

Regional action for wetlands

The Mediterranean
experience
1991-2002

Thymio Papayannis



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with contributions by:

Luc Hoffmann

Delmar Blasco

Spyros Kouvelis

Convention on Wetlands

The MedWet Initiative

Station biologique de la Tour du Valat

September 2002

Abbreviations

ACNAT	EC Action pour la nature
CEDARE	<i>Centre pour le développement des régions arabes et de l'Europe</i>
COP	Conference of the Contracting Parties
DGCN	<i>Dirección General para la Conservación de la Naturaleza</i> , Madrid, Spain
EC	European Commission
EKBY	Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre, Thessaloniki, Greece
EMU	European Economic Monetary Union
EU	European Union
FFEM	<i>Fonds français pour l'environnement mondial</i>
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GWP-Med	Global Water Partnership in the Mediterranean
ICBP	International Council for Bird Preservation, now BirdLife International
ICN	<i>Instituto da Conservação da Natureza</i> , Lisbon, Portugal
IGO	Inter-governmental organisation
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
IWRB	International Wetlands and Waterfowl Research Bureau, now Wetlands International
LIFE	EC <i>L'instrument financier pour l'environnement</i>
MAP	Mediterranean Action Plan (Barcelona Convention)
MEDTAC-GWP	Mediterranean Technical Advisory Committee of the Global Water Partnership, now GWP-Med
MedWet	The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative
MedWet/Com	Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, Convention on Wetlands
MIO/ECSDE	Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development
MWN	Mediterranean Water Network
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PAP-RAC	Regional Activity Centre for Priority Action Programmes (Barcelona Convention)
RAC-SPA	Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (Barcelona Convention)
Ramsar	The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971)
SEHUMED	<i>Sede para el Estudio de los Humedales Mediterráneos</i> , University of Valencia, Spain
SPAMI	Special Protection Areas of Mediterranean Importance (Barcelona Convention)
Tour du Valat	<i>Station biologique de la Tour du Valat</i> , Arles, France
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature International
WWF MedPO	WWF Mediterranean Programme Office, Rome, Italy

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The Carboneira Tower in the Camargue (France)

A message by Luc Hoffmann

Thymio Papayannis qualifies the history of the MedWet initiative as an adventure. He certainly is right when one considers the frail starting point, the unusual structure and the many difficulties encountered all along its way. At the end of the Grado symposium in 1991, a small group of people acting mainly on behalf of the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) (now Wetlands International) and the Tour du Valat Foundation proposed what looked like an utopia: a concerted long term action in cooperation by all those who were worried about the future of Mediterranean wetlands. Such an action needed to be based on a very broad structure. An innovative partnership between NGOs, governments and intergovernmental bodies was proposed. This seemed necessary but added to the difficulty of the challenge. Thanks to the obstinacy of a handful of people in NGOs, governments and IGOs stimulated by Thymio Papayannis, the late Ted Hollis and an initial contribution by the European Commission, the challenge could be met and the utopia became reality.

The first organised work, in the framework of project MedWet1, consisted of working on methods and techniques for the use of wetland management. By doing this, MedWet established its credibility and laid a solid basis for its future. MedWet's strength lies in its ability to bring together all those concerned by Mediterranean wetlands – from decision makers to field staff – to convince them of the need for good professional capabilities for management and restoration and to provide them with the tools for implementation.

The aim of this book is not to celebrate achievements but rather to give a critical look at the history of MedWet, to identify errors and weaknesses. Is this book then an evaluation? In as much as it will help to improve action in the future, it looks like an evaluation, but it is much more than that because it is written by Thymio Papayannis who was, from the beginning, a passionate leader of MedWet and experienced personally all its difficulties and breakthroughs. It is an objective historical record with a personal touch in its critical part. As such, it is not merely a look back but a preparation for the future. A future of overall science-based management of Mediterranean wetlands through permanent co-operation of their managers.

Luc Hoffmann
President
Tour du Valat Foundation



Lake Tonga (Algeria)

Preface

Thymio Papayannis writes in this publication: “On the political level . . . a regional initiative operating in the framework of an international convention can create a climate of equity and neutrality, build up confidence, and assist governments to abandon initial reservations.”

This is why, when I took over the position of Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands in 1995, I decided to devote considerable attention and support to MedWet. I thought that MedWet had the great value of being an initiative that had emerged from the “bottom up”, but that the time had come to give to it a firmer institutional anchorage. The Convention on Wetlands offered, in my view, the best possible framework for MedWet to operate within, for two reasons: 1) because Ramsar provides the environment of an intergovernmental institution, which governments can feel comfortable with; and 2) because at the same time Ramsar constitutes quite a unique case of flexible arrangements and modus operandi to make also feel comfortable the other actors involved in MedWet, whose active participation had to be secured.

I am very pleased to see that the considerable amount of energy devoted by me and my colleagues at the Ramsar Bureau to putting MedWet onto a more solid institutional and administrative footing is paying off. It will give me great satisfaction if I can leave my post as Secretary General in mid-2003 with the first regional arrangement of the Convention fully operational and with a secure future.

I very much hope that MedWet will serve as an example for the establishment of similar regional arrangements under Ramsar, since I am persuaded that the future expansion of the Convention has to take place in the regions. But I must warn my successors in this post that the MedWet experience clearly indicates that regional arrangements that emerge from the regions, with the active involvement of the major stakeholders, require considerable prodding, caring and investment from the Ramsar Bureau.

The other necessary precondition for successful regional initiatives is the firm commitment of regional leaders. In the case of MedWet there were a number of people whose passion and support made it possible for the Initiative to arrive at this point of no return. I will not mention all the names because I will risk forgetting some of them. But I want to express my gratitude to them all in the name of Thymio Papayannis, because he has incarnated their determination in a splendid manner.

It has been a real pleasure from me to serve the MedWet Initiative, among other reasons because working with the Mediterranean countries and their people has given me the opportunity of being closer to this Mare Nostrum of my ancestors.

I urge all those involved with MedWet to continue developing this magnificent initiative. The Mediterranean region needs it, and Ramsar needs to be able to count upon the success story of its first regional presence.

*Delmar Blasco
Secretary General
Convention on Wetlands*



Traditional boats in Burullus Lake (Egypt)

Introduction

The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) started 10 years ago as a concerted effort to stop and reverse the loss and degradation of wetlands in the Mediterranean Basin and to promote the sustainable use of their resources, including water. MedWet, however, has not been a concept introduced in the area, but an endogenous initiative, deeply rooted in its regional context, and building upon already existing collaboration efforts. Thus, it was the result of grassroots demand for common action on water and wetlands. In addition, MedWet has proven an adventure in many aspects.



Ill. 1: Major empires in the Mediterranean (maximum extent)

The Mediterranean context

Since the outer reaches of time, the Mediterranean Sea has been a unifying – and not a divisive – natural element. Its closed form, its limited scale (especially its North to its Southern shores) and the existence of numerous islands and promontories, encouraged navigation, even with primitive means. That is why population movements across it and along its shores have been pronounced, during its lengthy and tumultuous history, cultivating human contact, and the exchange of goods and cultures. This exchange was greatly magnified during the period of the major empires (Macedonian, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Moorish and Ottoman) that ruled along most of its periphery (Ill. 1).

