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Tools for Environmental Governance

Guidelines from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission

These guidelines originate in the framework of the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission (NHM). They aim to ensure continuity and uptake of the Programme's results, particularly the environmental governance tools developed by its projects, and support decision-makers in addressing environmental and climatic challenges.



Key messages for policy & decision makers

These key messages highlight the **strategic value of environmental governance tools** in supporting more effective, inclusive and actionable policies. They synthesise the main insights from the **Natural Heritage Mission**, demonstrating how structured approaches to collaboration, implementation and monitoring can help decision-makers address complex environmental and climate challenges.

Participation must lead to impact

Structured and collaborative governance tools help translate policy requirements into concrete environmental results.

Collaboration enables implementation

Beyond engagement, stakeholders need the capacity and frameworks to act collectively.

Measure what matters

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to assess impact and improve policy design.

Adaptation is place-based

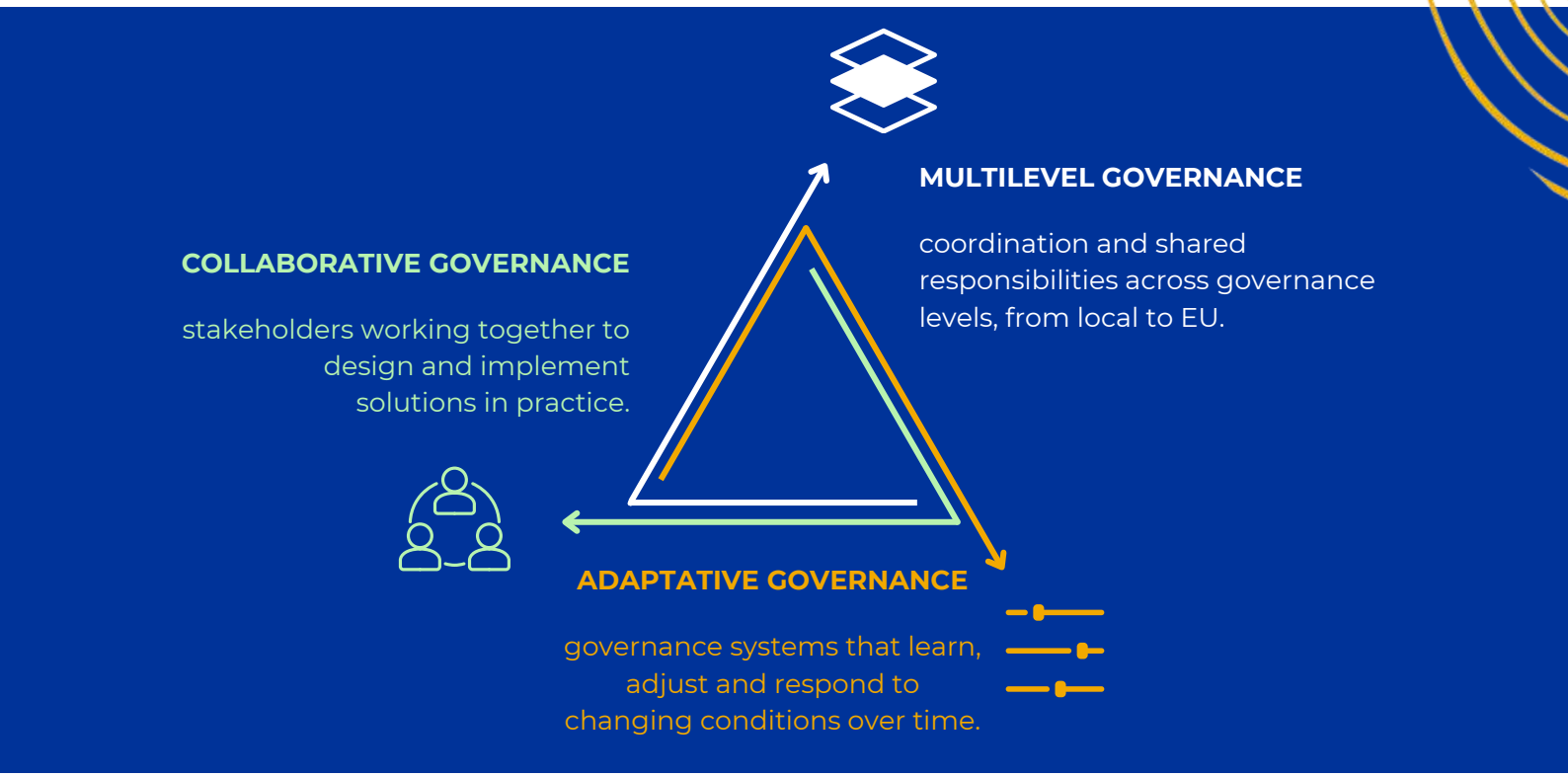
Flexible, tool-based approaches allow governance systems to respond to local contexts and challenges.

