

## 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee

5 July 2012, Bucharest, Romania

# Vision and strategic planning of the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO)

## I. Key points of the MWO

### 1.1. Introduction

The Mediterranean Wetland Committee (MedWet/Com) has mandated Tour du Valat in 2008 for catalysing the emergence and developing the Observatory of Mediterranean Wetlands (MWO), in order to monitor and evaluate the state and trends of wetlands in the Mediterranean and to develop the knowledge on their multiple values. Its eventual goal is to improve the conservation and management of wetlands by disseminating information on their status towards a broad audience, especially political decision-makers and the public at large, in agreement with Axis 1 of the **MedWet strategic vision**. The MWO has been conceived since 2009 as a regional tool for managing wetlands. It has been operational since 2010 (see Historical background, Appendix 1) and functions thanks to a group of 34 technical and institutional partners committed to this process.

The MWO is a central element of the MedWet initiative's strategy, and is fully embodied inside the governance structure of this initiative (see Appendix 2)

### 1.2. The MWO mandate, monitoring-evaluation framework and strategies

#### The MWO mandate

The principal service which the MWO is committed to provide to decision-makers, citizens, managers, scientists and all other potential users, can be described under 4 main axis :

- To collect, centralize, consolidate and share knowledge on the status and trends of Mediterranean wetlands ;
- To analyse the status and trends of the ecological functions, values and services provided by wetlands ;
- To raise the awareness of users and to assist decision-makers in their actions in favour of a better conservation, management and wise use of wetlands ;
- To analyze, more broadly, the evolution of wetlands within the context of sustainable development, and how they are taken into account in land-use and territorial planning.

#### The MWO monitoring-evaluation framework

The framework links the MWO objectives, themes and indicators.

The MWO has got **three objectives** that are closely linked:

1. Provide timely and quality information on Mediterranean wetlands status and trends.

2. Track threats to Mediterranean wetlands and identify actions to promote their protection and wise use and restoration.
3. Assess Mediterranean wetlands dimension in the Mediterranean context of sustainable development.

The degree to which these objectives are fulfilled is evaluated through monitoring **four themes**:

- Integrity of biodiversity and ecosystems
- Drivers & pressures
- Ecosystem services
- Consideration given to wetlands in development decisions.

These 4 themes are measured through a set of 25 indicators, 17 of which have been taken into account in the first outlook produced in 2012. The analytical framework adopted by the MWO is of a dual nature, combining the **DPSIR model** (Drivers- Pressures - State- Impact - Responses) used in the conservation world and the “**Sustainable livelihood concept**” which helps translate the results into a logic closer to the one used by developers.

### *The long-term strategy of the MWO*

Since the 1st international MWO workshop in March 2009, the coordination unit has developed and shared with the MWO partners a strategy as well as a set of principles aiming at efficiently achieving the objectives.

The MWO has adopted 3 principles: **usefulness, performance and sustainability**. These 3 principles mutually reinforce each other, and aim at developing and maintaining trust among all the stakeholders involved in this initiative, as well as their interest and effective participation.

The MWO has also developed since its inception a strategy of relevant partnerships so as to gather a strong scientific expertise, and elaborated a set of awareness-raising products based upon this scientific expertise, whose dissemination is oriented towards priority targets.

It translates into a multi-dimension approach that includes :

- A dimension of multi-products communication aiming particularly at decision-makers (local, national and international) and the public at large (through medias and NGOs), which are considered as the most efficient leverages for influencing or taking decisions ;
- A partnership dimension which is both horizontal (conservation and sustainable development stakeholders, public, private...) and vertical (local, national, supranational);
- A networking dimension , including relaying and exchanging information within the network;
- A broadening dimension, beyond wetlands and protected areas, so as to influence the areas and the stakeholders of sustainable development.

### **I.3. Main results**

Since early 2009, the MWO has been developing technically, institutionally and financially, with the participation of 34 partners. It has developed a set of communication products which ensures its visibility by the different users. It has produced a first outlook of Mediterranean

wetlands, in the dual form of a full technical report, and a strategic report targeting decision-makers, as well as a first thematic report on the evolution of Mediterranean wetland species.

### *A first Outlook of wetlands in the Region*

The first outlook on Mediterranean wetlands has been presented in February 2012 in the Agadir Symposium on Water and Wetlands, organised by MedWet. Some key results stand out of the analysis, and confirm the ongoing and rapid degradation of wetlands, both in number, in surface, in their capacity to deliver services to communities, as they are the victims of high pressures on their resources, especially water. The low priority given to wetlands in political agendas, inadequate governance mechanisms and institutional segmentation between stakeholders are the major causes of these pressures.

