

## **Review of environmental data available to the public on the Web**

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### **Abstract**

The present review was conducted within the framework of the Database and Information System Project. It concerns the screening of data and information available on the Web, the evaluation of their suitability, the accessibility and their possible relevance for the MedSudMed data base. It was, therefore, related only to the research, evaluation, and incorporation of available data from external sources.

The MedSudMed Co-ordination Committee, at its first meeting, stated the responsibility of the Data Base and Information System working group to design and develop the whole suite of software to be considered standard for all the participating project institutions. This is an important task, both because of the importance of the software component and because of the many possible applications in the Project's programme of work.

The overall objective is the establishment of a reliable and permanent regional information system to facilitate the exchange of information and its management, in all project domains, with a view to increasing the data integration, improving technology, as well as the quality of the information systems produced.

Conceptually, the long-term output is a large and multidisciplinary data bank exploited by a Decision Support System and by a GIS. This tool would enable the fisheries institutions of the four participating countries to carry out the continuous dynamic assessment and monitoring of the state of the stocks of fish and other living marine resources, as well as of the ecosystems in the central Mediterranean.

The requirements for processing power and technology, and the expertise, material, tools, resources, etc., are considerable, so many that the decision on the approach to be followed can only be taken after agreement is reached between all the interested participants.

This initiative has three objectives: (1) to present an activity that is being undertaken as a test; (2) to start collaboration with the other project groups, in order to enhance the possibility that the output may become the information vehicle and the processing tool to meet their needs; and (3) to meet with the regional experts to jointly verify the approach and set up a protocol to formalize the methodology.

The objective of this preliminary work was to find a series of web sites that contain environmental and biological data sets and to select those most relevant to the Project's needs. Biological data sets are not easily accessible to the public; therefore, results are focused on environmental data. A series of keywords were defined and helped in finding web sites that could be useful. The data sets are classified in order of importance in terms of available variables, and temporal and spatial resolution.

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Examples of maps that can be drawn using the extracted data are presented. These data come from the comprehensive oceanographic data set (COADS) and World Ocean Atlas–World Ocean Database (WOA–WOD). Differences between the data sets are exposed, as well as the advantages and the limitations of these data.