Human contacts (which included extensive intermarriage) created common social and cultural elements, such as the institution of the extended family, with strong matriarchal presence, hospitality, a sense of pride, as well as strong similarities in architecture, music, the arts and gastronomy. These persisted in spite of the religious diversity of the region, which gave birth to the three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), with their own cultural frameworks. Continuous armed conflicts and political events, invasions and internal revolts, long-term social evolution processes and violent clashes have resulted in the beginning of the 21st century to a part of the globe with a clear identity and yet radical disparities. The main one is perhaps between a devout Moslem world in the South and East and a Christianity becoming more and more secular in the North. In addition, an intense and seemingly permanent economic disparity has been established in the region; between on the one hand the affluent countries members of the European Union (as well as Cyprus, Israel and Malta) and on the other both the countries in transition of the Balkans and the developing ones of North Africa and the Middle East, the latter characterised by rapid population growth. The result is a new mixture caused by the flow of economic immigrants that cross the Sea at its East and West extremities.

Thus the Mediterranean is today both a region of common ancestral links¹ and present discord, thus “...*contravening one of the main rules of the Mediterranean world: unity in difference, the same rule, fundamentally, which is at the basis of the phenomenon we call life*”².

In addition, and in spite of intense anthropic use, the Mediterranean still retains a high degree of biodiversity with a strong endemism³ and is critical for a large number of globally threatened species. This is the result of the joining of three continents, varied climate and geomorphology, and an enclosed sea. Even human action over millennia has contributed, forming characteristic landscapes and establishing strong cultural values.

On the ecological side, the marine element has always been a unifying factor in this almost closed sea. The waters, energised by a system of powerful winds and currents, create a common environment that allows the mobility of fauna and sometimes flora⁴.

The bird migration routes along the Africa-Palearctic flyway constitute a second unifying element (Ill. 2). An estimated 2 billion migratory birds of approximately 150 species, as they cross the Basin from North to South and vice versa along many axes, espe-



Pelican colony in Mikro Prespa (Greece)

cially at its West and East ends, use wetlands as stepping stones, connect the 26,000 km of Mediterranean coasts and create a common natural heritage and dependence.



Ill. 2: Bird migration routes through the Mediterranean Region

¹ Brilliantly and convincingly analysed by Fernand Braudel. See Braudel F. (1990), *La Méditerranée*, Vol. 1, 9th edition, Armand Colin, Paris, France, pp. 588.

² Mojette A. (1996), *Mediterranean Sea: Guide to the underwater life*, Swan Hill Press, Shrewsbury, UK, p. 6.

³ For example, of the approximately 25,000 plant species in the region, 12,500 are endemic. Of 770 fauna species, 235 are endemic. See Myers N. et al (2000), *Biodiversity hotspots for conservation priorities*, Nature Vol. 403, 24 February, pp. 853-858.

⁴ Demonstrated recently by the wide and rapid expansion in the Mediterranean of *Caulerpa taxifolia*, an introduced algal species, with disastrous results. Human intervention has also assisted its spread.

Rivers and their wetlands cut across national borders (such as the Neretva between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, the Evros / Maritza / Meric shared by Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, and the Mejerda between Algeria and Tunisia) and they create opportunities for conflict or co-operation. Mountain ranges are often shared and allow a joint management of their natural heritage (such as the Pyrenees between France and Spain, the Julian Alps between Italy and Slovenia, and the Rhodope mountain range between Bulgaria and Greece).

Through these unifying natural elements the sense of international co-operation for their management and safeguarding has been gradually emerging.

Collaboration efforts in the region

At the second half of the 20th century, collaboration efforts in the Mediterranean on the political level have been limited and with debatable results. Perhaps the most important such initiative, on both the political and the economic level, has been the European Union, which counts today five Mediterranean states among its members⁵, while a few more are candidates for accession⁶. In the Balkans, the socialist grouping under the ex-USSR and the former Socialist Yugoslav Republic has collapsed in the early '90s. The Maghreb and Mashraq states continue a degree of co-operation, but with limited actual implementation.

Recent efforts by the EU to establish a unified economic framework for the region, through the EuroMed partnership, are still in an early phase of realisation.

International conventions focusing on the environment have been creating strong links in the Mediterranean. Perhaps the most important one has been the Barcelona Convention, established in the early '70s. This regional convention is specifically focussed on the Mediterranean and its members include practically all Mediterranean bordering states and the EC, while the Co-ordination Unit of its Mediterranean Action Plan in Athens is part of UNEP.

The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971), whose origins can be traced to the specific region⁷, counted 15 contracting parties in the Mediterranean at the beginning of MedWet (1991). It includes today all 25 states in the region. Other conventions (such as the Biodiversity, Desertification, Climate Change and others) have



been ratified by the majority of Mediterranean states, thus furthering transnational collaboration efforts.

International NGOs have been active in the region and some have created networks of members, thus strengthening co-operative efforts and a sense of unity. They include BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF International⁵, as well as national NGO networks such as the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO/ECSD) and the Forum for the Mediterranean on Environment and Sustainable Development (MED Forum). In addition, certain specialised centres, initially the *Station biologique de la Tour du Valat* in France, and in the '90s the Greek Biotope – Wetland Centre (EKBY) in Greece and the *Sede para el Estudio de los Humedales Mediterráneos* (SEHUMED) of the University of Valencia in Spain, have been involved in international co-operation efforts on wetlands, working closely with local organisations.

The need for MedWet

Within this general framework, in the late '80s and early '90s, a number of factors created a demand for wider and more systematic collaboration on wetlands and water management issues.

The first was the growing realisation of the extent of wetland loss and degradation in the region, which by that time was convincingly documented⁶. This loss was now related not only to drainage and agricultural expansion, but also to the growing water crisis, which started occurring in many parts of the Basin. In parallel, it was understood that existing conservation and management efforts on the national and local levels were insufficient to remedy the situation. A wider, all-encompassing initiative, bringing together all human and material resources in the region and beyond, and developing over a lengthy time period, would be necessary to make a substantial difference.

The second was the coming together of individuals and organisations already involved with Mediterranean wetlands. Most of them

⁵ France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, which are also members of the EU Economic and Monetary Union (EMU).

⁶ These include Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and Turkey.

⁷ The first proposal for such a convention was discussed at the MAR Conference, in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in the Camargue, France in 1962.

⁸ WWF maintains a Mediterranean Programme Office in Rome, while IUCN just established a Centre for Mediterranean Co-operation in Malaga.

⁹ For example, the destruction of Greek wetlands was presented at a workshop in Thessaloniki in 1989. See Gerakis P. (ed.) (1992), *Conservation and management of Greek wetlands – Proceedings of a workshop held in Thessaloniki, April 1989*, IUCN, Gland, Switzerland, 493 pp.

first met and started co-operating through an EC initiative, the “Expert group on Mediterranean-type wetlands”, enthusiastically led by Reinhard Klein of DG XI¹⁰, which studied in depth their problems and management options during the period 1987 to 1991. They were further reinforced by two significant events. The Council of Europe and Ramsar organised meetings on Mediterranean wetlands in 1989 in Matalascañas, Spain and in 1991 in Faro, Portugal, in collaboration with the national authorities responsible for wetlands (ICONA and ICN respectively). Both meetings, creatively organised by Elladio Fernández-Galiano and Mike Smart¹¹, brought together scientists and conservationists concerned about wetlands from many parts of the region and allowed open debates and the fermentation of ideas.