Definitions & key concepts

Environmental challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss affect our daily lives and cannot be solved by one authority or sector alone. Across Europe, some policies explicitly call for **coordinated action and collaboration across sectors and levels of government**, as well as for the active involvement of public authorities, stakeholders, and civil society. These policy developments highlight that environmental challenges require **governance arrangements capable of dealing with complexity, uncertainty, and cross-scale interactions**.

Environmental governance tools help make this possible. They provide practical frameworks—rules, processes and methods—to support decision-making, implementation and monitoring.

These tools enable a governance approach that is:



Good environmental governance is also guided by a **set of shared principles** that shape how decisions are taken and implemented while remaining adaptable to different social, cultural and institutional contexts. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified widely recognised principles—developed through international agreements and expert practice—that promote **inclusive, transparent, coordinated and accountable management of natural resources**.

NHM tools for an effective environmental governance

WE GO COOP: mediterranean Community of Practice among actors engaged in Wetland Contracts and Roadshow approach towards citizen engagement.

COASTRUST: coastal stewardship strategy and a set of actions for each target area according to its specificities, needs and environmental objectives.

TREASURE: mini-labs supporting the practical implementation of environmental monitoring activities and the testing of solutions and remediation measures in ports.

Germ of Life: drought risk decision support system developed in a collaborative space.

GreenList4MMPAs: guidelines to apply the IUCN Green List standard in the Mediterranean Marine context and a Mediterranean MPA Expert Assessment Group for the Green List (EAGL).

LocAll4Flood: an Early Warning System and Integrated Multi-stakeholder Governance Model (IMGM) to tackle flash floods.

MIRAMAR: living labs for co-creation and capacity building to managing multiple environmental stressors in marine environments.

INCORE-MED: participatory methods such as Democracy LAB (DLAB) and Scenario Workshop with Adaptation Pathways (SWAP) to tackle multiple coastal management challenges.

The tools presented all focus on engaging societal actors, using different approaches to establish commitments. They are structured around three main typologies, ranging from higher to lower levels of active commitment: 1) environmental contracts and stewardship agreements, 2) citizen and stakeholders participation protocols, 3) guidance and information provision to decision-makers. Together, these tools reflect complementary ways of supporting environmental governance in practice. These typologies are aligned with the governance dimensions introduced earlier, as they collectively operationalise multilevel coordination, adaptive approaches and collaborative action.

1. Environmental contracts and nature stewardship agreements

They are voluntary tools that **formalise commitments** between public authorities, stakeholders and land managers to implement shared environmental actions. They support **coordinated, place-based governance** by clarifying roles, fostering trust and enabling long-term collaboration beyond regulatory requirements.

Why/where are they most effective?

Environmental contracts help **overcome fragmented competences** by enabling coordinated action across actors and governance levels. In parallel, stewardship agreements **support voluntary joint conservation or restoration efforts** beyond legal obligations. Both tools are applicable across rural, coastal, marine and protected areas, promoting integrated approaches that also consider surrounding and connected territories.

