



Working for wetlands in the Mediterranean

PROGRESS & CHALLENGES

This MedWet publication is based on the National Reports submitted by 20 Mediterranean countries to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands on the occasion of its 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1–9 June 2015



MedWet

L'initiative pour les zones humides méditerranéennes
The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative
مبادرة المناطق الرطبة المتوسطية



About MedWet

Established in 1991, the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) brings together 26 Mediterranean and peri-Mediterranean countries that are Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971). They constitute the *Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com)*. The Palestinian Authority and a number of intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations and wetland centres are also members of the MedWet/Com.

The MedWet mission is to ensure the effective conservation of the functions and values of wetlands and the sustainable use of their resources and services. To achieve this mission, MedWet promotes and supports local, national and regional actions and collaboration in the Mediterranean region, within the framework of the Ramsar Convention.

MedWet activities are coordinated by a Secretariat hosted since 2014 by the Research Centre for the Conservation of Mediterranean Wetlands of La Tour du Valat in the Camargue, France. The Secretariat is funded by contributions from the 26 MedWet/Com countries and, during the triennium 2014–2017, by grants from the MAVA Foundation and the French Water Agency Rhône Méditerranée Corse.

MedWet works with a large number of partners in the region and participates in the promotion and execution of specific projects to further its mission.

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Members of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com)

Albania, Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, The FYR of Macedonia, Tunisia and Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority.

Barcelona Convention; Bern Convention; European Commission; Ramsar Convention; and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). BirdLife International; International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN); International Water Management Institute (IWMI); Wetlands International; and WWF International. Regional Agency for Environmental Protection in Tuscany (ARPAT), Italy; Greek Biotope Wetland Centre (EKBY), Greece; Institute of Conservation of Nature and Forests (ICNF), Portugal; and Tour du Valat – Research Centre for the Conservation of Mediterranean Wetlands, France. Honorary Members: Dr Luc Hoffmann and Mr Thymio Papayannis.



Table of contents

Foreword	4
Socio-economic indicators in the Mediterranean	6
Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Mediterranean – Progress & plans	8
National Wetland Inventories	28
Assessment of the ecosystem benefits and services of Ramsar Sites	29
Wetlands and poverty alleviation	33
Socio-economic and cultural values of wetlands	34
Wetlands restoration	36
Ramsar Sites in the Mediterranean	38
The challenges	42

Foreword

This is a personal analysis by the MedWet Coordinator of the National Reports submitted by 20 MedWet countries on the occasion of the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1–9 June 2015). Thus, it is not a technical report or a summary of these National Reports, and I take full responsibility both for the way that the information has been interpreted, and for the appreciations I am making and the conclusions and recommendations presented.

20 National Reports on hand

Of the 26 Ramsar Contracting Parties that are members of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com), the following 20 countries (73%) have submitted National Reports in preparation for Ramsar COP12: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. They deserve appreciation for having complied with this requirement as Parties to the Convention.

Six MedWet countries have not submitted their National Reports, in some cases for the second consecutive COP. This is understandable in the case of the Syrian Arab Republic and Libya, given the internal situations of those countries, but it is regrettable that the other Parties have failed to comply with the important Ramsar requirement of submitting a National Report every three years, prior to each ordinary meeting of the COP. National Reports are not a mere formality but an important way to allow the Convention and the Parties to take stock of the progress made in each country and each region, and in the world at large, concerning wetland conservation and wise use, as required by article 6.2.a of the Convention (“The Conference of the Contracting Parties shall be competent: a) to discuss the implementation of this Convention”) and a number of Resolutions of the COP.

It has also to be acknowledged that the National Reports submitted by the 20 MedWet countries vary quite widely in the amount and quality of the information provided. A good number of them are excellent reports, providing a

clear picture of the work undertaken in the last triennium and the progress made. Other National Reports contain practically only “yes” or “no” answers to the questions, and thus they do not help significantly to understand the status of wetlands in their territories.

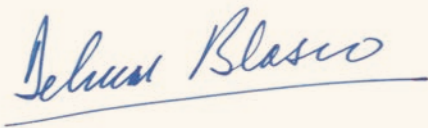
A challenge for the COP and MEAs

The time may have come for the COP to insist on the critical importance of Parties submitting their reports and on the quality required in them. It also may be advisable for the Ramsar Secretariat to provide a tool to allow Parties to prepare the National Reports as an ongoing activity that starts immediately after each COP, so that when the time comes to submit them, they can have a complete and detailed text virtually ready for submission.

Joint reporting with the other biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) continues to be a pending challenge that the Liaison Group of these Conventions has been discussing for many years and should seriously work towards resolving in the near future.

MedWet close to its countries partners

My general conclusion is that in spite of the 'crisis' that has affected the world economy and the political upheavals in a number of MedWet countries during the past triennium, dedicated officials in the national administrations and many people in the civil society organizations have ensured that wetlands have received a degree of positive attention. Let's hope that within the framework of the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals and of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan, significant progress will be made before Ramsar COPI3 in 2018. MedWet is committed to serving as a useful tool in that endeavour.



Delmar Alberto Blasco Bellomaria
MedWet Coordinator



Socio-economic indicators in the Mediterranean

The GDP is the value of all final goods and services produced within a nation in a given year, converted at market exchange rates to current U.S. dollars, divided by the average (or mid-year) population for the same year.

The figures presented here do not take into account differences in the cost of living in different countries, and the results can vary greatly from one year to another based on fluctuations in the exchange rates of the country's currency. Such fluctuations may change a country's ranking from one year to the next, even though they often make little or no difference to the standard of living of its population.

























Therefore these figures should be used with caution. GDP per capita is often considered an indicator of a country's standard of living, but this can be problematic because GDP per capita is not a measure of personal income.

List of MedWet countries by their gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at nominal values

GDP rank	Country	US\$
1	 Monaco	173,377
24	 France	42,339
29	 Israel	37,704
30	 Italy	35,243
—	 European Union	32,507
31	 Spain	28,944
34	 Cyprus	25,197
37	 Slovenia	23,161
39	 Malta	22,242
41	 Greece	21,722
42	 Portugal	21,429
60	 Croatia	13,490
63	 Libya	12,029
66	 Turkey	10,972
—	 World	10,553
73	 Lebanon	9,793
82	 Bulgaria	7,543
85	 Montenegro	7,109
86	 Serbia	6,313
93	 Algeria	5,325
100	 The FYR of Macedonia	5,110
102	 Bosnia and Herzegovina	4,662
104	 Jordan	4,618
105	 Tunisia	4,263
109	 Albania	4,066
111	 Egypt	3,110
127	 Morocco	2,952
130	 Palestine, State of	2,908
147	 Syrian Arab Republic	1,606
193	 Poorest country in the world	229

Source: United Nations

List of MedWet countries by their human development index (HDI) and its components

HDI rank	Country	Human Development Index (HDI) Value, 2013	Life expectancy at birth (years), 2013	Mean years of schooling (years), 2012	Expected years of schooling (years), 2012	Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2011 PPP \$), 2013	Human Development Index (HDI) Value, 2012	Change in rank, 2012–2013
Very high human development								
19	 Israel	0.888	81.8	12.5	15.7	29,966	0.886	0
20	 France	0.884	81.8	11.1	16.0	36,629	0.884	0
25	 Slovenia	0.874	79.6	11.9	16.8	26,809	0.874	0
26	 Italy	0.872	82.4	10.1	16.3	32,669	0.872	0
27	 Spain	0.869	82.1	9.6	17.1	30,561	0.869	0
29	 Greece	0.853	80.8	10.2	16.5	24,658	0.854	0
32	 Cyprus	0.845	79.8	11.6	14.0	26,771	0.848	0
39	 Malta	0.829	79.8	9.9	14.5	27,022	0.827	0
47	 Croatia	0.812	77.0	11.0	14.5	19,025	0.812	0
51	 Montenegro	0.789	74.8	10.5	15.2	14,710	0.787	1
55	 Libya	0.784	75.3	7.5	16.1	21,666	0.789	-5
58	 Bulgaria	0.777	73.5	10.6	14.3	15,402	0.776	0
65	 Lebanon	0.765	80.0	7.9	13.2	16,263	0.764	0
77	 Jordan	0.745	73.9	9.9	13.3	11,337	0.744	0
77	 Serbia	0.745	74.1	9.5	13.6	11,301	0.743	1
84	 The FYR of Macedonia	0.732	75.2	8.2	13.3	11,745	0.730	1
86	 Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.731	76.4	8.3	13.6	9,431	0.729	0
90	 Tunisia	0.721	75.9	6.5	14.6	10,440	0.719	0
93	 Algeria	0.717	71.0	7.6	14.0	12,555	0.715	0
95	 Albania	0.716	77.4	9.3	10.8	9,225	0.714	2
Medium human development								
107	 Palestine, State of	0.686	73.2	8.9	13.2	5,168	0.683	0
110	 Egypt	0.682	71.2	6.4	13.0	10,400	0.681	-2
118	 Syrian Arab Republic	0.658	74.6	6.6	12.0	5,771	0.662	-4
129	 Morocco	0.617	70.9	4.4	11.6	6,905	0.614	2
Low human development—No MedWet country in this group								

Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the Mediterranean

Progress & plans

In the last triennium, progress has been made in practically all Mediterranean countries in the area of wetland conservation; in some countries more than in others, of course, but overall we can say that yes: progress has been made.