Perhaps a third factor was the political situation during the winter of 1990-1991. In the middle of the Gulf War, with the possibility of polarisation between the Christian and Moslem worlds, the tendency of many Mediterraneans was to see the links between the two sides strengthened and to build again on traditional friendships, especially in non-political areas, such as the management of the natural heritage.

These were the factors that determined the genesis of MedWet, assisted by a number of fortuitous events. It is important to note here that MedWet was closely related to the Ramsar Bureau (Secretariat of the Convention) from the very beginning, even though the relationship during an early phase was more with the Ramsar Bureau staff¹² than with the Convention as such.



Visiting the El Hondo wetland in Elche Province (Spain)



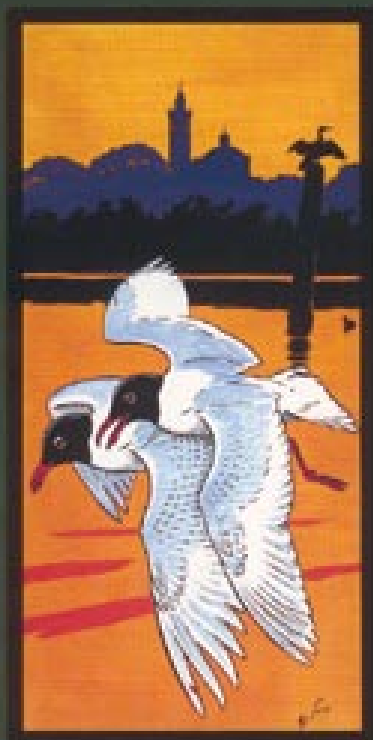
"El Khweinat" Karavanseray ruins in Zaranik (Egypt)

¹⁰ European Commission, Directorate General XI, today DG ENV.

¹¹ Both played a significant role in the first phase of MedWet.

¹² Initially with Mike Smart, Senior Policy Advisor, and Tim Jones, Regional Co-ordinator - Europe, and later with Delmar Blasco, Secretary General.

• • • • *The Grado Strategy* • • • •



*Managing
Mediterranean wetlands
and their birds
for the year 2000 and
beyond*

A strategy to stop and reverse wetland loss and degradation in the Mediterranean Basin



Chapter 1: An assessment chronicle

The first 10 years of the MedWet Initiative represent an eventful period, characterised by antitheses, opportunities and pitfalls, successes and failures, rapid progress on certain fronts and inaction on others, enthusiastic responses and cautious negativism. A critical presentation of the phases that MedWet went through during this period may be very useful in sharing the experience gained, which might be of use in other parts of the World. These lessons are analysed further and presented in a systematic form in chapter 3.

It is too early of course to write an objective account of this initiative. So necessarily the chronicle presented below, written by someone who has been involved in MedWet since its very beginning, retains a personal character, although it has been critically reviewed by many of the other participants in this venture.

Table 1: MedWet key events

Date and place	Event
Feb. 1991, Grado, Italy	Inception of the MedWet Initiative
May 1991, Tour du Valat	Establishment of a MedWet Co-ordination Group
June 1992 – June 1996	MedWet1 project
Oct. 1995 – March 1997	MedWet2 project
June 1996, Venice, Italy	Pan-Mediterranean Conference on Wetlands
	Endorsement of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy
Oct. 1996, Gland, Switzerland	Ramsar Standing Committee decision approving the establishment of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com)
15-17 Mar. 1998, Thessaloniki, Greece	First Meeting of MedWet/Com
	Technical Session on “Wetland restoration”
September 1998 – September 2000	MedWet4 project "Network of closed seas deltas" (part of a larger Ramsar / Danone-Evian / FFEM project)
31 Jan.–3 Feb. 1999, Valencia, Spain	Second Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee
	Technical Session on “Sustainable tourism and wetlands”
May 1999, San José, Costa Rica	Ramsar COP8 Resolution VI.22, recognising officially MedWet and MedWet/Com as a model of regional collaboration
Oct. 1999, Barcelona	Launching of MedWetCoast project
1-5 Apr. 2000, Djerba, Tunisia	Third Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee
	Technical Session on “Cultural aspects of wetlands”
16-17 Oct. 2000, Tirana, Albania	Establishment of the Prespa Park Co-ordination Committee
20-23 May 2001, Sesimbra, Portugal	Fourth Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee
	Technical Session on “Salinas: traditional values and sustainable management”

Grado (1991): Inception

In the small Italian town of Grado, in the North Adriatic, East of Venice, a catalytic event for Mediterranean wetlands occurred in February 1991¹³. The Symposium on Mediterranean Wetlands and their Birds brought together 280 experts from governments, academic and research institutions and NGOs of 28 countries, all of them strongly committed to wetland conservation and wise use.

The many presentations from all over the Mediterranean demonstrated in case after case the dramatic loss and degradation of wetlands in all parts of the region, the North and the South, the rich and the poor. But this was not sufficient. In the middle of a terrible snow storm, howling winds and polar cold, against the background of political instability created by the Gulf War, the character of the meeting changed from despondency and pessimism to a call for concrete action. The need for increasing international collaboration and co-operation was clearly presented¹⁴ and incorporated in the concluding paper¹⁵, and the proposals made met with a very positive response.

The reasons were various. The climate was ripe and a general consensus on the need for joint action and collaboration had already been built. But one should not underestimate the unique contribution of committed individuals, who represented their organisations, but also acted with personal courage and determination, and that is why they are mentioned in this text. First and foremost to be remembered is the late Edward G. (Ted) Hollis, professor at the University College London, who gave the Grado Symposium its unique momentum. Others include Michael (Mike) Smart and Tim Jones from the Ramsar Bureau, Mike Moser and Max Finlayson from IWRB, Jean-Paul Taris and Jamie Skinner from Tour du Valat, Tobias Salathé from ICBP; and of course, always present, concerned and supportive, Luc Hoffmann, the mentor of Mediterranean wetlands (and not only).

During nights and on the excursion day, a small group toiled at preparing the Grado mission statement and a lengthy strategy, which was finally endorsed by the Symposium participants¹⁶. During the last day however a sudden realisation came to many of the persons involved: after considerable efforts, we had arrived again at a written document, but without any mechanism for implementing it. MedWet was conceived at that very moment.

In informal meetings among the individuals mentioned above



A taste of the Grado Symposium

and quite a few more, a concept emerged with the following characteristics:

- long term action (a 30 years horizon was mentioned);
- on all levels, from the local (specific wetland sites), through the national (policies), to the international (co-operation and exchanges);
- bringing together all those concerned, from both the public and the private sectors.

An unofficial working group was assembled¹⁷ and undertook to carry out the necessary actions for the implementation of the concept.

