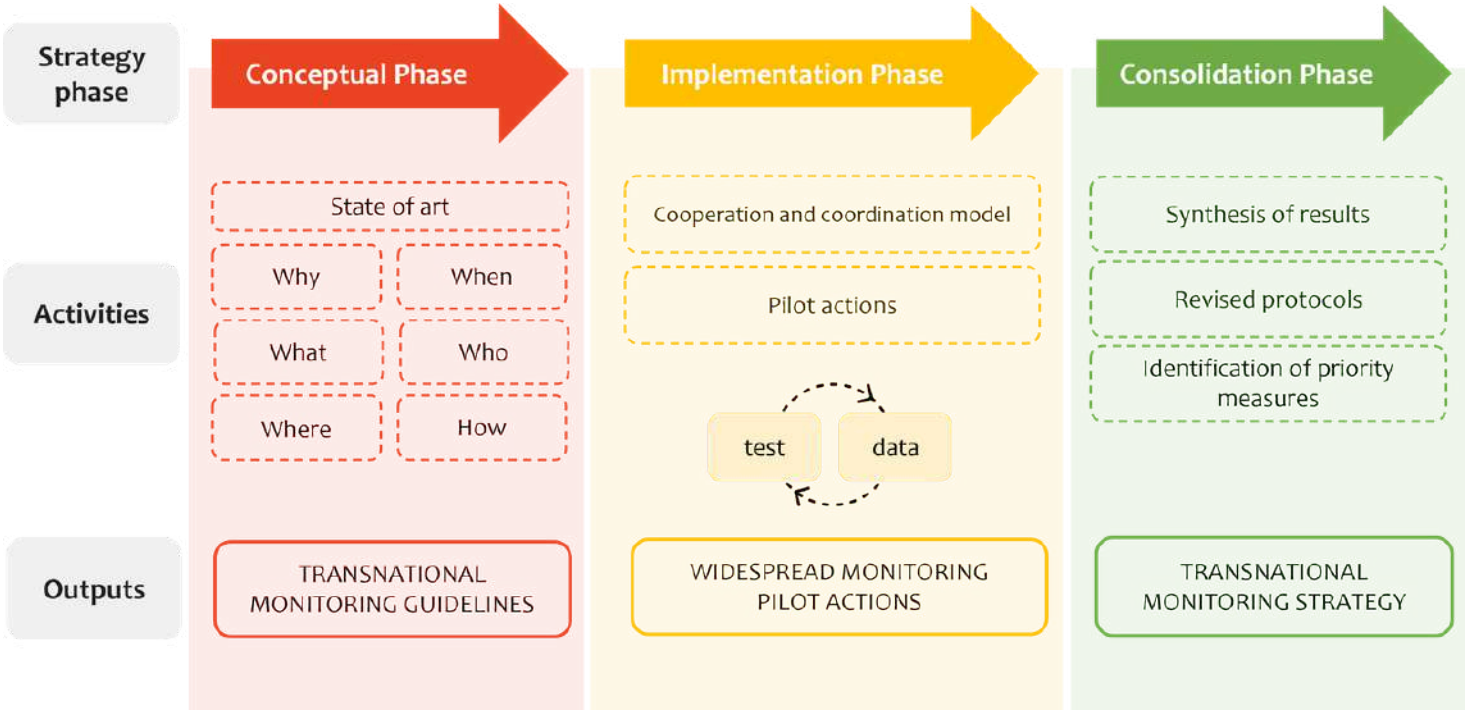
Methodology for strategy development

The methodology was structured around three interconnected phases, progressively moving from the definition of monitoring needs and guidelines, through implementation and testing, to the consolidation of the Transnational Monitoring Strategy.



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Methodology for strategy development

01 Conceptual Phase

The **starting point** was the analysis of the needs, requirements, approaches, and methodologies used by different local actors involved in monitoring and conservation activities at the local, regional, and national levels (Deliverable 1.2.1), providing the evidence base for defining priority areas and monitoring needs.

02 Implementation Phase

This phase focused on the development and validation of the transnational coordination and monitoring model (Deliverable 1.2.2) and the monitoring guidelines (Output 1.1) through **three steps**:

- comparative analysis of the **legal frameworks** for sentinel species protection in each participating country;
- development of standardized, scientifically validated **monitoring protocols** for strandings, free-ranging species and sea turtle nesting;
- establishment of local networks and national reference contact points integrated within the wider **transnational network**.