Key characteristics

- Formal agreements between **two or more parties**.
- Clearly **defined roles and mechanisms** for implementation and, where relevant, monitoring.
- Stewardship agreements typically involve two parties (e.g. a landowner and an organisation), often with third-party support.
- Environmental contracts involve a broader range of stakeholders, enabling more complex, multi-actor arrangements based on a shared strategy or action plan.

Why promote them

- Move beyond consultation by **enabling concrete commitments**, while fostering trust and shared responsibility among actors.
- Strengthen **local capacity to implement environmental and climate policies** and support long-term, place-based governance.
- Can be **initiated independently** of specific regulations, using general contract legislation across public, private or public domain contexts.



2. Citizen participation protocols

They are governance tools that **organise how stakeholders and the wider public are identified, informed and involved in decision-making processes**. These protocols help ensure that participation is transparent, structured and aligned with the objectives of the process. These tools can also include the methodological framework for monitoring the effectiveness of stakeholders' involvement based on indicators.



Key characteristics

- **Identification and selection of stakeholders** tailored to the objectives of the process.
- Use of **engagement methods** such as workshops, consultations and surveys, with clear procedures for participation and feedback.
- Mechanisms to **document and integrate inputs into decision-making**, including indicator-based assessment systems.
- **Flexible and adaptable** to different policy and planning contexts.
- **Can be operationalised** through methodologies such as SWAP, DLABS, Living Labs, or differentiated levels of stakeholder involvement.

Why promote them

- They **help ensure that engagement is meaningful**, inclusive and fit for purpose.
- **Participation is not reduced to stakeholder lists** or one-off consultations.
- Real and effective engagement requires **structured approaches**.
- They **improve the quality, legitimacy and usability of inputs** in decision-making processes.

3. Information provision tools & guidance to decision makers

They **support public authorities and practitioners by translating technical knowledge**, policy objectives and practical experience into usable formats for decision-making. They help **bridge the gap between knowledge and action**, ensuring that policies are designed, implemented and evaluated more effectively on the ground.

Key characteristics

- Provision of **practical guidelines**, **methodologies and frameworks**, combining scientific, technical and policy knowledge into usable decision-support tools (e.g. checklists, criteria, scenarios) and context-specific recommendations.
- **Collection, processing and dissemination of environmental and climate data**, including early warning systems and monitoring tools.
- Information provision tools focus on **generating and delivering data**, including climate services that translate climate science (data, forecasts and projections) into actionable insights for decision-makers.
- Guidance tools focus on **interpreting this information and translating it into formats that support decision-making**.



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Tools for Environmental Governance

Annex: catalogue from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission cluster's participants

This catalogue was created based on the responses received to a survey sent to cluster participants of the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission (NHM). The objective is to explain the tools proposed by them and link them to make them available to support decision-makers in addressing environmental and climatic challenges.

1. Land stewardship agreements

This tool is not associated to any thematic project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission. It comes from the Land Stewardship Movement in Catalonia.

This is a tool to **promote voluntary agreements between landowners and conservation practitioners**, as well as with other land managers and users, in order to promote nature conservation from a **bottom up perspective**.

Pilot case example

This tool has been used widely in Catalonia with very **diverse purposes related to nature conservation and restoration**. Many other initiatives are to be started in Catalonia where this tool is used to provide certainty and security to private land conservation projects.

Key message

The land stewardship agreements have proven to be **useful tools to engage different stakeholders in nature conservation**, whose associated legal instruments are diverse and flexible enough to **accommodate a wide rage of different needs and requirements** that can emerge in each case.

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More information

FLYER **PRESENTATION** **TOOLKIT**



2. Integrated Multi-stakeholder governance model (IMGM)

This tool was originated by the **LocAll4Flood** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

Flash flood risk in the Mediterranean is not primarily a data or modelling problem; it is consistently exacerbated by a **structural disconnect** between the emergency management mandates of Civil Protection bodies and the long-term spatial and flood-risk planning functions of basin authorities, water agencies, and land-use planners.