But this report also reveals that the fate of wetlands is not sealed, that solutions do exist. Some components of biodiversity are better off than 20 years ago; many services are provided by wetlands to mankind, especially provisioning services through agriculture and cultural services through ecotourism. The number of Ramsar sites designated under the Ramsar convention has grown twice more rapidly than in the rest of the world ; many initiatives show that new alliances between stakeholders from the conservation and development worlds are fertile and bring lasting benefits. This report also brings strategic and operational answers, and perspectives for action by decision-makers and key components of civil society.

The results and messages from this report have largely contributed to the Guidelines proposed for the next 20 years of MedWet.

### *Some first heartening signs*

It is still too early to evaluate the impact of this first regional outlook. A first evaluation is planned for 2013. Nevertheless, some encouraging signs are to be noted, that can be attributed to the MWO capacity to become quickly operational and to deliver its first results in a very short time. Among those signs :

- Requests by several organisations to assist with the development of their observatory : the national wetland observatory (MEDDE, France), the regional biodiversity observatory (PACA Region, France), the Nador lagoon observatory (FFEM Project, Morocco), the observatory of sustainable development of the Moroccan Atlas (Moulay Ismail University , Meknès), the national observatory of wetlands (High commission of water, forests and combating desertification, Morocco);
- The request for the MWO to participate in various projects and forums : capacity-building of civil society in North Africa, project to reinforce the management of water, forum on biodiversity Observatories (France), forum on ecosystem services within an international framework (ANR SERENA, IRD, CIRAD).

## **II. Stakes, challenges and perspectives for the period 2012-2015**

### **II.1. Stakes**

The hypothesis made in 2008 (MedWet/Com9, Changwon) is that the MWO results could influence strategic and political decisions in MedWet members countries, and that they could motivate partners, incl. funding agencies, to support this initiative and take part in it.

The MWO durability and development are strongly linked to its usefulness, to its human and financial means, and to the active participation of its partners to the activities of monitoring-evaluation and communication. An efficient relaying of information by national and local,

public and private actors, as well as the appropriation of MWO activities and messages by partner countries are leverages that are necessary for its efficiency.

## **II.2. The challenges**

Since its political validation in november 2008, the MWO has shown its capacity to deliver results and messages relatively quickly. These have been elaborated jointly with the countries whilst taking into account their expectations, as expressed during the 2009-2010 study on the situation and needs for monitoring-evaluation of wetlands.

However, the current economic background and the wetland monitoring results highlight five main challenges for the future :

1. The capacity by the MWO, MedWet and partners to become part of the networks of decision-makers influencing or impacting wetlands, especially those linked to land-use planning, urban development, agriculture, energy, fisheries and tourism ;
2. Stimulating the effective and lasting participation of partners and national focal points into the MWO activities, jointly with the Coordination Unit
3. The need for national approaches in each country for reaching decision-makers, harmonizing monitoring processes and comparing monitoring results, especially because of the differences in terms of political and legal framework and access to international funds for the environment, between EU and non-EU countries.
4. The need to reinforce the MWO institutional relays towards the sustainable development stakeholders (Barcelona Convention, Union for the Mediterranean, Union of the Arab Maghreb, the national thematic/ funding groups, etc.), in order to enlarge the dissemination of the results to the national sustainable development networks.
5. The mid/ long-term funding issue for the MWO institutional functioning, which was raised as early as 2010 (MedWet/Com10 meeting in Corsica). For the time being, it is funded through short-term projects, which makes difficult to implement a mid/ long-term strategy.

These challenges often reach beyond the MWO framework, but are considered important for its development, durability and usefulness. Today, they lead to a situation that hinders the long-term vision and institutionalisation of the MWO. This situation currently limits the impact of the analyses done, and their potential use by key stakeholders, especially national sector decision-makers and local authorities involved in territorial planning and sector planning influencing wetlands.

## **II.3. Strategic perspectives**

Whilst taking into account the stakes and challenges above, it is important for the MWO to maintain its priority actions in the spirit of the long-term strategy mentioned above.

The MWO will also maintain its multi-product communication-visibility strategy targeting identified users, especially decision-makers and citizens. Additional mechanisms for communication and transfer towards networks of actors and sector decision-makers impacting wetlands will be discussed with the MedWet institutional bodies.

