**Progress report**

**Caspian Environmental Information Center – Phase 2**

**Prepared by:**

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**Introduction**

This is a progress report on the activities accomplished as a National Environmental Information Officer under the Consultant contract with Grid Arendal in the framework of “Caspian Environmental Information Center – Phase 2” project.

The report has been prepared to fulfil obligations as described in Annexes of the contract and submitted for consideration of the project manager.

**Project overview and assignment**

In order to assure the functionality and sustainability of Caspian Environmental Information Centre, which was established in 2012, the second phase of CEIC has been initiated. The goal of the CEIC is to function as an information hub, providing access to reliable, high-quality and necessary information for policy and decision makers and, where appropriate, to the public at large. The information provided by the Centre is aligned with the structure of the Unified Reporting Format (URF) of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, and the Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) for the Caspian Sea, feeding into and allowing sound State of the Caspian Sea Environment reporting. The overall objectives of the CEIC are:

• To secure information sharing through legal commitments;

• To support the national reporting to the Tehran Convention on the basis of the Unified Reporting Format;

• To make its operation sustainable by enlarging the network and to strengthen the cooperation and data exchange between the stakeholders in the Caspian Sea region at the national and sub-national levels;

• To work towards the harmonization and standardization of information relevant to the protection of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea and obtained in the context of the EMP.

The executive summary of the implemented activities is given in the following paragraphs of the report.

**Executive summary of activities during the project assignment**

The current activities under the CEIC project seek at improving database and information sharing practices on the Caspian Sea environment in order to better of protecting its environment and biodiversity, as well as enhance awareness of policymakers and civil society through the establishment of a centralized database and information management system – web-based CEIC portal.

A key point for this period of assignment was the identification of enlargement of the network and strengthening the cooperation and data exchange between the stakeholders in the Caspian Sea region at the national level while assisting the national consultant in preparation of the national contribution to the second State of the Environment Report of the Caspian Sea (SoE2 report). During the assignment period, the regular consultations on the national level with the national expert, NLO of the Tehran Convention and other relevant experts to exchange of views and properly implement tasks coming forward from the project.

The consultant on the Caspian Environmental Information Center was paid a country visit to Azerbaijan on 19-23 February 2018. The main objective of the visit was to introducing the Caspian Environmental Information Center to the local information holders and reviewing the files to be uploaded to the portal.

The first day of the visit was dedicated to the identification of the documents and the material to be uploaded to the CEIC portal. The available materials were reviewed and some of relevant material and information were uploaded to the portal. While reviewing the available data special attention was given to the relevancy and actuality of the information in the regional scale. It was helpful in terms of determining the further information to enrich the portal. It is not still clarified which data should be shared for public and which should be limited. This is an open question to be discussed in further steps before concluding the project. Based on the discussions with the CEIC consultant we will strive to upload a maximum of relevant material on the CEIC portal.

The second topic of the discussions was the listing the potential information holders on the Caspian Sea and preparation to the training for the Stakeholders - creation of users accounts. The purpose of the training was to raise awareness between stakeholders and to enlarge network of data contributors. The training workshop was held on 22 February at the premises of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. About 30 representatives participated from 14 organizations, including government, academia, private sector and NGOs.

The general information was presented on the overall objectives of the CEIC 2 project, especially stressing the need for national coordination to reach the objectives of the project. It is also mentioned that in order to activate and further utilize the portal continuous contribution is required from the information holders. The CEIC consultant presented the technicalities to create a user account, upload files, make collections, amend them, share among group members and make public etc.

After the initial presentation on the portal, the question raised for the audience what data they have and might upload to the portal. The active discussion carried out on this topic. To sum up the discussions, the information holders are ready for the cooperation and share the available relevant data on the Caspian Sea, however, most of them are needed an official letter on the appointment of the contact point on CEIC and to upload information on the Caspian Sea. Taking into account the above-mentioned an official letter addressed to the relevant organization for the appointment the contact point and obtaining the relevant information to be uploaded to the CEIC portal. After receiving feedbacks from organizations, the CEIC portal will be further enriched with the relevant documents and materials. Besides the data uploading, the all national information holders, including private sector and academia encouraged to use of the CEIC web portal resources.

During the discussions with the stakeholders, some useful suggestions were made regarding the current CEIC portal for further technical development and optimization of it. It was suggested to divide the information by sectors to make it clear and facilitate the process of searching for the data. The suggestions were separately discussed with the CEIC consultant after the workshop. The main points will be followed up by the CEIC consultant after returning the home.

In order to identify the available remote sensing data on the Caspian Sea and Coastal Areas, a meeting was organized between CEIC consultant and an expert from the Geodesy and Cartography Agency under the MENR. The home task was to gather GIS maps relevant to the needs of the project. As soon as materials received they will upload to the portal.

Meanwhile, the first draft of national contributions to the SoE2 report was developed in accordance with the agreed table of the content and submitted to the project manager. The assistance was made to the National expert in the collection of information for and preparation of 2nd State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report as well as translation of information from the state language to the required languages.

In all stages of implementation of the duties under the project, the regular communications and consultations with experts of Grid-Arendal were ensured.

**Faig Mutallimov 30.04.2018**