The IMGM bridges these two spheres by **fostering coordinated engagement among quadruple helix stakeholders** (i.e., public authorities, the private sector, academia, and civil society) and promoting collaboration across local, regional, and national governance levels through an **integrated approach encompassing prevention, adaptation, and mitigation**. This integrated approach is essential because flash floods cannot be effectively addressed through a single measure or intervention; rather, they require a combination of complementary actions that reduce risk before events occur, enhance preparedness and adaptive capacity, and mitigate impacts during and after flood events. Moreover, the IMGM promotes the **coordinated implementation** of these measures among the different actors involved, ensuring that actions are aligned across sectors and governance levels.

Within this framework, three complementary lines of work were developed and tested: **Early Warning Systems**, **public awareness and education**, and the promotion of **Nature-Based Solutions** for flood risk mitigation.



Pilot case example

The IMGM model was tested across **nine pilot catchments across six Mediterranean regions**, particularly in areas sensitive to flash floods and with a high risk of flooding. The pilot sites were selected to **cover all the topographical areas of land in the Mediterranean** including: urban, rural, industrial, and coastal. This diversity validates the IMGM across different territorial conditions and supports its transferability across the wider Mediterranean basin. Specifically, the pilots were located:

- In **Catalonia** (Spain), there was the Gurri catchment, a mixed urban–rural area covering the Vic Plain.
- In the **Balearic Islands** (Spain), there were two urban streams: Torrent Gros, which ran through the eastern part of the Palma metropolitan area, and Torrent de na Bàrbara, a smaller stream crossing the city of Palma.
- In **Malta**, the sites included Birkirkara–Msida, a highly urban, low-lying catchment in the heart of the Valletta metropolitan area, and Burmarrad, which was more rural but still low-lying.
- In **Bulgaria** (Varna region), there was Dalgopol, a small urban town catchment along the Kamchia River, and the Kamchia–Varna system, a coastal river–estuary system connected to the Black Sea.
- In **Italy**, the pilot was located in Bari (Puglia), a large urban–industrial city crossed by seasonal streams.
- Finally, in **Greece**, the Anthemountas catchment in Central Macedonia was a rural–coastal system, located between mountain ranges and near Thessaloniki.

Key message

Actors from different sectors and governance levels were actively engaged, and in all pilot sites there was strong interest in the tool and in the overall approach. In fact, a specific **Memorandum of Understanding was signed** to continue working within the framework defined by the IMGM working group.

A key achievement of the IMGM was their **direct implementation and testing by local stakeholders**, ensuring that solutions were grounded in real operational needs and could be effectively integrated into local flood-risk management practices.

All partners and stakeholders involved across pilots highlighted the **importance of coordination** and the **need for tailored solutions for flash floods**. These are local events with very specific characteristics, but they represent a shared and widespread problem across Mediterranean regions.

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LOCALL4FLOOD **WHAT WE ACHIEVE**



3. Mini-labs

This tool was originated by the **TREASURE** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

Mini-Labs are **place-based, multi-stakeholder platforms** implemented in all TREASURE partner ports. They bring together public authorities, port operators, research institutions, and technical experts, combining existing facilities with new TREASURE equipment. Each mini-lab functions both as an **operational site** where technical and scientific activities take place, and as a multi-stakeholder working group with **defined roles** spanning port management, environmental monitoring, health and safety, and policy-making.

They enable **joint identification of environmental priorities**, **coordinated data collection**, **water quality monitoring**, **testing of remediation solutions in real operational conditions**, and exchange among institutional, scientific, and operational actors. Designed to be **flexible and transferable**, mini-labs can adapt to different local contexts and support the replication of governance practices across Mediterranean port areas.



Pilot case example

As a pilot case example, we take the experience of partner **Fundación Valenciaport**. The Mini-Lab at the **Port of Gandía (Spain)**, coordinated by Opentop, serves as a **multi-functional hub** for testing environmental remediation techniques focused on water quality improvement. It leverages **infrastructure from key partners**: APV provides operational port access, UPV's coastal research institute (IGIC) leads scientific evaluation, while the City Council of Gandía and GVA ensure regulatory compliance.