And this positive fact has to be valued against a socio-economic, political and geopolitical context that has not been nearly so positive.

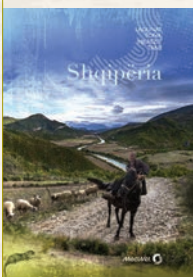
Socio-economic indicators in a considerable part of the region, including in the richest countries, have continued to be affected by the crisis that has affected most of the world since 2007, and in some cases they have deteriorated further. A number of countries in the region have also gone through periods of social and political turmoil that in the majority of cases have not brought about an improvement in effective governance and socio-economic indicators for the benefit of the majority of the populations.

Two MedWet countries, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, in particular the latter, have been involved in tragic internal conflicts, and the Middle East has not seen improvements in its now chronic situation of conflict.

In the European Union, in member countries and countries preparing for EU accession, wetlands are benefiting from the legal requirement to transcribe into the national legislation and apply the EU Directives, in particular the Water Framework Directive but also the Habitats and Birds Directives, the Floods Directive, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The rest of countries are not subjected to any supranational legislation of compulsory application (the Ramsar Convention and the other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are, in practice, 'soft law'), and this fact is reflected in the way that wetlands are considered in the national planning systems and legislations, and in the way that they are managed in practice.

Thus, against this background, we can be proud that, overall, progress has been made in the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands, in most cases thanks to the dedication and hard work of a handful of individuals – in many cases of one single person – in national and regional or local administrations, and to the efforts and commitment of civil society organizations and local communities.





Shqipëria (Albania)

A new Ramsar Site (RS), *Prespa Lakes*, has been added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance; three management plans for RS have been developed; and the most important wetlands have been declared as Important Bird Areas (IBAs), “which ensures a legal protection”.

PLANS: Fundraising, law enforcement, capacity building, and awareness raising.



الجزائر (Algeria)

Legal protection has been given to some wetlands (Executive Decree n° 13-375 of 9 November 2013); a management plan for one RS has been developed; a national bird watchers network has been established by ministerial decision; progress has been made with the wetlands inventory and, at the time of writing, the National Wetland Strategy is being finalized and hopefully will be adopted before Ramsar COP12. The Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire (SNAT) (National Scheme for Land Use Planning) was adopted in 2010, translating the political will of ensuring, towards 2030, and within the framework of sustainable development, the balance, the equity and the attractiveness of the territory in all its components.

“It will be important to value the ecosystem services that wetlands could provide in urban areas by creating an urban micro climate and also in relation to flood control.”

National Report, Algeria

PLANS: Completion and implementation of management plans for RSs; 17 new RS to be added to the Ramsar List; updating of the wetland inventory; work on legislative and regulatory aspects and completion of the National Wetland Strategy.

The visuals are representing the posters of the exhibition ‘Our wetlands, Our people’ created by MedWet, the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, for the Ramsar COP 12, June 2015.



Восна і Hercegovina Босна и Херцеговина

(Bosnia & Herzegovina)

Transboundary cooperation has been strengthened in relation to the Neretva - Trebišnjica river basin and related wetland projects implemented. A management plan for a RS was developed and research and monitoring was conducted in RSs. Public awareness about wetlands has been improved.

PLANS: More awareness raising and improved management of RSs and other wetlands; strategic networking and promotion of cooperation at the regional level.



България (Bulgaria)

A transboundary RS has been designated with Romania in the Lower Danube Green Corridor; a significant extension of the area of two RSs on the Danube River has been approved; the National Wetlands Plan 2003–2022 for the conservation of the most important wetlands was approved and, very importantly, additional administrative capacity and financial resources dedicated to wetland conservation, maintenance and restoration has been created, with national and EU resources.

PLANS: Limitation of the unfavorable anthropogenic factors that affect wetlands as ecosystems; wise use of the country's wetlands in relation to the long-term protection of their ecosystem services and the related benefits for the public. The maintenance of the wetland ecosystem functions through sustainable utilization of their resources, contributing to the quality of life of the local communities and their livelihood, as an important approach for

“The river basin management plans include maintenance and restoration activities, depending on the conservation status of habitats and species subject to conservation in the protected areas and Ramsar Sites under the EU Habitats Directive and Birds Directive.”

National Report, Bulgaria

limitation of and adaptation to global climate change. Restoration of wetlands that have been disturbed as a result of various anthropogenic impacts, but which have a restoration potential and/or are an important habitat for rare and endangered species. Restoration and maintenance of the water regime, which is often related to the design and construction of hydro technical facilities. Popularization of the social, economic and ecological benefits of wetlands through various forms of ecological education, as well as through demonstrations of mechanisms for sustainable use of natural resources.



Hrvatska (Croatia)

A new RS, *Vransko jezero Nature Park*, was added to the Ramsar List and a new transboundary Biosphere Reserve with Hungary was declared. All RS were included in the Natura 2000 network, providing protection also to those which are not protected areas under local or national legislation.

PLANS: Extension of the transboundary Biosphere Reserve (with Austria, Serbia and Slovenia); establishment of a National Wetlands Committee; and promotion of strategic networking and cooperation at the national, regional and international level.



Κυπρος Kibris (Cyprus)

Work was carried out to increase awareness about wetland conservation, and the Party's only RS was included in the Nature 2000 network.

PLANS: Review the management plan of the RS and finalize the wetland inventory.



FACTS & FIGURES

The massive seasonal influx of tourists to the Mediterranean, **275 million** international tourists per year, is a very large consumer of living space and resources.



مصر

(Egypt)

An action plan for migratory birds was completed and funding for implementation secured. Efforts were made to mainstream wetland issues into tourism and renewable energy development. A framework on the green economy strategy was prepared and sent to the Minister of Planning for consideration; it is based on the outcomes of Rio+20 and the proposed Sustainable Development Goals in which the issues of poverty, water, energy, biodiversity, agriculture, urbanization, etc., are being considered in the national sustainable development strategy. Based on that, all biodiversity-related Conventions are being considered in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which will then be incorporated in the development sectors.

PLANS: Complete the updating of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan taking into consideration the CBD, Ramsar, CITES and CMS strategic plans; secure more funding for wetland management through innovative

“Threats facing the Convention implementation at the national level during the current political instability in the region are beyond the capabilities and resources of the National Administrative Authorities. We need more partners to solve the current situation of wetlands.”

National Report, Egypt

financial mechanisms; improve effective management of protected areas, including wetlands of international importance; implement the framework of the green economy in wetlands; continue biodiversity monitoring and assessment of wetlands, based on the conceptual framework of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).



France

“For the Parties to the Bern Convention and to the Regional Seas Conventions, it is important to share informations on the protected area networks established according to the different treaties: Emerald Network (Bern), Ramsar List, Specially Protected Areas (Regional Seas).”

National Report, France

The first map of potential wetland areas was published at the scale 1/100,000, and a national wetland observatory was established; the second and third Wetland Action Plans were evaluated and the 4th National Action Plan launched. Remarkably, some degree of progress was made between the wetland conservation and the agriculture sectors.

PLANS: Implement the 4th National Wetland Action Plan; relaunch the MedWet Initiative; reinforce knowledge about the services provided by wetlands; develop concrete collaborations between the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and Ramsar to support projects in Africa; and designate new RSs for the Ramsar List.