Initial ambitions and enthusiasm

A characteristic excerpt of an article¹⁸ from the initial period of MedWet illustrates the vast ambitions of its founders and the enthusiasm that permeated the whole enterprise:

“Today, only four months after this important event [Grado Symposium], a wide range of activities has already started, imbued by the Grado spirit.” It goes on to mention the publication of the Grado declaration and Strategy, the plans to establish a Mediterranean wetland centre for Information and Education in the Camargue, and the operation of a task force to “...co-ordinate the Mediterranean Wetlands Campaign and to mobilise concerned organisations and individuals, especially those that participated in the Grado meeting.”

The article continues, in a broader context, as follows:

“Efforts to save the Mediterranean wetlands and the campaign that is being orchestrated have also wider implications. They recognise the pressures created by overpopulation in certain countries and mass tourism in others, and consider solutions for their abatement. They realise the dramatic income differences around the Basin and seek methods to direct financial support from the more affluent countries of the North to the less fortunate of the South, at least in relation to wetlands. But more important, they intend, through the joint activities for the wetlands, to establish a climate of partnership for a common goal around the Mediterranean Sea.

This last element is of great importance. Since Antiquity, the Mediterranean has been the birthplace of civilisations, empires and religions. A common character has evolved along its coasts through centuries of conflict and exchange. Let us hope that today the common concern of the Mediterranean people for the protection of their natural heritage, and especially of their wetlands, will contribute to a better understanding in the region.”

¹³ IWRB International Symposium on “Managing Mediterranean wetlands and their birds”, February 1991.

¹⁴ See Papayannis Th. “Wetland degradation in Ramsar sites in the Mediterranean” in Finlayson, C.M., G.E. Hollis and T.J. Davis (eds.) (1992), *Managing Mediterranean wetlands and their birds – Proceedings of an IWRB Symposium, Grado, Italy, February 1991*, IWRB, Special Publication 20, Slimbridge, UK, pp. 97-105.

¹⁵ Hollis G.E., J. Patterson, Th. Papayannis and M. Finlayson “Sustaining wetlands: Policies, programmes and partnerships”, *ibid*, pp. 281-285.

¹⁶ See Hollis, G.E. (co-ord.) (1992), *A strategy to stop and reverse wetland loss and degradation in the Mediterranean Basin*, IWRB / Regione Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trieste, Italy, 40 pp.

¹⁷ It consisted of representatives of Tour du Valat (Jamie Skinner), IWRB (Max Finlayson), WWF (Luigi Guarrera), Ramsar Bureau (Mike Smart) and the European Commission (Antonio Troya), and was chaired by Thymio Papayannis.

¹⁸ Papayannis Th. (1991), “*Mediterranean wetlands: Grado and beyond*”, IWRB News, No. 6, July 1991, Slimbridge, UK.

Maintaining momentum

A few months later, in January 1992, C. M. Finlayson wrote in the *Mediterranean Wetland News*¹⁹:

“MedWet Forum: The concept of concerted action to save the wetlands of the Mediterranean was born in the heated discussions of the Grado Symposium. During the months that followed a unique spirit of collaboration between international bodies, national governments and NGOs developed. As a result, we have the Mediterranean Wetlands Forum, known as MedWet. The Forum will comprise a series of meetings and events that will bring together all organisations concerned with the Grado Goal. It has an informal character that encourages organisations with different philosophies and modus operandi to participate and develop strategies and concrete actions for achieving the Grado Goal. If the spirit of concern and collaboration that has been generated is maintained, the seeds planted at Grado, and even earlier in Seville, will bear fruit.”

The MedWet Forum was further developed in Rome at a meeting hosted by the Italian Ministry of Environment during September 1991. Under the direction of Alessandro Russi, the first version of the Mediterranean Action Plan was drafted. This is an important follow-up to the Grado Symposium and will provide further focus and clarification of key issues to ensure the conservation of the remaining Mediterranean wetlands. The draft action plan will be revised after further discussions with participants in the Forum. A tangible output from the Rome meeting was the commitment by the Italian Ministry of Environment to host a small secretariat for the Forum in Rome. Additionally, the first steps in submitting a funding proposal to the EC were taken, [and] a MedWet Co-ordination Group (CoG) has been formed.”

Rome and Circeo (1991-1992): Laying the foundations

One of the first decisions taken by the working group in May 1991 was that MedWet should start through a major project, targeted at the development of methods and tools for Mediterranean wetlands. The Italian *Ministero dell'Ambiente* was approached first, as Italy had been the host of the Grado Symposium, and their reaction was enthusiastic. Initially in Rome and the Circeo National Park (September 1991) the *Ministero* (represented by Alessandro Russi) hosted the first MedWet preparatory meeting, during which an Action Programme was debated and agreed. At subsequent meetings in Rome during 1992 the Action Programme was further refined. The Greek Ministry of Environment also (through Demetra Spala) was highly supportive and involved, as well as ICN, the Portuguese Institute of Nature Conservation (with a team led by Antonio Teixeira). A number of other organisations provided encouragement and advice; mainly the Barcelona and Bern Conventions, ICBP and IUCN.

The European Commission was next approached for support and their response was very positive, as this initiative was considered as

a continuation of the previous work of their Mediterranean expert group. Reinhard Klein from EC/DGXI played a key role during the preparation of the project brief, which was finally submitted by Italy in 1992 under the ACNAT funding line. Certain bureaucratic procedures endangered the submission, but were overcome with the assistance of WWF Italia, and particularly Alessandro Bardi. The MedWet1 project proposal was approved by the EC in late 1992 for a total sum of € 6.645 million, covered 66% by the EC (through ACNAT) and the rest by the other participants. These included the Ramsar Bureau, Portugal and Spain, IWRB, Tour du Valat and WWF.



Italian wetland site

¹⁹ A fact sheet prepared by MedWet and distributed with the IWRB Newsletter.

What about a name?

In 1991, various names were proposed for the new initiative. The one that gained the greatest support was “MedWet”, proposed by Thymio Papayannis as a shortcut for “Mediterranean Wetlands”. It was complemented by Mike Smart, who suggested “HumMed” for the French and Spanish versions (from humides and humedales), while no satisfactory proposal was found for an Arabic one. Finally, MedWet became widely accepted as more euphonic, and HumMed was abandoned²⁰. A phonetic Arabic transcript of MedWet was also used.

The name was later used legitimately to name various activities related to the initiative, such as MedWet/Com (the Ramsar Committee on Mediterranean Wetlands), the MedWetCoast project, MedWet/Regions Network, MedWet/Sites Network. On the other hand, some confusion was created through the totally unrelated NetWet project. This indicates the need to protect legally the names and logos of any such regional initiatives.

The MedWet1 project, focusing on the five EU-member states in the region, but involving many others from the Middle East and North Africa, started in early 1993 and was completed in 1996. It was led by a Steering Committee, chaired initially by the EC (Reinhard Klein) and later by the Ramsar Bureau (Mike Smart). A Co-ordination Group was also established bringing together all executants, chaired by Thymio Papayannis²¹. The Secretariat of the project was provided by WWF Italia²², and was hosted at the building of the *Ministero dell'Ambiente* in Rome.