The model was validated through the pilot action (Activity 1.3) by a modular task force involving representatives of the scientific and operational partners across **four hotspots** representing different ecological and socio-economic contexts: Piran Bay (Slovenia), Vrgada Island (Croatia), Boka Kotorska (Montenegro), and Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park (Albania). Capacity-building activities and field testing enabled local partners and stakeholders to apply the protocols, generating feedback on their practical application, strengths and limitations. This **iterative process**, from development to testing and refinement, ensured that the Strategy became a jointly validated framework adaptable to the different financial and technical contexts of the participating countries.

03 Consolidation Phase

The consolidation phase marks the transition from hotspot-level testing to a macro-regional framework. Outcomes from the 4 pilot hotspots are cross-analysed to identify the coordination model elements that proved **effective** across different ecological and socio-economic contexts and those requiring local **adaptation**. The results, based on field data, partner feedback and technical notes, are incorporated into the revision of Output 1.1, Deliverable 1.3.1 and Output 1.2. This process confirms or revises protocols, tools and coordination mechanisms, while identifying additional measures, such as new data fields, adapted reporting formats and targeted training, to ensure the model is fully operational across all countries. Priority is given to solutions addressing **common gaps** across hotspots and to **measures** that can be implemented immediately without additional resources.

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Strategic Objectives and Framework of Activities

01 Harmonization of monitoring methods and comparability of data

The strategy promotes a **common, standardized approach** for data collection, based on the protocols developed in Output 1.1 and Output 1.2 for stranding events, free-ranging sentinel species and sea turtle nesting monitoring. Partners across different institutions and countries typically operate under very different levels of financial, technical and human resources, the approach should be **multi-tiered**: it should define a **core set of essential information** to be collected by all partners, complemented by additional, more advanced data that can be gathered where logistical and technical capacity allows. This **tiered structure** ensures that no partner is excluded from the network for lack of resources, while still enabling more advanced institutions to contribute richer datasets. Operationally, this requires a **shared set** of core variables and reporting formats used consistently across the network, so that **comparability** is guaranteed at transnational level while additional detail remains possible without excluding less-resourced partners.

02 Cooperation among multiple institutions and countries

A transnational strategy should formalize cooperation among the diverse organizations engaged in monitoring and conservation, which should be structured across three levels:

- **Transnational level**: overall coordination, harmonization of standards and protocols, and coherence of the network as a whole, typically entrusted to a designated coordinating partner and supported by a dedicated governance body (e.g., a steering or technical committee) and by regular joint meetings.
- **Regional/national level**: adaptation of the harmonized protocols to each country or region specific regulatory, institutional and logistical context.
- **Local level**: on-the-ground data collection and engagement of local stakeholders (public authorities, protected area managers, NGOs, citizens), coordinated through local reference points and networks.

This **multi-level architecture** keeps the network coherent at macro-regional scale while remaining responsive to local specificities, and is particularly relevant wherever partners operate under different regulatory frameworks or institutional capacities.

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03 Support for shared conservation policies and data used

The value of harmonized monitoring lies ultimately in its use. A transnational strategy should be designed to feed validated, comparable data into **decision-making processes** at all levels, from local management measures to national conservation policies and broader spatial planning processes, such as Maritime Spatial Planning. To this end, the strategy should anticipate the development and use of **tools** able to translate scientific information into forms usable by policy-makers, for instance species distribution models and cause-effect relationship analyses linking human pressures to impacts on target species, so that the evidence generated by the monitoring network can be directly transferred into **management and planning decisions**.

04 Accessibility and long-term continuity of data

Data collected through a monitoring network is of little value if it remains confined to individual partners or is lost once a project or initiative ends. The strategy aims to promote the **integration of monitoring data** into existing national and international databases and reporting systems already in use by partners and institutions, so as to avoid duplication of effort and maximize the reuse of information collected. Data should be structured to be **accessible across the whole partnership**, not only to the partner that originally collected it. Equally important is ensuring that the monitoring network itself continues to operate **beyond the funding period** of any single project: this requires a clear plan and, where possible, formal agreements among participating organizations committing to **continued cross-border cooperation** over time.

05 Capacity building and transferability

Where technical and financial capacities vary significantly among partners, priority should be given to **strengthening the skills** of less-resourced partners and local stakeholders, through targeted training, exchange of expertise and **hands-on capacity-building activities**. Recurring opportunities for exchange – periodic joint meetings, local round tables, training sessions and a network of national reference or focal points – should be formalized, so that partners can continuously share expertise and discuss emerging issues. Beyond the partnership itself, the resulting model and protocols should be designed to be **transferable**: that is, adoptable with limited adaptation by other organizations, networks or regions pursuing similar conservation objectives.

06 Adaptability and continous update

A transnational monitoring strategy should be conceived as a **living framework**, subject to **periodic review** of its protocols and coordination mechanisms based on feedback gathered through implementation. It should remain **open to the inclusion** of new partners, additional monitoring sites, and emerging technologies (e.g., passive acoustic monitoring, eDNA, UAV-based surveys) as these become validated and accessible to partners with different levels of technical and financial capacity.