Facilities include water testing tanks, quality monitoring stations, and environmental sensors deployed across the port. Operations combine **collaborative testing of innovative technologies** — such as bioremediation and filtration systems — with **real-time data collection** and **post-experiment analysis**, engaging technology providers, researchers, and regulatory authorities jointly.

Key message

Mini-Labs **turn Mediterranean Ports into living laboratories**: by connecting port authorities, researchers, and local institutions within a shared governance framework, they **make environmental remediation a collaborative, testable, and transferable practice across the Mediterranean**.

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More information

WHAT WE DO

RESULTS



4. SWAP

This tool was originated by the **INCORE-MED** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

The SWAP Tool help stakeholders evaluating and comparing alternative management, adaptation, and resilience measures in **coastal and marine environments**. It integrates environmental, social, economic, and governance criteria within a **multi-criteria assessment framework**, enabling users to identify trade-offs, synergies, and potential impacts of different interventions. SWAP supports participatory planning by **incorporating stakeholder preferences and local knowledge** into the evaluation process. The tool provides transparent and evidence-based assessments, helping decision-makers prioritize actions that **maximize sustainability benefits** while **reducing risks and vulnerabilities**. SWAP is applied to **assess climate adaptation** options in the framework of ICZM and MSP and support the development of resilient and sustainable strategies for Mediterranean coastal areas.

Pilot case example

The SWAP tool is applied in the **Catalonian coastal pilot** in Spain. This case focuses on assessing climate-related risks and vulnerabilities affecting coastal and marine ecosystems, local communities, and critical infrastructure. Within this pilot, the SWAP tool is used to support integrated decision-making by **evaluating environmental, social, and economic impacts of different adaptation and resilience measures**. The tool enables stakeholders to compare alternative management options, identify trade-offs and synergies, and prioritize actions that enhance coastal resilience while supporting sustainable development objectives.

The Catalonian pilot demonstrated how SWAP can **facilitate participatory planning processes** and provide evidence-based support for **climate adaptation strategies in complex coastal environments**.



Key message

The SWAP Tool helps decision-makers prioritize resilient and sustainable actions with confidence and transparency, by integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into a single assessment framework.

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More information

WHAT WE DO



5. Wetland Contract

This tool was originated by the **WE GO COOP** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

Wetland Contracts are voluntary, place-based governance tools that support the **integrated conservation, restoration and sustainable management of wetlands** through **participatory and multi-stakeholder processes**. They bring together public authorities, local communities, NGOs, researchers, landowners and economic actors to develop a shared vision, define **common objectives** and implement **coordinated actions**. Rather than being regulatory instruments, they rely on collaboration, negotiation and shared responsibility, strengthening **local ownership** and long-term commitment.

Within the WE GO COOP project, the approach was reinforced through a **Mediterranean Community of Practice** and a collaborative digital platform, fostering capacity building, knowledge exchange, peer learning and the transfer of good practices, while improving the scalability and effectiveness of wetland governance.

Pilot case example

Wetland Contracts are applied in diverse **Mediterranean wetland environments**, including coastal agricultural landscapes, river deltas, lagoons and protected wetland systems. Within WE GO COOP, existing experiences were consolidated through Symposia in the Central Region of Macedonia (Greece), the Agro Pontino coastal area (Italy), and the Andalusia and Valencia regions (Spain), **supporting knowledge exchange and strengthening established governance processes**. New pilot implementations were developed through Roadshows in the Vjosa–Narta Protected Area (Albania), Vransko Jezero Nature Park (Croatia), and the Carvalhal wetlands (Portugal), where activities initiated the co-development of strategies for Wetland Contracts and opened local working processes with stakeholders and institutions.

The transfer process was further extended with the initiation of activities in Morocco and Lebanon, confirming the adaptability of the approach across different ecological, institutional and socio-economic settings in the Mediterranean.