MedWet1 had as its primary objective to develop methods and tools specific to Mediterranean wetlands in five areas. These are summarised in the opposite table.

The fact that most of the five thematic components were jointly led by a governmental organisation and an NGO was extremely original and, despite some co-ordination difficulties, proved to be a very positive feature of this programme.

The methods and tools developed were tested separately in a number of wetland sites, in various parts of the Mediterranean Basin. From the beginning, in France the elaboration of MedWet methods was tested at a number of specific Mediterranean wetlands, providing them with the necessary structures and tools for integrated long-term management. In a final phase they were applied in an integrated manner in five specific sites²³, and the results were carefully evaluated.

Table 2: MedWet1 methods and tools

	Executant	Outputs
Inventories and monitoring	ICN Portugal Wetlands International	MedWet Inventory System and database developed, tested and published Framework for planning monitoring programmes developed, tested and published
Wetland management	DGCN Spain	Publication with case studies and legal review
Training	Tour du Valat, French Ministry of Environment	Training modules and practical training guides prepared and courses organised
Public awareness	WWF International Greek Ministry of Environment	Systematic methodology developed and applied
Research results dissemination	Tour du Valat, French Ministry of Environment	MedWet / Tour du Valat Publications

The beginning of this systematic collaboration was noted by the 5th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Kushiro, Japan, June 1993) which issued Recommendation C.5.¹⁴²⁴ encouraging its development.

The work done may not have been totally consistent, as the executants had independent contracts with the EC, and the Co-ordination Group could act only in an advisory manner. Thus, some of the outputs were not sufficiently practical for future users, but others were much more concrete and could be put readily into practice. A general weakness that often affects similar projects was that not enough provision had been made within the project for the dissemination of its results. As a consequence, some of the methods and tools that were developed were not sufficiently and systematically promoted among potential users.

²⁰ Although in Spain, the project remained known as "HumMed" until about 1996.

²¹ Under contract with the Ramsar Bureau.

²² Among the dedicated WWF staff members of the Secretariat to be mentioned were initially Luigi Guarrera and later Alessandro Montemaggiori, William Pratesi Urquhart and Bruno Ravaglioli.

²³ These included Étang de l'Or (France), Kerkini Lake (Greece), Diaccia Botrona (Italy), Sado Estuary (Portugal) and Aiguamolls de l'Empordà (Spain).

²⁴ See Addendum 1, p. 91

An early assessment of MedWet1

In August 1995, Écosphère included the following perceptive appraisal in its report of MedWet1, which presents clearly the difficulties faced:

“...The MedWet project is conceived as a long-term initiative, jointly undertaken by a dozen signatories and beneficiaries of the contract: governmental services, international and non-governmental organisations, with the collaboration of the European Commission. Despite the very different traditions and ways of functioning of these institutions, but given the common strong will not to create a new cumbersome structure, but to keep MedWet small, and to rely on the participating organisations to carry out the actual work, bureaucratic procedures have deliberately kept to a minimum, relying mainly on human contacts.

To create a unified approach and strategy, by involving the administration of five countries and several non-governmental organisations is a huge task. It is therefore not surprising that the coordination of the project does take time and efforts, and has to overcome many administrative and institutional hurdles. Regular communication, officially, and on a more informal basis, between the members of the Steering Committee, the Coordination Group, the Secretariat and the project executants have so far succeeded in assuring smooth coordination of the project, albeit this necessitates regular and mutual efforts by all partners involved. In this way, the sub-project coordinators and executants have so far been able to adapt their functioning rapidly to a continuously changing multilateral political and administrative context...”



Venice (Italy)

Venice (1996): Consolidation

In the framework of MedWet1, a new Strategy for Mediterranean Wetlands had been prepared, based on the Ramsar Strategic Plan, which provided its legitimacy. Although drafted by Thymio Papayannis and Mike Smart, the final text was debated by all 10 of the MedWet1 Steering Committee members (the EC, the Ramsar Bureau, five states and three international NGOs). Thus, when it was brought in front of the Pan-Mediterranean Wetland Conference that closed the MedWet1 project (Venice, June 1996)²⁵, the Strategy had considerable support from all sides, and was readily endorsed, with some modifications.

Shortly after, a second project started, MedWet2, for extending the MedWet1 results to five non-EU member states (Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Morocco and Tunisia). This € 1.1 million project, initially planned two years earlier so as to coincide with the final phase of MedWet1, was finally approved under the LIFE Third Countries line only in 1996 and was completed in March 1998, which caused various difficulties. The project was managed by the Ramsar Bureau²⁶, while the five states involved were the executants, with technical support from various MedWet partners.

Besides the use and adaptation of the MedWet tools, and actions on five specific sites, MedWet2 included a new component, a first approach to the socio-economic aspects of wetlands (see section on *Social and cultural aspects* in Chapter 2)²⁷.

In spite of enormous difficulties (due mainly to the EC financial and administrative requirements and the inability of participating states to satisfy them fully) and the limited funds available, the project bore good results, established solidarity among the countries and organisations involved, and was selected by the EC as one of their model projects.

It was at the Venice Conference that the idea of MedWet not as a series of projects of limited duration, but as a long-term collaboration system, gained general acceptance. Already the 10 MedWet1 partners had agreed on the following characteristics of this system, which remain applicable to similar initiatives even today:

- the system should assure the equitable participation of commit-

²⁵ Chaired by Delmar Blasco, Secretary General of the Convention on Wetlands.

²⁶ Thymio Papayannis acted as co-ordinator, while Paulette Kennedy was the administrator of the project.

²⁷ See Benessaiah 1997.

ted organisations, both from the public and the private sectors, both governmental and non-governmental. This is the crucial element, as all sides are necessary for reaching the goal of reversing wetland loss and degradation in the Mediterranean ;

- it should be non-exclusive as to its participants, and should try to build bridges with all relevant activities in the Mediterranean, international, national or local, in order to avoid duplication and attain the highest degree of synergy ;
- it should retain an independence from direct political constraints, and should handle all issues in an objective and impartial way, always based upon sound scientific, technical and social analysis ;
- it should avoid any form of rigidity, and should develop a high degree of efficiency and flexibility in its internal organisation ;
- it should operate with minimal administrative costs, using as much as possible existing and well-established national and international institutions.

The ground had been laid three months earlier by the Recommendation 6.11 on Mediterranean wetlands²⁸, unanimously approved by the 6th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Brisbane, Australia, March 1996), which noted the innovative character of MedWet²⁹.

During the Venice Conference, at informal gatherings, the future of MedWet was debated. It was clear that MedWet had to be placed under the aegis of an existing organisation, which would ensure its legitimacy and continuity. Various options were discussed, but the Convention on Wetlands was unanimously selected for the following reasons:

- its precise mandate was the conservation and wise use of wetlands ;
- it had played up to that point a major and highly supportive role in MedWet ;
- although its membership was governmental, it encouraged the substantial participation of responsible NGOs as privileged partners ;

The Ramsar Bureau accepted gladly this responsibility. As a concrete first step, it introduced to the Convention's Standing Committee a proposal for the establishment of a Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, consisting of intergovernmental organisations, Mediterranean states and entities and international NGOs and wetland centres. Chaired by the Secretary General of the Convention, MedWet/Com would be an advisory body to supervise and guide the work of MedWet. The proposal was approved in October 1996, thus creating the first structure for MedWet within the Convention.