ישראל (Israel)

There was a great increase in natural freshwater returned to be used by wetlands that in the past had been captured for other uses, from a total of about 35 million cubic meters in 2012 to almost 90 million in 2014. The amount of water supplied artificially to support wetlands was also increased greatly, from a total of 10 million cubic meters in 2012 to a total of 31 million in 2014. There was significant improvement in the removal of contaminants and pollutants from wetlands from 115 pollution point sources in 2009 to 80 in 2013. There was also a significant increase in activities for the rehabilitation and restoration of wetland habitats, in physical, hydrological and biological terms. And there was a significant increase in activities in wetlands to control and remove invasive plants and over-abundant plants that negatively effect their biodiversity.



Italia (Italy)

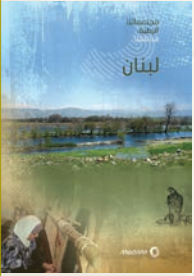
PLANS: Improve the water quality of wetlands and increase the environmental flows reaching them; improve the habitat structure through restoration and rehabilitation of wetlands and the habitat function (e.g., by controlling invasive plant species); promote management aimed at improving the conservation status of Red List wetland plant species.

The National Biodiversity Strategy was approved in 2010, which includes wetland-related issues, and progress has been made in wetland inventory. The Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) continued to report on the status, values, indicators and best practices regarding wetlands, and the RSs were considered as pilot areas for the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides.

PLANS: Approve management plans; evaluate the wetland ecosystem services of wetlands; promote the wise use of wetland resources; and assess the effectiveness of management plans.

FACTS & FIGURES

Agriculture is the biggest consumer of freshwater at **64%** of the total freshwater consumption, followed by industry and energy production at **22%** and domestic consumption at **14%**.



لبنان (Lebanon)

Progress was made with the integration of wetland issues into the National Water Sector Strategy and River Basin Management Plans, as well as with raising public awareness about wetlands and their important role in the sustainable development of local communities. Wetland matters were included in the educational curricula for environmental geosciences, watershed management, and IWRM/ICZM courses in two universities. There was participation in training opportunities to learn and apply new techniques in spatial analysis related to the mapping and management of wetlands. The first step in linking the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Lebanon with other policies and strategies has started with the implementation of a water policy/strategy through the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the National Water Sector Strategy, which is being reviewed in detail by a group of experts from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Energy and Water. In addition, all the other policies and strategies will be linked to the Ramsar Convention through a planned program targeting each of them in detail.

PLANS: Establishing a National Wetland Committee and a related research unit in cooperation with other government agencies, universities and research institutes; creating a complete geodatabase and dynamic maps for all the existing sites and their integration into a GIS-based system; and elaborating the national wetland inventory and designating six new RSs.

“We need more basic and advanced training and workshops which allow more interaction between specialists and national focal points, regionally and internationally.”

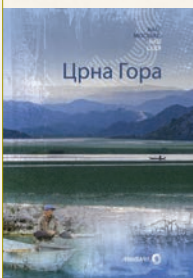
National Report, Lebanon



Monaco

Observation of numerous bird species, such as *Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii* and *Thalasseus sandvicensis*; an increase in the population of the fan mussel; the conservation of *Posidonia*; and the maintenance of the high quality of sea waters.

PLANS: Improve the coordination between governmental and NGO actions; prevent human-induced impacts; prepare an air quality management plan; and promote the nesting of waterbirds.



Црна Гора (Montenegro)

A new RS, *Tivatska solila*, was added to the Ramsar List and progress was reported on nature conservation issues in general (though not specifically related to the implementation of the Ramsar Convention). The Convention is one of the mechanisms for implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development in the field of biodiversity. The implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy will improve management policy and incorporate conservation issues into water management.

PLANS: Establish monitoring measures in wetland sites; increase regional cooperation; and designate new RSs.

FACTS & FIGURES

On average,
50 %
of the exploitable,
renewable water
resources are used
every year in the
Mediterranean.





المغرب (Morocco)

The preparation of the National Water Plan should have significant importance for wetlands. The inventory of Moroccan wetlands included some 300 sites as well as an information system for the waterbird census in the Maghreb countries. Important progress was made in the area of environmental legislation, including that related to protected areas, which should allow the provision of legal protection to wetland areas. The preparation of a National Strategy for the Environment and Sustainable Development and the adoption of an integrated system for the sustainable management of the environment (SPDE) were important milestones in the area of regulations.

PLANS: Have an inventory and monitoring programme of wetland sites through an Internet-based information system, regularly updated; have the National Strategy for Wetlands Conservation validated by all concerned stakeholders and develop a National Wetland Action Plan; encourage the adoption of technical, legislative and regulatory tools to ensure the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands; implement the management plans already adopted for some wetlands and develop new management plans for priority sites, in particular those designated as RSs; reinforce the communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities in relation to wetlands.

“A sustained international cooperation could help to improve the implementation of the Ramsar Convention through information exchanges, execution of pilot projects and the provision of experts to Parties in the field of sustainable management of wetlands.”

National Report, Morocco



Portugal

Three new Ramsar Sites were designated (Laggon of Pateira de Fermentelos and Valleys of rivers Águeda and Cértima); an Action Plan 2012–2016 was adopted to recover the *critically endangered* endemic species *Saramugo Anaecypris hispanica*; a large visitors centre was open in the Tejo river estuary; and there was a decrease of the pressure to build new tourist resorts and other infrastructures affecting Ramsar Sites, partly because of the economic crisis that has affected the country.

PLANS: Finalization of management plans for all Ramsar sites and improving the management capacity, including co-management with NGOs and local authorities; effective functioning of the National Wetlands Committee; preparing a manual for the effective implementation of the Convention in the country; and providing legal protection to all Ramsar Sites.

“Ramsar information has been scarce and there is a need to inform and make decision makers more aware of the implementation of the Convention. The Secretariat should promote more awareness, information and training addressed to national institutions.”

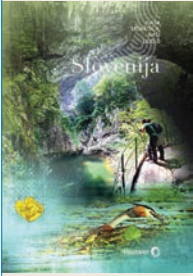
National Report, Portugal



Србија (Serbia)

Work was carried out towards the designation of a new RS, *Djerdap*, and protected areas were declared in two saline areas. Projects were promoted in two RSs and plans launched to proceed with a national wetland inventory.

PLANS: Improving the wise use management and protection of RSs and other wetlands; designating new RSs; establishing the National Wetlands Committee.



Slovenija

(Slovenia)

A number of projects were successfully implemented in the areas of awareness raising, management, conservation and restoration of wetland sites. The 2nd Management Plan for the Škocjan Caves Regional Park and RS was adopted. There was active cooperation between nature conservation and water management authorities in the preparation of the water management plans (NUV) and programme of water management measures. Transboundary cooperation and exchange of experiences were strengthened.

PLANS: Designating a new RS and adopting and implementing management plans for the existing ones; reorganizing the National Wetlands Committee; further integrating wetland management into river basin plans (NUV) and using the EU Cohesion Funds for the implementation of appropriate measures; and implementating measures for the conservation and wise use of wetlands through the Natura 2000 guidelines.

“In Europe, the Water Framework Directive provides the framework for including wetland issues into water management planning and implementation. Additionally, common projects and activities provide for good cooperation between water, biodiversity, wetland conservation and wise use. Working with other sectors and policies is difficult but not impossible since there are some examples of good cooperation with rural development, tourism and sustainable development.”

National Report, Slovenia



National Wetland Policies and national legislation

In the 20 National Reports from MedWet countries:

- **10 countries have indicated that they have a National Wetland Strategy**
- **3 countries are preparing one**
- **6 countries do not have one.**

Note: no response from one country.

It should be noted, though, that when providing details about the “National Wetland Strategy” some countries have considered that they have one because wetland issues are included in national instruments such as the biodiversity strategies or sustainable development strategies; it is not clear, therefore, how many MedWet countries have a specific national strategy devoted to wetlands. And in the case of countries that have an *specific* strategy, no clear data is available concerning the actual implementation of the document.

Concerning national legislation affecting wetlands, six countries have indicated that changes have been introduced in the corps of national legislation in favor of the conservation of wetlands, and two countries indicated that such changes are in preparation.

