1. Country and Sector Background

Several Government policies on the environment, biodiversity and development support the proposed project. The National Strategy for the Protection of the Environment and Sustainable Development defines priority areas and actions to be undertaken; the National Action Plan for the Environment (NEAP) and the National Strategy and Action Plan for Biodiversity (1988) are the most important policy instruments carried out to date. The latter, financially assisted by the GEF (Biodiversity Enabling Activity, through the World Bank) involved participation by universities, research centers, ministries, agencies and major environmental NGOs.

The priorities in the National Strategy for Biodiversity include (a) improving scientific knowledge, (b) preventing further deterioration of genetic capital and biodiversity, (c) improving the protection and management of crucial ecosystems, (d) integrating the protection of biodiversity into sectoral strategies and (e) strengthening institutions and regulations. The Government is aware that to manage biodiversity in an integrated manner, policy and site-specific actions are required. At the policy level, the Government has recently integrated the former Ministry of the Environment into the former Ministry of Agriculture and...
Water Resources. The new amalgamated Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources (MAERH) now is focusing greater institutional attention to integrate water and natural resources management issues in a more efficient and sustainable manner. At the site-specific level, the Government is committed to working closely with communities, with MAERH having a decentralized administrative structure that facilitates the participation of beneficiaries and users in rural areas during the implementation of projects.

This project adopts both a participatory and an integrated sustainable management approach that complements the ongoing Government strategy for efficient and decentralized local investments.

2. Objectives
The overall objective is to contribute to the protection of important Mediterranean and international biodiversity and promote economic development by sustainably managing marine and coastal natural resources. The specific development objectives are to:
(a) develop innovative integrated biodiversity management plans for six representative pilot sites in the Gulf of Gabès and implement them at three of the sites, and
(b) contribute to long-term sustainability through community participation and identification of institutional and technical resources needed to reverse the biodiversity degradation.

3. Rationale for Bank's Involvement
The Bank and GEF add value from their experience in project design and implementation. Further, funding principles of GEF allow the Government to rapidly launch activities to protect biodiversity that might not otherwise be funded as a short-term budget priority. This early funding adds support to the decentralized participatory management plans to protect biodiversity of global value that otherwise would not be part of Government priority activities. At the regional level, value will be added due to GEF funding for sharing of scientific knowledge and promoting exchange with institutions in other countries involved in similar projects with global objectives.

4. Description
The project has four components, estimated at US$9.81 million, of which the GEF will fund US$6.31 million.

Component 1: Institutional strengthening, strategic planning and dissemination (estimated at US$4.03 million). This component includes:

(1) A Project Management Unit (PMU) and Project Operational Unit (POU) staffed by eight full-time civil service professionals, office and other equipment, map printers, digitizing platforms), operating costs and basic field equipment (e.g. boat, vehicles); (2) Quality control and evaluation for project activities, provided by short-term technical assistance (TA) experts; (3) Long-term strategy to protect biodiversity, including a workshop to disseminate project results to scientific/technical groups at the project, national, Mediterranean and international levels. The workshop will incorporate lessons from other GEF projects and plans to replicate project activities; (4) A Geographic Information System (GIS) to serve as a database for the Information Exchange Center located at the POU in the town of Gabès. It will gather technical, scientific and social information on the Gulf of Gabès, create a user-friendly filing (archiving) system and regularly update project activities, as well as coordinate with existing information services (e.g. Observatoires) of Tunisian ministries; (5) Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to review the impact on biodiversity of the mid-to-long-term tourist development plan for the Gulf of Gabès; (6) A strategy to protect biodiversity areas from accidental petroleum and chemical spills, and (7) Terrestrial ecological
inventory of the Gabès Oasis.