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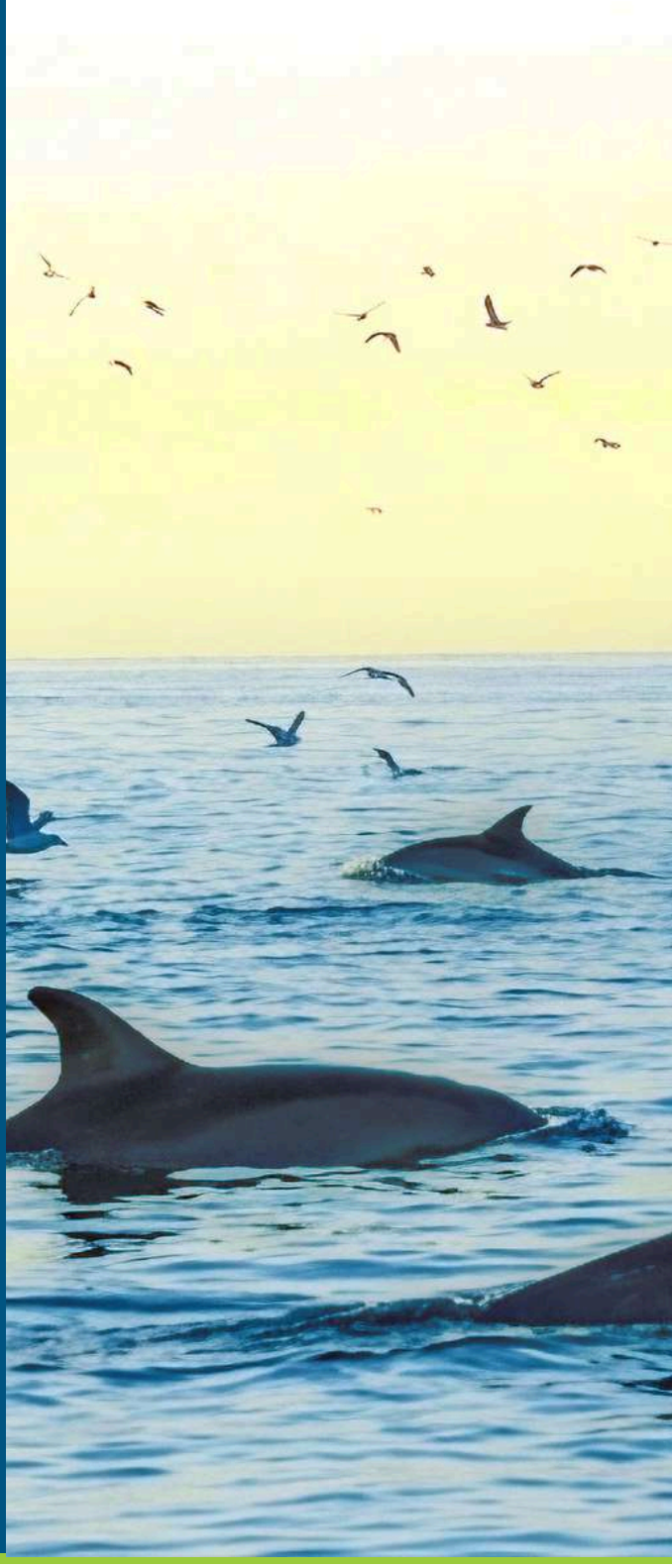
Future Perspectives

The Transnational Monitoring Strategy provides the foundation for long-term, evidence-based decision-making across the Adriatic-Ionian region. **By ensuring that monitoring data on sentinel species are comparable across seven countries, it will strengthen the ability of public authorities, MPA managers and other stakeholders to address shared conservation challenges through a common macro-regional perspective.** Its implementation will also support adaptive management and directly inform Output 3.3 – Action Plan for the Transnational Sustainable Marine Ecosystem Management in the EUSAIR Region, translating the Strategy into concrete conservation and management actions.

Beyond the lifetime of SAMESEA, the Strategy is intended to remain a living framework. The transnational network, formalized through a Programmatic Manifesto and a Memorandum of Understanding and supported by national focal points, will provide the basis for continued cooperation and the progressive involvement of new organizations across the EUSAIR region. Future developments will include the expansion of monitoring to additional hotspots, the integration of new partners and stakeholders, and the adoption of emerging monitoring technologies—including passive acoustic monitoring, eDNA and UAV-based surveys—as they become validated and accessible across different technical and financial contexts.



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