“In particular, recommendations for the implementation of the Ramsar commitments are set out in the Legislative Decree (Official Gazette n. 35, 22/01/2014) for the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides, according to UE Directive 2009/128/CE.” National Report, Italy



España

(Spain)

Spain submitted a National Report based on the inputs provided by the country's 17 Autonomous Regions, which have the actual responsibility for wetland conservation, with the national government fulfilling only a coordinating role through the National Wetlands Committee. Important progress was made in water management issues at the basin level (a central government responsibility) with effects on wetland issues. A Strategic Plan on the Natural Patrimony and Biodiversity 2011–2017 was adopted. Spain is particularly proud of being the country with the third largest number of Wetlands of International Importance in the world: 74. The 17 Autonomous Governments all reported significant progress in wetland-related issues.

“It will be important to reinforce the international programmes for the conservation and wise use of Mediterranean wetlands, and more specifically the MedWet Initiative, taking into account the threats affecting these ecosystems due to the current processes of global climate change.”

National Report, Spain, Regional Government of the Junta de Andalucía

PLANS: Complete the national wetland inventory and make progress in updating the Ramsar Information Sheets of RSs; encourage the Autonomous Regions to identify the rest of the wetlands in their territories that could be designated as RSs; reinforce Spain's presence in regional and international cooperation related to wetlands.



تونس

(Tunisia)

The most significant development was the designation of 20 new RSs. Significant efforts were made to protect wetlands during the period of political instability that followed the revolution. A National Wetlands Committee was established and better visibility of the Ramsar Convention at the country level has been achieved.

PLANS: Prepare a National Wetlands Strategy and management plans for priority RSs; undertake fundraising for the implementation of management plans and the development of local communities; increase public awareness efforts.

“The wetland management plans have to be about participative and integrated management.”

National Report, Tunisia



Türkiye (Turkey)

Progress was reported in legislation and strategic issues but with no specific details provided. The Regulation on Conservation of Wetlands was revised in 2014. All stakeholders, including farmer and fisherman associations, relevant institutions, local universities and local NGOs are involved in the management planning processes related to wetlands. National and local wetlands committees meet regularly and participate in decision making and monitoring.

FACTS & FIGURES

Mangroves and coastal wetlands annually sequester carbon at a rate **2 to 4** greater than mature tropical forests and store **3 to 5** times more carbon per equivalent area than tropical forests.



The conservation status of wetlands

In the 20 MedWet countries National Reports analysed, it is indicated that:

In wetlands that are Ramsar Sites, their conservation status:

- **has improved** in 5 countries;
- **has been maintained** in 14 countries.

And the conservation status of wetlands in general:

- **has not changed** in 9 countries
- **has improved** in 4 countries
- **has deteriorated** in 5 countries.

Note: one country did not respond the first question and two did not respond the second question.





MedWet

Progress & plans

The most significant achievement of MedWet during the last triennium was the holding of the *International Symposium on Water and Wetlands in the Mediterranean – From Grado to Agadir: The next 20 years*, in Agadir, Morocco, on 6–8 February 2012, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the wetland symposium in Grado, Italy, in 1991 which launched the MedWet Initiative. The list of *Agadir Commitments* was one of the major outputs. The programmes and projects inscribed in that list make up a concrete contribution to wetland conservation and wise use in the Mediterranean Basin, with the key objective of creating synergies. The *Agadir Commitments* are also a contribution to the Changwon Declaration and the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009–2015, adopted by Ramsar COP10 (Changwon, Republic of Korea) in 2008.

MedWet affected by the crisis

In 2013, the austerity measures imposed upon Greece, the host country of the MedWet Secretariat since 2002,

affected the ability of that country to continue funding the MedWet Secretariat. Thus, at the invitation of the French Government, the Secretariat moved to France in 2014, with a generous bridge grant from the MAVA Foundation and the French Water Agency Rhône Méditerranée Corse. The private Tour du Valat Research Centre for the Conservation of Mediterranean Wetlands, located in the Camargue (France's first Ramsar Site) offered to rent space for MedWet within its premises.

The new MedWet Secretariat is firmly established and has been operating effectively since the last quarter of 2014. Significant progress has been made in re-establishing partnerships, with MedWet already involved, with different degrees of responsibility, in some 15 regional projects, and an ambitious work plan has been prepared for 2015.

A significant initiative

In particular, the Secretariat has been working on a Mediterranean Wetlands Action Plan 2016–2030 to

coincide with the period of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be approved by the UN General Assembly at the Special Session to be held on 25–27 September 2015.

If maintained, the draft SDG 15.1 reads:

“by 2020 ensure conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems, *in particular wetlands, mountains and drylands*, in line with international agreements.”

The first six years of the proposed MedWet Action Plan should be devoted to the implementation in the Mediterranean Basin of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016–2021 to be adopted by Ramsar COP12.

These plans and a number of other important changes in the modus operandi of MedWet should be considered and approved by the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee at its 12th meeting, planned for the last quarter of 2015.



National Wetland Inventories

Fourteen countries, out of the 20 reporting, indicated that they have a national wetland inventory; **four countries** indicated that there is such an inventory in progress; and **two countries** indicated that they do not have one.

Nevertheless, the additional information provided in their responses shows that in practically no MedWet country is the national inventory complete and satisfactory, in the sense of being a useful instrument for planning wetland conservation and wise use.

MedWet continues working on inventory

Since its inception, MedWet has done a considerable amount of work on wetlands inventory and has developed a MedWet methodology for this. But new technologies, such as remote sensing, have emerged since then and the situation – and expectations – have changed over time. Thus, the MedWet Secretariat has established a Working Group on National Wetland Inventories with experts from different countries, which, with the assistance of a consultant expert in remote sensing, will have the following tasks:

- 1 To gather all information and data regarding inventories of wetlands in each MedWet country (existence and status of wetland inventories, data availability and format, etc.);
- 2 To organise and build a dataset on wetland inventories in all MedWet countries;
- 3 To analyse the dataset and characterize the situation of each MedWet country in relation to wetland inventory;
- 4 To propose solutions to harmonize, as far as possible, the dataset at a Pan-Mediterranean scale;
- 5 To establish the “state of the art” concerning tools for undertaking a wetland inventory;
- 6 To propose adapted solutions to improving and to finalizing wetland inventories in each MedWet country; and
- 7 To prepare project proposals aimed at providing assistance for improving and finalizing the wetland inventories, if possible, in all MedWet countries and the territory of the Palestinian Authority, by the end of 2017.

Assessment of the ecosystem benefits and services of Ramsar Sites

The responses in this section of the National Reports were as follows:

- **Five countries** have carried out assessments of the ecosystem benefits and services of Ramsar Sites;
- **Eight countries** have partially done so;
- **Three countries** are planning assessments; and
- **Four countries** have not carried them out.

Egypt: “An assessment has been conducted for the ecosystem benefits/services provided by Ramsar Sites and other wetlands. At Burullus Lake, fish catch from about 300 km² is 60,000 tons of fish whereas fish from aquaculture facilities around the lake in an area of 120 km² is 146,000 tons of fishes. Thus, fish production is estimated annually to be about 300 million US dollars. The potential and actual economic uses of plants were also assessed, based on field observation, information collected from local inhabitants and literature review. The economic uses are classified into major categories: grazing, fuel, medicinal uses,

human food, timber and other uses.” More details in NR, response to question 1.4.1.

Portugal: “Some new assessments of ecosystems services have been carried out at the Tejo river estuary by the Technical University and in the Arrábida coast by the University of Lisbon.”

Slovenia: “In accordance with the EU Flood Directive, Slovenia will establish flood risk management plans focused on prevention, protection and preparedness by 2015. The focus will also be on retention areas management.”

Spain: “The University of Alcalá, together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment, carried out the project ‘Valuation of the Natural Assets in Spain (VANE)’, with the main aim of facilitating the identification and economic valuation of the functions and environmental services in the Spanish territory. With this aim, the VANE project has focused on the identification of natural assets

of Spain and the establishment of physical models for the attribution of an economic value, and it has elaborated a territorial information system of the natural capital, allowing the cartographic presentation of this information and of the results generated.”

Ecosystem services

Because of the critical importance of the issues related to ecosystem services, the following information from the report of the European Environment Agency (EEA) entitled *The European Environment – State and Outlook 2015* is reproduced here.

Ecosystem services are the direct and indirect contributions of ecosystems to human well-being. They support directly or indirectly our survival and quality of life. According to the study *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)*, ecosystem services can be categorized into four main types:

Provisioning services are the products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fresh water, wood, fiber, genetic resources and medicines.

Regulating services are defined as the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes such as climate regulation, natural hazard regulation, water purification and waste management, pollination or pest control.