Kerkini Lake (Greece)

During the next year, a new MedWet Secretariat was established at EKBY in Thessaloniki, with generous funding from the Greek government. In addition, WWF International provided to the Ramsar Bureau the necessary funds to appoint a MedWet Co-ordinator for 1997-1998³⁰. This support continued in 1999-2000 through a direct contribution to the Bureau by the MAVA Foundation.



Photo from MedWet2 work

Most of the work focused on the successful completion of the MedWet2 project, but also on the establishment of MedWet/Com. Contacts were made with states and organisations to ensure their participation and support. The very positive responses obtained, demonstrated the general awareness of the need for international collaboration in the region and the readiness to overcome national insularities and suspicions.

Thessaloniki (1998): Structuring



First Meeting of MedWet/Com in Thessaloniki (Greece)

With the support and funding of the Greek government, the first meeting of MedWet/Com was held in Thessaloniki in March 1998, organised by EKBY. Already membership included 20 states, three conventions (Barcelona, Bern and Ramsar), the European Commission and 7 NGOs and wetland centres³¹. The meeting approved the Committee's "Rules of procedure", debated the implementation of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy, and evaluated the programme and priorities of the MedWet Initiative for the next two years.

In a separate technical session, the participants reviewed the issue of restoration of wetlands and of their functions. The meeting was concluded with a field trip to the site of the large Carla Lake in Central Greece, drained in the '60s and now planned to be restored to a large extent.

During the same year, the MedWet Team was established, consisting of the Co-ordinator and the three wetland centres involved in MedWet work, EKBY in Thessaloniki, SEHUMED in Valencia (joining in 1998) and Tour du Valat in the Camargue, France.

²⁸ Introduced by Spain, following a presentation in plenary by Italy's Alessandro Russi and Thymio Papayannis.

²⁹ See Addendum 2, p. 93.

³⁰ Thymio Papayannis was proposed for this post by France, Greece, Tour du Valat, Wetlands International and WWF International and was appointed by the Ramsar Secretary General.

³¹ BirdLife International, EKBY, IUCN, SEHUMED, Tour du Valat, Wetlands International and WWF International.

Valencia to Djerba (1999-2000): Growth and expansion

The second meeting of MedWet/Com was grandly hosted by Spain in the Beneficencia Centre in Valencia in February 1999, organised by SEHUMED. Membership of the Committee had increased since the past year and the participants had doubled to about 60. The technical session was devoted to tourism and wetlands. World Wetland Day 1999 in Spain was also officially celebrated during the meeting with an event presided over by the Minister for the Environment, Isabel Tocino.

In the meanwhile, the very large GEF / FFEM MedWetCoast project (US\$ 15.5 million) had been approved³². It concerns wetland and coastal areas in Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority, and aims at strengthening capacities through the use of MedWet-developed tools and reinforcing the institutions at local and national level. Its Facilitation Unit was established at Tour du Valat.

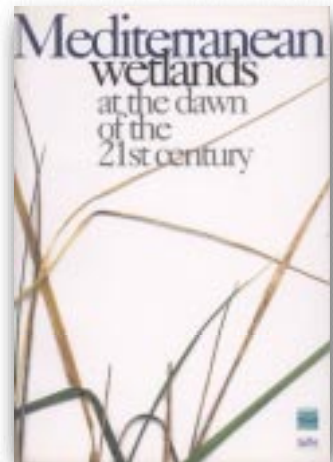
During the year, activities focused on the preparations for Ramsar COP7 (San José, Costa Rica, May 1999). A book on Mediterranean wetlands³³ was published and an exhibition stand on MedWet designed and constructed. An informal Mediterranean meeting was organised with great success, in a friendly and constructive climate. Perhaps as a result, a new Resolution on Mediterranean collaboration was voted, which rendered official the MedWet structure and designated this initiative as a model of regional collaboration for the Convention³⁴.

Strong partnerships started being developed, mainly with the Barcelona Convention and the Regional Activity Centres of UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan; primarily with the Centre for Special Protection Areas in Tunis (RAC-SPA) and secondarily with the centre for Priority Action Programmes in Split (RAC-PAP) and the Plan Bleu in Sophia Antipolis (RAC-PB). This collaboration resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Barcelona and Ramsar Conventions on 11 February 2001. In addition, MedWet was elected member of the Mediterranean Committee on Sustainable Development, established by the Barcelona Convention, for the period 1999-2001.

Yet some of the past partnerships did not continue on an active level for a variety of reasons, mainly financial and institutional. Thus the strong initial collaboration with Wetlands International and WWF International decreased considerably after 1996, while



Second Meeting of MedWet/Com in Valencia (Spain)



"Mediterranean wetlands at the dawn of the 21st century"

joint activities with BirdLife were discussed and agreed, but never launched. In the case of Wetlands International, this was the result of a policy decision that regional initiatives were better placed to implement MedWet after its establishment and that their limited resources should be better directed elsewhere, an argument which might also be true for the other two organisations mentioned. In any case, all three continued to participate in MedWet/Com and their guidance has always been invaluable.



Third Meeting of MedWet/Com in Djerba (Tunisia)



MedWet/Com3 field visit to the National Park of Bou Hedma (Tunisia)

On the positive side, efforts started in 2000 for the establishment of the Med-Wet/Regions³⁵ network, co-ordinated by Tour du Valat. Today, the network consists of 9 regions from France, Italy and Spain. On the other hand, the planned networks of sites has not yet materialised, as there no organisation has been found willing to act as a catalyst, while the national NGOs network is having a slow start due to internal reorganisation in the lead agency, WWF MedPO.

The third meeting of MedWet/Com (and the first on the South shore of the Mediterranean) was held on the island of Djerba in Tunisia in April 2000, organised by the Tunisian General Direction of Forests and the Tunis Office of WWF³⁶. Membership of the Committee had increased to include all of the 25 Mediterranean range states, as well as UNDP, and participation exceeded 100 persons. Organising a meeting in a developing country had many positive implications, but also presented certain administrative and especially financial difficulties, which demonstrated the need for dedicated resources, especially to cover the costs of sponsored representatives.

During the meeting, discussions on the financial sustainability of MedWet did not reach a unanimous conclusion, and further consideration was agreed. However, as Thymio Papayannis, after 10 years of active involvement in MedWet, had announced his desire to be replaced in the post of MedWet Co-ordinator by the end of the year, a solution had to be found rather rapidly.

In Djerba, the technical session introduced the issue of the cultural values of wetlands, which has recently become a major new

³² Developed since 1995, the project brought together MedWet, represented by Tour du Valat, and the *Conservatoire du Littoral*.

³³ Papayannis, Th. and T. Salathé (1999), *Mediterranean wetlands at the dawn of the 21st century*, MedWet / Tour du Valat, Ramsar Bureau, Le Sambuc, Arles, France, 138 pp.