Key message

Wetland Contracts **translate biodiversity, climate and local development goals into collaborative and shared responsibility** among actors, enabling effective wetland restoration across the Mediterranean.

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More information

WE GO COOP | COLLABORATIVE PLATFORM | POLICY PAPER | CASE STUDIES | PROJECTS | ROADSHOWS GUIDELINES | VIRTUAL PLATFORM GUIDELINES | COP MEMBERSHIP FORM | COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MOU



6. Living Labs

This tool was originated by the **MIRAMAR** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

The MIRAMAR Living Labs are **collaborative, stakeholder-driven innovation platforms** established in the project's pilot areas to co-design, test, and prioritize mitigation and restoration **solutions addressing multiple environmental stressors and pollution in the Mediterranean**. Grounded in scientific evidence and local knowledge, the Living Labs bring together local authorities, researchers, NGOs, businesses, community members, youth, and other stakeholders to develop solutions that are technically sound, socially acceptable, and aligned with governance needs.

They promote inclusivity, co-creation, transparency, and long-term ownership through **interactive workshops, evidence-based discussions, and participatory decision-making**, generating locally relevant solutions that support environmental restoration, strengthen stakeholder engagement, and facilitate the replication and uptake of successful practices across the Euro-MED region.

Pilot case example

The MIRAMAR Living Labs will be established across **nine pilot areas** in six Mediterranean countries (Albania, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, and Spain) covering seagrass meadows, wetlands, and habitats of endangered species. These environments face **cumulative pressures** from marine litter, chemical, light and noise pollution, invasive species, and climate change, while monitoring and management often remain fragmented.

In each pilot area, authorities, researchers, NGOs, businesses, youth organisations, and local communities will **combine scientific monitoring data with practical and local knowledge** to identify key pressures and **co-design mitigation and restoration measures**. The proposed measures will be assessed according to their effectiveness, feasibility, and social acceptance, producing prioritised, locally adapted actions that can inform governance and environmental management and be transferred across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Key message

The MIRAMAR Living Labs transform scientific evidence and local knowledge into **practical, stakeholder-driven solutions** for ecosystem restoration, providing a **replicable model** for collaborative environmental governance.

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More information

MIRAMAR WEBSITE





7. Stewardship agreement

This tool was originated by the **Euro-MED Coastrust** project from the Interreg Euro-MED Natural Heritage Mission.

Stewardship Agreement is a voluntary public-private collaboration tool based on **participatory commitments and shared responsibility** involving a broad spectrum of civil society and promote the idea that biodiversity conservation is compatible with productive activities. It **encourages cooperation between landowners and land users** – such as farmers, foresters, shepherds, fishers, tourism operators, or environmental organisations – to support the long-term conservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural landscapes.

Typically lasting around ten years, stewardship agreement **formalises stakeholders' commitments to the implementation, management, and maintenance of the territory**, specifically in natural and rural contexts. It provides an institutional and financial framework that ensures continuity over time, while enabling landowners and users to become active stewards of landscape quality and biodiversity.

Pilot case example

Within the Interreg Euro-MED Coastrust project, stewardship agreement has been applied, for the first time, to **marine and coastal areas** exposed to anthropogenic pressures such as urbanisation, pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change impacts and overfishing. In this context, stewardship agreement supports multi-actor governance engagements **involving stakeholders** operating along the coast and foster the sustainable management of both terrestrial and marine natural resources.

Specifically, Coastrust tested coastal stewardship agreement in **8 Mediterranean contexts**: Circeo National Park in Italy, the Neretva Delta and Valley in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ċirkewwa Marine Park in Malta; Buna/Drini Bay in Albania, Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park in Spain, Municipality of Domus de Marie – South Sardinia in Italy and the Gulf of Patras in Greece.



Key message

Stewardship agreements offer a **practical and highly transferable governance tool** to turn shared responsibility into long-term action, enabling coastal and marine stakeholders to jointly **protect biodiversity while supporting sustainable local activities**.

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EURO-MED COASTRUST WEBSITE



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