Habitat services highlight the importance of ecosystems to provide habitat for migratory species and to maintain the viability of gene-pools.

Cultural services include non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems such as spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.

Some examples of key services provided by ecosystems are:

Climate regulation is one of the most important ecosystem services both globally and on a European scale. European ecosystems play a major role in climate regulation, since Europe's terrestrial ecosystems represent a net carbon sink of some 7–12% of the 1995 human-generated emissions of carbon. Peat soils contain the largest single store of carbon and Europe has large areas in its boreal and cool temperate zones. However, the climate regulating function of peatlands depends on land use and intensification (such as drainage and conversion

to agriculture) and is likely to have profound impacts on the soil capacity to store carbon and on carbon emissions (great quantities of carbon are being emitted from drained peatlands).

Water purification by ecosystems has a high importance for Europe, because of the heavy pressure on water from a relatively densely populated region. Both vegetation and soil organisms have profound impacts on water movements: vegetation is a major factor in controlling floods, water flows and quality; vegetation cover in upstream watersheds can affect quantity, quality





and variability of water supply; soil micro-organisms are important in water purification; and soil invertebrates influence soil structure, decreasing surface runoff. Forests, wetlands and protected areas with dedicated management actions often provide clean water at a much lower cost than man-made substitutes like water treatment plants.

Pests and diseases are regulated in ecosystems through the actions of predators and parasites as well as by the defense mechanisms of their prey. One example of these regulating services is provided by insectivorous birds in farms that use most of their land for agriculture.

ECOSYSTEMS SERVICES		Agro ecosystems	Forests	Grasslands	Heath and scrubs	Wetlands	Lakes and rivers
Provisioning 	Crops/timber	↑	↑			↓	
	Livestock	↓	=	=	=	↓	
	Wild foods	=	↓	↓		=	
	Wood fuel		=		=		
	Capture fisheries					=	=
	Aquaculture					↓	↓
	Genetic	=	↓	↓	=	=	
	Fresh water		↓			↑	↑
Regulating 	Pollination	↑	↓	=			
	Climate regulation		↑		=	=	=
	Pest regulation	↑		=			
	Erosion regulation		=	=	=		
	Water regulation		=		↑	↑	=
	Water purification					=	=
	Hazard regulation					=	=
Cultural 	Recreation	↑	=	↓	↑	↑	=
	Aesthetic	↑	=	=	=	↑	=

Status for period 1990–present: ■ Degraded ■ Mixed ■ Enhanced ■ Unknown ■ Not applicable

Trend between periods:



Positive change between the periods 1950–1990 and 1990 to present



Negative change between the periods 1950–1990 and 1990 to present



No change between the two periods

Source: RUBICODE project of the IEU

Ecosystem services

Soil biodiversity is a major factor in soil formation, which supports a range of provisioning services such as food, fiber and fuel provision and is fundamental to soil fertility, being a highly important ecosystem service in Europe. In addition, a diverse soil community will help prevent loss of crops due to soil-borne pest diseases.

Cultural services provided by ecosystems are also very important to EU citizens. Evidence can be found in the scale of membership of conservation organizations. For example, in the United Kingdom the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has a membership of over one million and an annual income of over £50 million.

Although most people associate them mainly with nature conservation and tourism, well managed protected areas

can provide vital ecosystem services, such as water purification and retention, erosion control and reduced flooding; they support food and health security by maintaining crop diversity and species, play an important role in climate change adaptation and contribute to mitigation through the storage and sequestration of carbon.

A **new classification** of ecosystem services is under development at **international level**, the Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services (CICES) to facilitate integration of ecosystem services in environmental accounting. At EU level, a conceptual framework for Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES) has been developed to steer a more harmonized approach to ecosystem and ecosystem services assessments across EU Member States.

Ecosystem services in the EU

Most of the ecosystem services in Europe are judged to be ‘degraded’ – no longer able to deliver the optimal quality and quantity of basic services such as crop pollination, clean air and water, and control of floods or erosion (RUBICODE project 2006–2009; marine ecosystems not included).

Wetlands and poverty alleviation

To the question: “Have wetland programmes or projects that contribute to poverty alleviation objectives or food and water security plans been implemented?”, the responses have been:

- **One country** has done so;
- **Eight countries** have done so partially; and
- **Six countries** have not done so.

Egypt: “We have encouraged the establishment of NGOs and have provided them with the necessary training to execute specific programmes in our protected areas. These included rehabilitation and restoration programmes (e.g., removal of weeds, maintaining the connection between the seawater and the lakes); transplantation of mangroves and other trees; establishing honey bee hives; encouraging handcrafts of local inhabitants; etc. We have given priority to declaration of new protected areas where indigenous ways of life are strongly linked with nature, such as in Salum.”

Algeria: “Within the framework of the programme for the development of continental aquaculture, projects of aquaculture farms are carried out in the semiarid and Saharan zones through the use of underground waters. This represents the integration of the aquaculture and agriculture sectors by merging the use of water serving for fish production, crabs, etc. and irrigated agriculture, knowing that the waters used in aquaculture are very rich in fertilizers.”

Morocco: “Pillar II of the Green Morocco Plan has been conceived to generate solidarity with the small peasants with the view to improve the income of those in the most precarious situation through the implementation of 545 economically viable projects which integrate the protection of natural resources and water saving.”

Tunisia: “The Ramsar National Administrative Authority and its partners have initiated many specific projects in

wetlands with the global aim of reducing poverty and generating food security.”

It is interesting to note that five countries have responded that this question was not applicable to them. Can any country, in good faith, in the Mediterranean region (or in the world at large) claim that there is no poverty in its territory? We all know that even in the countries with the highest GNP per capita there are important sections of their populations that are below the poverty line. Thus, it would seem that the role of wetlands in poverty alleviation applies *urbis et orbis!*

Socio-economic and cultural values of wetlands

To the question: 'Have socio-economic and cultural values of wetlands been included in the management planning for Ramsar Sites and other wetlands?', the responses have been:

- 12 countries report having done so
- Seven countries have done so partially
- One country has planned to do so.

France: "Almost all Ramsar Sites are subject to legal protection. Socio-economic and cultural values are, in most cases, taken into account in the management plans of Ramsar Sites. The same applies to the sustainable management of wetlands in general."



MedWet
Culture

The MedWet Secretariat has signed a two-year contract with the Greek NGO MedINA, specialized in the cultural aspects of wetlands, to relaunch the MedWet Culture Network. The general aim is "to promote the connection between the cultural and natural heritage of Mediterranean wetlands as a contribution to their conservation and wise use and to safeguard the tangible and intangible benefits provided to people and nature by these ecosystems".

The project's main activities include:

- 1 Preparation of an inventory of organisations/institutions and individual experts already involved (or interested) in the cultural aspects of Mediterranean wetlands with the aim of:
 - providing information and updates on interrelated cultural/natural activities in Mediterranean wetland;
 - monitoring developments related to culture and wetlands; and
 - facilitating the sharing of information, experiences and lessons learnt through a regular e-newsletter.
- 2 Re-enforcement of MedWet Culture with the preparation of an annotated list of cultural, social and spiritual events in the Mediterranean, directly or indirectly related to wetlands, which can contribute to awareness raising and action for wetland conservation and wise use;
- 3 Promotion of awareness of the cultural values of Mediterranean wetlands among decision-makers, wetland managers (institutions, NGOs/CSOs), and experts;
- 4 Provision of advice and guidance on the incorporation of culture values in the management of wetlands; and
- 5 Catalysis of cooperation among relevant institutions, including project development related to culture and wetlands.

An Action Plan on the cultural aspects of Mediterranean wetlands will be developed and a web-based platform will be established to carry all the information related to the MedWet Culture. The project also includes the production of studies and information materials on cultural and wetlands.

FACTS & FIGURES

Restoration and/or rehabilitation of wetlands offer a return on investment up to **100** times that of alternative carbon mitigation investments.



Wetland restoration

To the question “*Have priority sites for wetland restoration been identified?*”, the responses were as follows:

- **Yes:** eight countries
- **Partially:** three countries
- **No:** four countries
- No reply: five countries.

Bulgaria: “The National Plan 2013–2022 for the conservation of the most important wetlands includes horizontal measures for protection and wise use of wetlands. One of the measures is the restoration and/or improvement of the water regime of wetlands of high significance. Drainage and degradation of Bulgarian wetlands through disturbance of the water regime is affecting to a greater or lesser extent almost all natural wetlands. The Plan includes a list of specific priority measures / projects for protection and improvement of the ecological status of wetlands.”