³⁴ See Addendum 2, p. 93.

³⁵ The term "Regions" here means sub-national units.

³⁶ Assisted by Nejib Benessaiah.

concern of the Convention on Wetlands³⁷, and has created wide interest. Its conclusions have provided the basis for recent work of the Convention in this area, on the global level.

Various discussions were held during the rest of the year, and two proposals for hosting and funding the MedWet Co-ordination during 2001 and 2002 were submitted by Spain and Greece. Finally Spain offered to withdraw its proposal to facilitate a decision, and the Greek one was accepted by the Standing Committee of the Convention in October 2000.

During the same year, MedWet was invited to become a member of the Global Water Partnership (GWP) in the Mediterranean, and is now a core member of GWP-Med, its regional organisation, assisting in its establishment and structure.

Unfortunately, Greek administrative procedures proved to be very slow, and the promised funding was made available only in late 2001. Thus, the new MedWet Co-ordinator, Spyros Kouvelis, assisted by Policy Advisor Nejib Benessaiah, could start work only on 15 July 2001, and until that time Thymio Papayannis remained as acting co-ordinator. The MedWet Co-ordination Unit, the first outposted regional office of the Ramsar Bureau, was finally established in a prestigious building in Athens and was inaugurated³⁸ on 21 November 2001.

Sesimbra (2001): Building for the future

In May, the fourth MedWet/Com meeting was hosted by the Portuguese government in the coastal village of Sesimbra, close to the Sado Estuary. The meeting was efficiently organised by ICN. It proved to be a very significant event, with in depth discussion of MedWet priorities and of the necessary resources for dealing with them effectively.

The technical session focused on the sustainability and the traditional aspects of Mediterranean salinas, thus enriching the theme of cultural values. A MedWet working group on salinas was also established.

The transition in the MedWet Co-ordination required a considerable effort. It did not stop, however, MedWet actions concerning:

- new projects (a LIFE Third Countries project proposal was submitted for the North African Wetland Network);



Villa Kazoulli in Athens, home of the new MedWet Co-ordination Unit



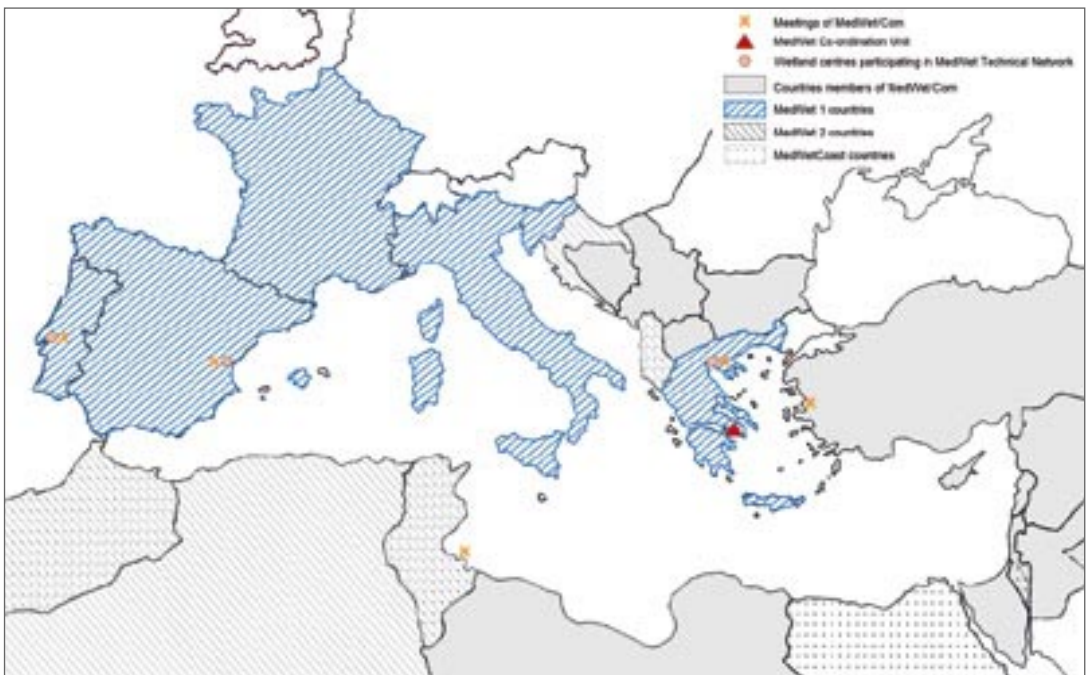
Fourth Meeting of MedWet/Com in Sesimbra (Portugal)



Field visit to Sado Estuary and its salinas

- new transboundary initiatives (first meeting on Dojran Lake was convened by MedWet between Greece and the FYR of Macedonia);
- preparations for the Mediterranean presence at Ramsar COP8;
- contribution to the work programme of GWP-Med through a proposal of Local Dialogue on Water, Food and Environment (involving Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia).

At the 26th meeting of the Standing Committee (Gland, 3-7 December 2001), a proposal for funding the MedWet Co-ordination was discussed in a favourable climate, but the issue was postponed for 2002, for COP8 and a final decision.



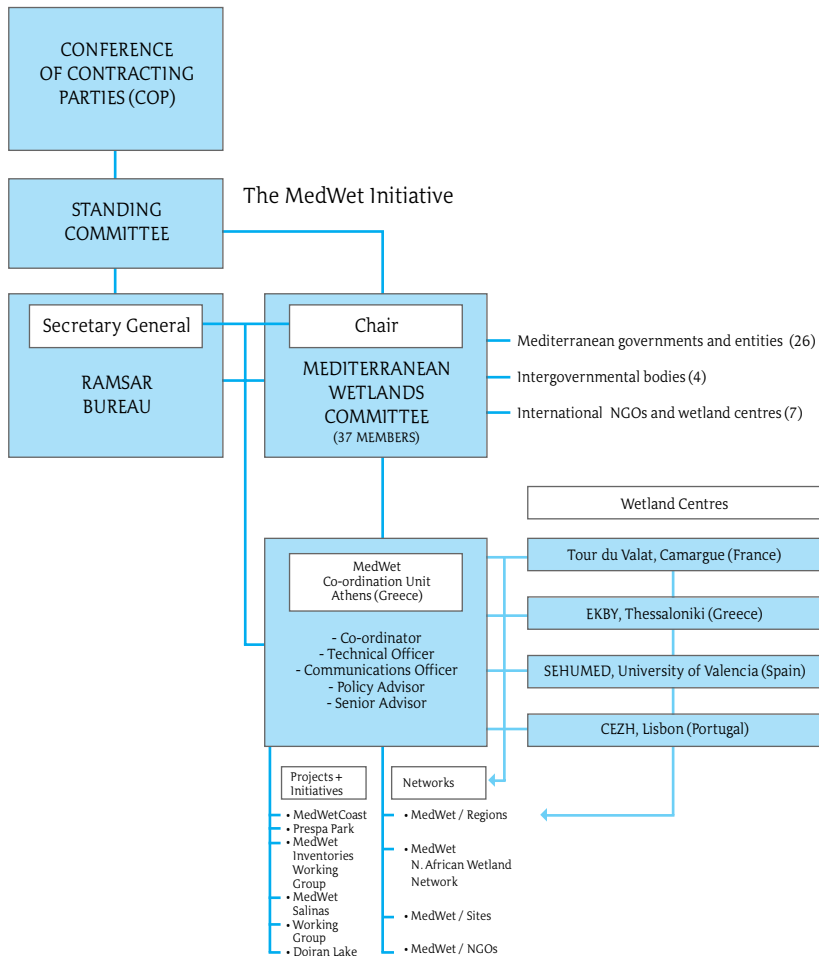
III. 3: A MedWet geography

³⁷ It will be the theme of Technical Session 5 during Ramsar COP8 (Valencia, Spain, November 2002).