**Component 2: Training and capacity Building** (estimated at US$1.35 million). This component aims to strengthen human resources for project management, technical, scientific and public participation skills to improve management for biodiversity. It includes:

(1) Training for full- and part-time project staff and high-level staff on managing marine and coastal biodiversity and developing project management skills (e.g. financial management, procurement, progress reporting, monitoring of key indicators, etc). These activities will combine classroom and on-the-job training to ensure the project is efficiently launched and implemented with adoption of a team approach across the various institutions; (2) A public awareness program for target communities, local stakeholder groups and the general public. It will draw on experience from other ongoing GEF projects in Tunisia; (3) Training and capacity building to help enforce biodiversity protection provisions in marine and coastal regulations. It is targeted at Government agency staff who enforce regulations for fisheries, solid waste, small and large ports, customs, coastal and wetlands areas, international treaties, etc., (4) Socio-economic surveys of target populations and other stakeholder groups, and (5) Preparation of a participatory methodologies for local development committees and other stakeholders to ensure incorporation of participation into biodiversity management.

**Component 3: Baseline marine data acquisition and applied biodiversity monitoring** (estimated at US$1.20 million). This component will acquire and update the technical/scientific data needed for biodiversity management plans, and then monitor key scientific project performance indicators. It includes:

(1) Hydrodynamic and water quality studies focused on the Jerba-Zarzis area; (2) Inventories and monitoring of marine and lagoon fish species of regional and global interest, to assist planning and implementation of the biodiversity management plans; (3) Inventories and monitoring of alien species and their distribution within the Gulf; (4) A regional management strategy to address ballast water disposal and alien species; and (5) Evaluation of biodiversity impacts from fishing fleets and preparation of guidelines recommending changes to fishing practices to ensure biodiversity sustainability.

**Component 4: Participatory biodiversity management plans** (estimated at US$3.23 million). This component will prepare sustainable biodiversity management plans for the six pilot sites and implement them in the three priority sites. All plans will be prepared through a participatory approach. It includes:

(1) Preparation of a general methodology for the participatory biodiversity management plans, consistent with Tunisian laws; (2) Implementing the management plan for the sea grass area located near the Kerkennah Islands, with installation of a anti-trawling structures and artificial reefs; (3) Inventories and mapping of the marine plant cover, including *Posidonia* sea grass beds, to fill the existing data gaps and widen the existing baseline data; (4) Monitoring network for significant sea grass beds; (5) Implementing the management plan for the Gulf of Bou Ghrara, which includes construction of a visitor center; (6) Implementing the plan for the Kneiss Islands, which includes construction of bird observation platforms; (7) Preparing a management plan for the El Bibane lagoon; (8) Preparing the management plan for the Kerkennah Islands, and (9) Preparing the management plan for the Gabès Oasis.

Component 1 - Institutional Strengthening, Strategic Planning and Dissemination
Component 2 - Training and Capacity Building
Component 3 - Baseline Marine Data Acquisition and Applied Biodiversity Monitoring
Component 4 - Participatory Biodiversity Management Plans
5. Financing
Source (Total (US$m))
BORROWER/RECIPIENT ($3.50)
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY ($6.31)
Total Project Cost: $9.81

6. Implementation
The agency selected to implement the project is the Direction general de l’environnement et la qualité de vie (DGEQV), now part of MAERH. DGEQV’s Director General reports to the Secretary of State for the Environment who in turn advises the Minister of MAREH on environmental issues. This choice was based on the leadership that DGEQV provides for biodiversity policy issues, and on their coordination experience gained while leading the project preparation. Three other institutions will implement other components of the project. They are (a) Centre international des technologies de l’environnement (CITET), which will supervise Component 2 of the project involving activities for training and capacity building, (b) Institut nationale des sciences et technologies de la mer (INSTM), which will supervise Component 3, involving baseline marine inventories and applied monitoring studies, and (c) APAL, which will supervise Component 4 involving preparation and implementation of the participatory management plans.

7. Sustainability
Sustainability is fundamental to the project design that uses the existing public service staff and structures, including the PMU and POU, as well as the project partnership arrangements with three Tunisian agencies (CITET, INSTM and APAL). These arrangements assure that the institutional structures will extend well beyond the 5-year project period. In addition, since all key project staff are full-time civil servants, the training, capacity-building and on-the-job experience gained from the project will be sustained over the longer term.