Egypt: “Studies made recently have shown that mangroves store carbon dioxide four times more than other rainforests. Since we started restoration program on mangroves for several years, mangrove restoration is given a priority, and a project is being prepared to be funded by GEF. However, the current political instability in the region does not help us to start restoration programs.”

France: “In order to respond to the objective established in the Directive 2000/60/CE of ‘good conservation status of waters’ by 2015, a programme was established to monitor the ecological status of water bodies. The maps prepared on the basis of this programme have allowed the identification of the status of different water bodies. The water bodies identified as not having attained the ‘good conservation status’ are considered in need of restoration as priority sites.”

To the question “*Have wetland restoration/rehabilitation programmes or projects been implemented?*”, the responses were as follows:

- **Yes:** nine countries
- **Partially:** two countries
- **Planned:** two countries
- **No:** four countries
- No reply: three countries.

Bulgaria: The National Report provides an interesting list of projects in response to question 1.8.2.

France: “The European Commission ensures the direct management of the LIFE programme (the Financial Instrument of the EU for the Environment) having as its aim to accompany the implementation of EU policies in favour of the environment through the funding of innovative projects. One component of the programme is called ‘Nature-Biodiversity’ and it is within this component that

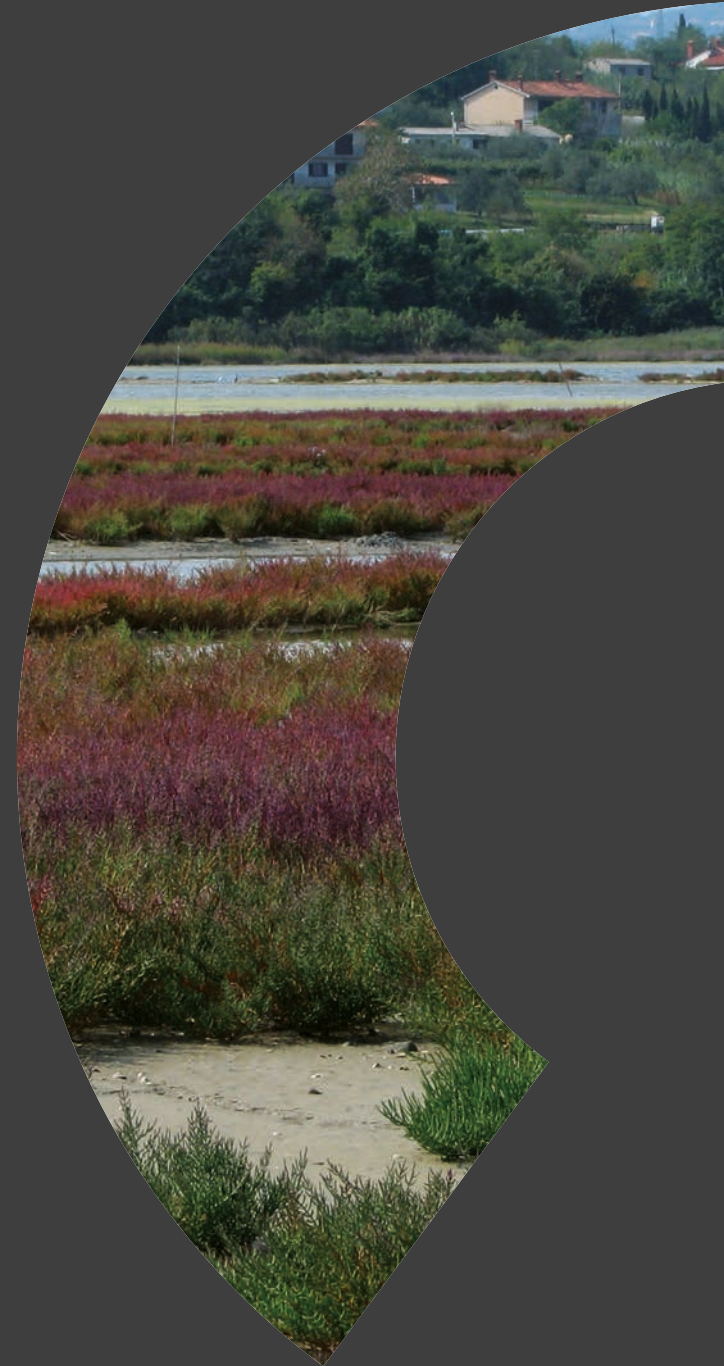
different projects related to wetlands have been financed, for example the LIFE Project Marais de Rochefort for the preservation and restoration of the biological functions of this site.”

Portugal: Restoration programmes are foreseen in two Ramsar Sites (Pateira de Fermentelos and Lagoa de Albufeira) and invasive species were removed in several Ramsar Sites of the Azores Islands. Plans are being developed to plant autochthonous species in these areas.

Slovenia: “‘Ljubljana Connects’ is a four year LIFE+ project (2012–2015) aiming at improving the coherence of Natura 2000 sites by restoring the functionality of the Ljubljana River as a corridor linking two sites. It will achieve this by removing barriers to fish migration, enhancing and restoring habitats, improving the water management infrastructure, and putting in place a water monitoring system. The target fish species are Danube roach, Danube salmon and striped chub.”

FACTS & FIGURES

In monetary terms,
the loss of freshwater
wetlands worldwide
from 1997 to 2011
is valued at
US\$ **2.7** trillion
per year.



Ramsar Sites in the Mediterranean

RSs versus PAs

Sites included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance maintained by the Ramsar Convention (the Ramsar List) deserve special attention by all governments and all institutions interested in wetland issues and protected areas (PAs). Wetlands included in the Ramsar List do not acquire the legal status of a PA if, at the same time, they do not have other PA designation according to the designations formally recognized in the laws of each country.

When designating RSs, Parties accept a commitment vis-à-vis the Convention and the international community to protect those sites. In fact the World Bank and the European Commission have paid attention, in many instances, to RSs' status when negotiating assistance to recipient countries on issues that could be related to wetlands and water management. But these commitments by countries and practices by some donors do not

guarantee to RSs the same degree of attention and protection given to legally designated PAs. This is a problem that the Ramsar Convention should attend to, perhaps at its COPI3 in 2018.

Worrisome statistics

The table on page 40 shows in a summary way the following situation in the 20 MedWet countries whose National Reports have been analysed (with the margin of error created by the fact that some countries have not responded to all the questions):

- 1) Of 377 RSs in these 20 countries, only 209 (55%) have a management plan;
- 2) Of these 209 managements plans, only 142 are been implemented (38% of all RSs);
- 3) 27 management plans are being prepared (or for only 16% of RSs without a managemenet plan); and
- 4) 111 RSs (29%) have in place a cross-sectoral management committee.

These statistics show a serious state of affairs because:

a) the conservation status of a significant number of RSs – almost half of them – is not guaranteed and; b) the credibility of the Ramsar List, as the flagship of the Convention, could be seriously questioned.

A challenge for the wetland community as a whole

Thus, it is important that all the different actors – the Parties themselves in the first instance, the Conference of the Parties, the Ramsar Standing Committee, the Ramsar Secretariat, the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel, MedWet, the Ramsar International Organization Partners and all other stakeholders and partners pay significant attention to this matter if we want the situation to improve as soon as possible.

Concerning further designations of RSs, **five countries** indicated that they have established a strategy and priorities for further RS designations; six countries have partially done so; and four countries have planned this action.