It is proposed that the information, monitoring results and analysis on mediterranean wetlands be communicated, fed back and transferred via the following products :

- A regional overview of wetlands every 10 years (1<sup>st</sup> one in 2012, next one planned for 2022)
- Thematic publications every 2 years: the 1<sup>st</sup> one in 2012 on Biodiversity, the next one on ecosystem integrity and land-use in 2014, a third one in 2016, probably on water issues
- A web site in French, English and Arabic, regularly updated and relayed through partners' web sites (started in June 2010)
- A MedWet/ MWO bimonthly electronic newsletter, in English and French (since 2009);
- Each year, several communications, side-events within conferences, participation in symposia and national and international workshops and meetings (since 2009);
- Identification of NGOs and reinforcement of their capacities in wetland monitoring and in communication and relaying information at local and national level (due to start in 2012 in North-West Africa).

The results will be presented in the form of posters, films, scientific and popular articles, brochures, leaflets, press releases and articles, TV and radio interviews etc.

#### Proposals for strategic priorities for 2012-2015

It is proposed that the strategic priorities for the period 2012-15 be focussed primarily on 2 of the 3 principles of the MWO : usefulness and sustainability. During this period, we will mainly:

1. **optimise the outcomes and impacts** of the MWO results through the key targets (principle of usefulness). The outcomes and impacts are mainly expected in terms of taking into account our results and analysis in wetland conservation and management decision-making, and in their appropriation by the components of the civil society that are active in the wetlands field. The priority targets are therefore the national and local decision-makers, as well as NGOs. The MWO would lay a special emphasis on making visible its 2012 results (especially its general overview and its Biodiversity thematic report) , in a diversified and complementary way : web site, films, posters, leaflets, side-events in international forums. At a political and strategic level, the MedWet/Com members and the Ramsar Convention could play a key role in transferring and encouraging the MWO results and lessons learnt to be taken into account by national and local decision-makers.
  - Making the best out of the MWO results, especially through national and international forums, the MWO web site and information relayed through partner institutions and sites ;
  - Promotion of the Coordination Unit's experience beyond the field of monitoring-evaluation, to assist with the development of strategic planning, and of national wetland strategies and policies;
  - Evaluation of the development of the MWO and of the outcomes/ impacts of its results and analysis.
2. To reinforce, under the principle of sustainability, the institutional, financial and technical dimensions of the MWO.

#### *Institutional sustainability*

- Consolidation of existing partnerships and development of new ones;
- Support and institutional relaying by Medwet/Com, including in the networks of country representatives.
- Reinforcement of the role of the technical Working Group ; handing –over of some components of the actual monitoring to technical partners.

- Reinforcement of the civil society in the south Mediterranean, in order to better monitor wetlands and transfer/ relay the MWO results and information to the national and local levels.

#### *Financial sustainability*

- Seeking/ engaging MedWet countries for the institutional funding of the MWO,
- Developing projects in partnership for the development and monitoring of priority indicators.

#### *Technical sustainability*

- Gradual development of the indicators, as per the priorities
- Monitoring some indicators by the Coordination Unit, i.e. those that fall within Tour du valat's area of competence: mediterranean biodiversity, ecosystem services, ecosystem integrity, area of protected wetlands, local development and wetlands, overall cross-cutting analysis.
- Delegating to competent MWO partners the monitoring of other indicators: demography, ecological footprint, water (quality and quantity), cultural and other ecosystem services, others;
- Development of a database as a working tool for the MWO, in coordination with partners and other databases, especially MedWet's.

### **III. Proposal for a 2012-2015 workplan**

The workplan proposed for 2012-2015 (see attached table, annex 3) is conceived as a continuous programme. It will be detailed by year and adjusted according to the countries' situation, their needs and priority expectations, decisions that will be made by the MWO governance bodies, and its resources (human, financial, projects).

It is structured along 3 broad sections (see Annex 3 for details) :

1. Management and development of the MWO.
2. Monitoring and dissemination of the MWO results
3. Strategic and political influence of the MWO

The first section covers all the MWO monitoring-evaluation activities, from data collection, the production of results, to the dissemination and transfer of results. The second section covers "downstream activities", i.e. strategic and political initiatives beyond the results, like e.g. assisting the development of national wetland policies or wetland observatories. The 3<sup>rd</sup> section deals with the development and management of the MWO, at the institutional, partnership, technical and financial levels.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1: Historical background and milestones in the development of the MWO
- Appendix 2: Governance structure of the MWO
- Appendix 3: Proposal for a MWO strategic workplan for 2012 - 2015