The design of preparing and implementing management plans with community participation is to ensure activities are sustained in a way that relates to the communities’ concerns and carried out with their assistance. For example, the Bou Ghrara site is near a heavily visited tourist zone that is well known nationally and internationally. Here, the project will work with the private sector, NGOs and Government agencies and to identify how the threat of tourism can be transformed into an opportunity for developing and financially supporting the biodiversity management activities to ensure longer term sustainability.

The capacity-building activities are aimed at various levels of staff, from “on-the-ground” field staff to higher level decision-makers responsible for managing and enforcing regulations for the use of and protection of biodiversity resources. This approach, often referred to as ”mainstreaming,” will help individuals become more aware of issues and become more responsible for conserving biodiversity over the long-term. Furthermore their involvement in participation activities will reinforce the learning of these new attitudes.

The scientific monitoring studies for biodiversity indicators are designed to ensure long-term use for application of results obtained during implementation. For example, all monitoring data collected will be stored at the information exchange center in the town of Gabès. The center will offer easy access to the most recent data and will have it available for future use. The goal is to transform the center into a permanent regional data center (observatoire) for the Gulf. Other examples of activities designed for sustainability are (i) preparation of a technical guidebook on sustainable fishing practices, and (ii) a strategy to prevent biodiversity degradation from invasion of alien species from ship ballast water.
Finally a long-term strategy for biodiversity sustainability will be prepared for the Gulf de Gabès region before project closure. The strategy will plan for the longer term horizon of 10-15 years, and identify the institutional mandates, along with the resources required to reach a sustainable level of effort to protect biodiversity resources. The strategy will consider the technical, scientific, human and financial resources required, and identify the most relevant environmental and social issues. This strategy will include a plan for the next 5 year implementation period for the 3 pilot sites for which only management plans were prepared (Kerkennah Islands, Bahiret El Bibane and Gabès Oasis), and also include a plan for replication of the management plans at other 3 pilot sites.

8. Lessons learned from past operations in the country/sector

There two on-going GEF financed projects in Tunisia to protect biodiversity: (i) WB/GEF P048315: Protected Areas Management Project (GEF implementing agency: World Bank), and (ii) Regional MEDWET project: Conservation of Wetlands and Coastal Ecosystems in the Mediterranean Region (GEF implementing agency: UNDP). Both projects are being carried out through the same agencies (DGEQV and APAL), and both offer important lessons on coordinating the efforts of the agencies involved. Feedback from early implementation of these projects has been integrated into project design, as are lessons from Bank efforts in marine and coastal biodiversity (see Assessment of Integrated Coastal Area Management Initiatives in the Mediterranean-1988 to 1996: published by METAP). Once this new project begins, feedback will be shared from the other two projects on common issues such as indicators, community participation, scientific monitoring results, and planning for sustainability.

During the design phase, the project considered the GEF’s post-evaluations on biodiversity projects in Africa along with World Bank evaluations on biodiversity, conservation and eco-tourism. The various lessons on project design have been incorporated: lessons related to stakeholder participation, clarity of objectives and components, degree to which past experience was incorporated, identification of risks, efficiency of implementation, analysis of institutional capacity and use of appropriate indicators. Specifically a new technique to monitor implementation progress is being adopted, as based on international experience. For all the six pilot areas the methodology to be used is based on "Reporting Progress at Protected Area Sites – A Site Level Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool " prepared for the World Bank/World Wildlife Alliance for Forest Conservation and Sustainable Use, May 2003, and "Score Card to Assess Progress in Achieving Management Effectiveness for Marine Protected Areas", published by World Bank, Revised Version-July 2004.

9. Environment Aspects (including any public consultation)

Issues : The project consists mainly of TA activities with only a few small structures to be built at the three priority sites: (i) a visitor reception center in the Gulf of Bou Ghrara area, (ii) observation platforms for the Kneiss Islands, and (iii) anti-trawling and artificial reef structures at the sea grass area near the Kerkennah Islands. The locations and designs for these small structures will be determined as part of the preparation of the final management plans for each pilot site, and so that environmental impacts are avoided.

10. List of factual technical documents:
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Note: This is information on an evolving project. Certain components may not be necessarily included in the final project.