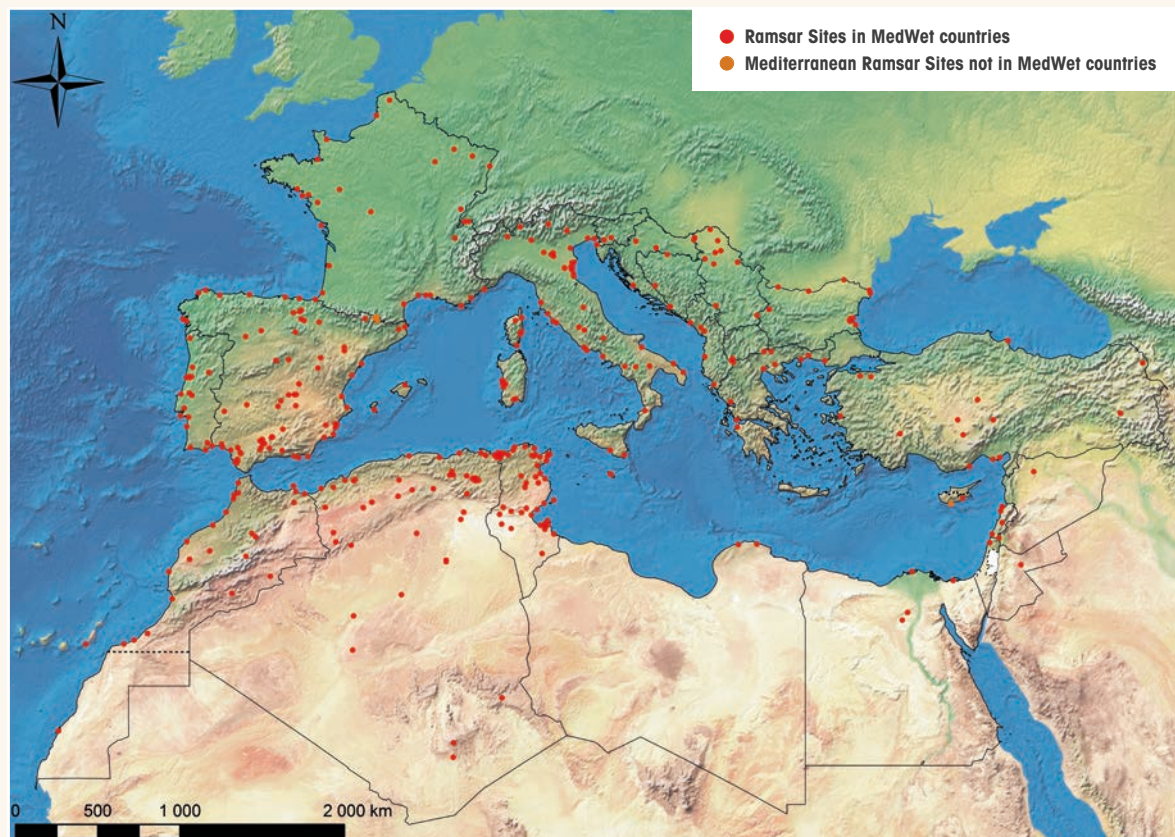
A study of the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory showed that merely designating a wetland as a RS does not influence its biodiversity trends, whereas having an effective management plan does bring benefits.

We are far from an effective implementation in the Mediterranean region of the Ramsar Resolution on the Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971), originally adopted at Ramsar COP8 in 2002 and updated by Resolution XI.8 in 2011.

The vision for the Ramsar List has been established as:

To develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life through the maintenance of their ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services.

Concerning RS designations, there are basically two schools of thought: there are those who think that Parties should only designate the RSs for which they are in a position to ensure effective management; and there are those who



believe that Parties should be encouraged to designate ALL wetlands in their territories that respond to the Ramsar criteria for being included in the Ramsar List.

The MedWet Secretariat adheres to the second school of thought: countries should be encouraged to designate as many RSs as possible, thus accepting the commitments that go with such designations. The time will come to assist countries, if necessary, to put in place the required tools

for effective management. Otherwise, when wetlands are not in the Ramsar List, the Convention and MedWet have practically no clear mandate to work with governments to ensure their conservation and sustainable use.

Ten MedWet countries have indicated their readiness to designate around 48 new Ramsar Sites in the forthcoming triennium. This would bring the total of RSs in the MedWet countries from 396 at present to some 444 RSs.

Table 1. Analysis of responses in the National Reports of 20 MedWet countries concerning the situation of their Ramsar Sites

Country	Number of Ramsar Sites	Number of Ramsar Sites with a management plan	Number of management plans being implemented	Number of management plans being prepared	Number of Ramsar Sites with a cross-sectorial management committee	The effectiveness of management has been assessed	Strategy and priorities established for further Ramsar Site designations	Designations planned for 2015–2018
Albania	4	3	3	1	3	No	No	0
Algeria	50	9	2	21	21	No	Yes ¹	17
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3	0	0	1	1	No	Planned	0
Bulgaria	11	7	7	4	6	For some sites	Yes ²	0
Croatia	5	3	3	0	0	Yes ³	No	0
Cyprus	1 ⁴	1	1	0	1		Partially	0
Egypt	4	4	4	0	4		4	Yes ⁵
France (including overseas territories)	43	34	34	4	4	Yes ⁶		
Israel	2	2	2	0	0	No	Partially	0
Italy	52	41	No response	No response	No response	No	Planned	2
Lebanon	4	2	1	2	2	No	Planned	6
Monaco	1	0	0	1	0	No	No	0
Montenegro	2	1	1	1	0	No	Partially	0
Morocco	24	4	0	3	0	No	Partially ⁷	10
Portugal	30	9	2	0	1	No	Yes	1
Serbia	10	9	9	0	0	For some sites ⁸	Partially	2
Slovenia	3	2	2	1	2	Yes ⁹	Yes	2
Spain	74	60	52	27	50	Yes ¹⁰	Yes ¹¹	4
Tunisia	40	7	7	3	4	For two sites	Planned	1
Turkey	14	12	12	0	12	For some sites	No response	3
TOTALS	377	209	142	72	111			48

¹ Algeria has identified some 60 sites of international importance for inclusion in the Ramsar List (50 are already included and 17 are being studied). The present priority is to ensure that the designated sites have management plans in place to ensure their long-term protection. The difficulty in preparing the Ramsar Information Sheets resides in the absence of information on the ground, which requires the means to obtain it and, thus, the necessary funding.

² The territorial scope of the National Action Plan for conservation of wetlands of high significance in Bulgaria 2013–2022 includes 11 wetlands as priority territories which at present are part of the Ramsar List. The descriptive part of the plan describes in detail 28 additional wetlands that cover one or more of the Ramsar designation criteria or have a significant potential for protection and restoration, but are not included in the Ramsar List.

³ A management effectiveness evaluation of the Protected Areas, including Ramsar Sites, in Egypt was made, and it is a continuous process. The tool applied was the Rapid Assessment of Protected Area Management (RAPAM), with modifications to suit the Egyptian situation.

⁴ Plus *Akrotiri*, designated by the United Kingdom on its Western Sovereign Base Area.

⁵ Objective 5 of the National Wetland Strategy is to identify, on a scientific basis, wetland sites that are ecologically important at local, national and international scales, and ensure their conservation. There are 12 generic types of wetlands that have been recognized in Egypt. These include the coastal lakes along the Mediterranean (Salloum), Wadi Natrun lakes, Qaroun-Rayon lakes, agricultural drainage water depressions in the Nile Delta, water springs along the Red Sea, the River Nile, Lake Nasser, Toshka spillway, littoral salt marshes along the Mediterranean coast, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aqaba and Suez (mangroves, coral reefs), and Suez Canal lakes. A database is currently being established for priority areas. However, no actions have been taken during the past three years due to the current instability in the region.

⁶ The evaluation is carried out according to different rhythms, according to the protected area category. Evaluations are available from the managers of each site.

⁷ The 10-year programme of the High Commissioner for Water and Forests and to Combat Desertification 2016–2025 foresees the inclusion of 30 new sites in the Ramsar List.

⁸ The RAPPAM methodology (Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management-WWF) was applied in 16 protected areas, of which five are also Ramsar Sites. The Protected Area – Benefit Assessment Tool (PA-BAT), by WWF, was used in another two RS.

⁹ Assessments were made using the RAPPAM analysis for all PAs in Slovenia, including the Ramsar Sites.

¹⁰ Five autonomous regions (out of 17) responded affirmatively and two responded that they have done the assessment partially.

¹¹ This is a responsibility of each autonomous government. There is a national methodology in place, adopted for the Spanish Wetlands Committee, called "Protocol for the inclusion of Spanish wetlands in the Ramsar List" which is being applied. Only two (out of 17) autonomous governments (Andalusia and Catalonia) have responded affirmatively, and another two (Castilla La Mancha and Castilla y Leon) said that they have done so partially.

MeRSiM-Net

The MedWet Secretariat is launching an initiative that goes in the direction of increasing the effectiveness of management planning in Ramsar Sites: the establishment of a MedWet Network of Mediterranean Ramsar Sites Managers (MeRSiM-Net) with the following objectives:

- 1 to promote the feeling and experience of belonging to the Mediterranean Ramsar Sites 'ethos'¹;**
- 2 to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and experiences concerning the situation of and management practices in Mediterranean Ramsar Sites;**
- 3 to facilitate mutual support in terms of technical advice and assistance in problem solving; and**
- 4 to encourage the twinning of Mediterranean Ramsar Sites.**

The terms of reference for the consultant hired for this project are:

- 1. To identify and contact existing networks and institutions in the Mediterranean region** (or elsewhere) that may already have developed other networks that could be useful to the MedWet MeRSiM-Net in order to avoid duplication of efforts;

- 2. To prepare a chart of the 396 Mediterranean Ramsar Sites with summary information** on:

- 2.1. the management system existing in each site, if any, including the legal or regulatory status of the system (e.g., the Ramsar Site has a formally approved management plan; is also a legally protected area; has other international designations, such as a World Heritage Site);
- 2.2. the Ramsar Site is managed according with traditional or consuetudinary systems of resource use and/or on the basis of traditions or other cultural values;
- 2.3. the institution(s) responsible for the application of the existing management system, if any;
- 2.4. a list of the individuals and/or institutions directly involved in the application of the management system(s), with full details about postal address, telephone and e-mail;
- 2.5. as far as possible, a list of other individuals and institutions that in some way or another, formally or informally, are involved in the management and/or resource use of the Ramsar Site, such as:
 - local communities and/or individual users (e.g., loggers, hunters, etc.) intervening in the site, legally or otherwise;
 - non-governmental and civil society organizations involved or interested in the management of the site; and

- individuals and/or groups active in the Ramsar Site because of its cultural values (festivities, religious events, beliefs, traditions, etc.);

- 3. To prepare a proposal for the content and operation of the web-based platform** to be used by the network; and
- 4. To prepare recommendations to the MedWet Secretariat concerning the perspectives and future operations of the MeRSiM-Net** and on any other issues that could be pertinent for improving the effective management of Mediterranean Ramsar Sites.

Not a panacea but a step forward

The MeRSiM-Net would not be the panacea to resolve all the pending issues in relation to the effective management of RSs, but it could become a useful tool towards providing support to those who, in the central and local administrations and on the ground, have the heavy responsibility of ensuring the long-term ecological health of these sites, for the benefit of nature and people.

¹ Ethos: the character or disposition of a community, group, person, etc.

The challenges

While progress in the *conservation* of Mediterranean wetlands was made, apparently not much has happened in the area of *sustainable use* of wetland resources. The recognition, valuation, inclusion in local and national planning, and active and proper use of wetland services and functions, continue to be pending issues in most MedWet countries.

Insufficient resources

Most National Reports indicate that the main challenges faced in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention are the insufficient financial and human resources allocated by governments to wetland-related work in the national administrations.

And this is true: in most national governments (and regional governments with responsibilities for wetland matters, such as Spain), including those with the highest GNP in the Mediterranean region, wetlands are the responsibility of

one government official, in most cases at a low, or at best, middle level of the hierarchy, and in the majority of cases employed in ministries of environment with limited clout in the general decision-making on national priorities and actions. This is not a very encouraging picture.

Personal commitment

And if some progress continues, as indicated in the preceding sections, it is because in most countries that “wetland person”, who in general goes unnoticed in the spider’s web of national administrations, acts with such determination and abnegation that one would say that there are well-equipped contingents taking care of wetlands!

Reaching the decision-makers

So far, nobody has found the solution, or the means, to change the perception of high-level decision makers in order to obtain more resources in the national budgets devoted to wetlands. Wetlands continue to be the Cinderella of natural resources, with biodiversity

some years ago and climate change at present being the stepmothers of the poor Cinderella. We need to find the Prince that will safeguard the crystal shoe of our wetlands, marry them, and bring them to the Castle of Central Decision-making!

The socio-economic crisis of recent years in most Mediterranean countries have also had an adverse effect on environmental protection in general and wetlands in particular: these are issues that governments – pushed by social pressure – are inclined to attend to only in times of bonanza, which in turn, if not enough attention is paid, can also have devastating effects on wetlands through land transformations undertaken with the excess of capital and pharaonic water schemes.

A ‘Marshall Plan’ for wetlands?

The only solution may come from donors, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (for aid recipient countries) and the European Commission (for aid recipient



and EU and accession countries alike). If they could be persuaded to launch a ‘Marshall Plan’ for Mediterranean Wetlands – and there is no exaggeration in saying that, because of the services that they provide – the fate of wetlands might be changed. With a large infusion of money into wetland issues, it is quite possible that the perception of high-level decision makers would change as well: if important resources are channelled to a particular issue, that issue has to be ‘important’; it cannot be otherwise.

In some countries, insufficient expertise on wetland issues at the national level also seems to be an obstacle, as well as the limited capacity of civil society organisations to develop convincing project proposals. International cooperation has an important role to play in these areas.

A more holistic approach

The inclusion of wetland issues at the basin management scale is also a pending issue in most countries, with the exception of the EU countries now guided by the

application of the Water Framework Directive, the Floods Directive and others, and even so not always with impeccable results.

Serious, useful and complete inventorying of wetland resources is still an issue in the 26 MedWet countries. Hopefully the MedWet project launched this year in this area will bear fruits starting in 2016.

Fully operational Ramsar/Wetlands National Committees continue to be an exception rather than the rule in MedWet countries. Fortunately, a number of Parties have indicated that this is a priority in the next triennium, and the MedWet Secretariat will be ready to assist as much as possible in these endeavours.

A crucial issue

Water scarcity in the Mediterranean was mentioned as a challenge in some National Reports, but not widely enough, as if there was not sufficient awareness of the crucial

importance of this issue in two significant ways: a) wetlands may suffer in the competition for scarce water resources with other more powerful users; but b) well-functioning wetlands may also be strong allies in maintaining the quantity and quality of the resource for all users. In one particular case, it was underlined that a prolonged drought impeded completing water agreements for sufficient freshwater allocated to wetlands.

Hunting and agriculture

Hunting, in particular poaching, in wetlands continues to be a challenge, in particular when the state has not the means – or the will – to enforce laws and regulations in an effective manner.

Wetlands and agriculture continue to have a problematic relationship. As with water, wetlands can be a strong ally for farmers, but unsustainable agricultural practices can be disastrous for wetlands. This is a love and hate relationship that needs to be managed with great care. No wonder that



the first Resolution on wetlands and agriculture adopted by Ramsar at COP8 in Valencia in 2002 caused such a heated debate at the time! Some EU countries have affirmed that the Common Agricultural Policy continues to be unfavorable for wetlands conservation.

Also at the EU level, the implementation of Ramsar in the light of the EU Directives is an area that deserves and needs clarification.

In the most populated countries, anthropogenic influences are greatly amplified and, as the human population increases, so too does its impact upon wetlands, such as recreational uses in sensitive sites, invasive species, increased fragmentation, and reduced buffers around protected sites.

Ramsar and MedWet should do more

Weak cooperation and discontinuous communication with the Ramsar and MedWet Secretariats were also signalled as a challenge to be overcome, as well as the insufficient

international cooperation on technical and scientific issues. The organisation of regional and international workshops to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and experiences is in great demand. In this sense, emphasis should, it is said, go more to on-the-ground actions than on the development of new concepts.

In one EU Party it was indicated that the Ramsar Focal Point is overwhelmed with the number of complaints received concerning the conservation status of RSs. Would other Parties suffer from the same problem if there was a more widespread culture of approaching the governments to complain about environment-related problems?

Pollution problems affecting wetland waters have also been signalled as a challenge by a number of National Reports.

An IYW?

A suggestion was made to work at the level of the UN General Assembly to declare an International Year of

Wetlands (IYW). This, together with the Marshall Plan for Mediterranean Wetlands, could have a significant impact.

There is hope

These challenges – those drawn from the National Reports as described above and probably quite a few more that could be mentioned – may seem daunting. It is easy to feel sometimes that the tasks before us are too many, and too complex, and cannot be achieved successfully. But at the same time, we know that there are many knowledgeable and dedicated people working together on these problems, and there are many tools that can be better employed, and many ideas for creating still better tools, and this is what gives us strong reasons for hope that those efforts will not be in vain in the end.

The MedWet Secretariat is ready to assist countries in the region to respond to all of these challenges, to the best of its abilities, and looks forward to working closely with the Parties and partners in this endeavour.

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