³⁸ By the Greek State Secretary for the Environment and the Ramsar Secretary General.

Mediterranean Collaboration on Wetlands

Convention on Wetlands
(Ramsar, 1971)



III. 4: Present structure of MedWet

A collaboration structure

The structure of MedWet has evolved in three phases:

- 1991-1996 Co-ordination Group (Five members and a chairman).
- 1996-2001 MedWet/Com, plus MedWet Co-ordinator (Ramsar Bureau staff member), assisted by three wetland centres.
- 2001- MedWet Co-ordination Unit, as outposted part of the Ramsar Bureau, under MedWet/Com, and various networks.

Its current structure, as illustrated in the organigramme of III. 4, is briefly described below. Some parts of it are not yet fully operational or may be modified in the months to come.

The decision-making organs are:

- the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) of the Convention on Wetlands;
- the Standing Committee of the Convention (SC).

The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, consisting of all the 25 states in the region (which are also Ramsar Contracting Parties) and the Palestinian Authority, and a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and wetland centres, is an advisory and supervisory body. It is chaired by the Secretary General of the Convention.

The MedWet Co-ordination Unit (at present established in Athens) consists of:

- the MedWet Co-ordinator, appointed by the Secretary General in consultation with the Advisory Board of MedWet/Com;
- a Technical Officer;
- an Information and Communications Officer;
- Advisors or consultants, as required.

The MedWet Technical Network (*Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat*, Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre – EKBY, *Sede para el estudio de los humedales mediterráneos* – SEHUMED, and Portuguese Wetland Centre – CEZH), which provides the core technical and scientific and communications support to the Co-ordination Unit and to most MedWet activities.

In addition, a number of MedWet-established networks have been planned to allow much wider participation of stakeholders in the work of MedWet and to benefit from its activities. They include :

- MedWet/Regions (9 regions of France, Italy and Spain);
- North African Wetland Network (under establishment, with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia participating at present);
- MedWet/NGOs (which will bring together national NGOs active on wetland issues);
- MedWet/Sites (which will cover wetland sites involved in MedWet activities).

In addition, other collaborating institutions and organisations participate in MedWet/Com and support the MedWet programme. These include the European Commission, UNDP, the Barcelona and Bern Conventions, BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International and WWF International.

The structure may appear at a first glance to be complicated, but it brings together most of the stakeholders in the region and is planned to remain effective and economical.



The Huelva wetlands (Spain)

Chapter 2:

Case studies on MedWet activities

During the past 10 years, there have been very many actions initiated by MedWet, carried out directly by MedWet, or involving MedWet. Full information on them can be obtained from :

- the final reports of the MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects;
- the detailed yearly reports submitted to the four meetings of MedWet/Com;
- various MedWet publications.

In this chapter, however, certain actions are presented in an integrated and critical manner, as they might provide useful lessons for other similar efforts. We have tried to present successes modestly and not to dissimulate failures, which may be equally valuable in providing experience for the future.

Preparing methods and tools

The informal group that launched MedWet at Grado and beyond consisted mainly of wetland (and waterbird) experts, which represented organisations already involved in wetland management and conservation. It is natural, therefore, that their first approach to the challenges was technical and the initial priorities agreed concerned methods and tools.

During the preparation of the MedWet1 proposal, which was based on the Action Plan already developed, certain areas were identified as needing immediate attention and were included in the project brief. Ten years later, it is interesting to review the rationale behind these choices, as finally included in the project contract (see following box). In all fairness, it should be noted that the distribution of funds among the different areas was not properly balanced, and that the development of some of the tools was not quite cost effective.

Objectives of the MedWet1 project³⁹

The wetlands of the Mediterranean biogeographic region are today subjected to particularly strong pressures. These are due, on the one hand on human uses incompatible with the conservation of nature, such as the intensification of agriculture, and of some forms of aquaculture, urbanisation, infrastructures, tourism and leisure activities, and on the other the abandonment or changes of traditional uses that had contributed to the maintenance of an environment favouring nature conservation.

In the past, especially in recent years, large parts of these zones have been lost, either because of drainage, or because of other transformations that have ignored their value for the conservation of nature. These events have been aggravated by regional ecologic conditions, notably of the regime of precipitations. In general, the conclusion is that none of these zones can be sacrificed for uses or functions other than those appropriate for wetlands and compatible with nature conservation. It has been recognised that such wetlands should be subjected to integrated management.

In order to face the existing serious menaces and achieve the objectives of nature conservation and integrated management, it is appropriate to establish a regional strategy for Mediterranean wetlands. As a first contribution to this large scale objective, the Mediterranean members states of the European Union, as well as international and non-governmental organisations, have prepared a project for a co-ordinated action in favour of Mediterranean wetlands. this project has been prepared in collaboration with the Commission, and on the basis of various preparatory actions, including those launched by the Commission.

The aims of this action are:

- the establishment of a forum with a technical orientation, in which will be represented the five EU-member states, those responsible for the various sectors of the project and the Commission; this forum could serve as well as an organ of consultation, of collaboration and of co-ordination in relation to the efforts and interventions of governments, and international and non-governmental organisations pertaining to wetlands; the forum could be open as appropriate to non-EU partners, which would thus include stakeholders from the entire Mediterranean Basin;
- the organisation, at the end of this project, of a conference of all those Mediterranean stakeholders involved in wetlands, on its results;
- the development and testing of a the most appropriate methodology for the inventory of wetlands, as well as of a corresponding manual;
- the same for the monitoring of their ecological parameters ;
- the establishment of expertise, the analysis of successful examples, the organisation of workshops and the preparation of a manual concerning wetland management;
- the establishment of expertise, the preparation of elements to be used, the planning and testing through pilot cases in France of a programme of studies concerning education and training on wetlands;

- the establishment of the necessary expertise, the analysis and preparation of means and material to be used, the organisation of campaigns focussing on all levels of the population and on decision-makers, notably in case studies in France, concerning public awareness on questions of conservation and the appropriate management of wetlands;
- the establishment of necessary expertise, the identification of missing information, the encouragement of co-operation among scientific institutions, and the testing – notably in France – concerning the efficient use of research results.

Wetland inventories and monitoring was an obvious first choice. It was necessary to know the wetland resources of the Mediterranean, thus setting baselines, and to be able to monitor their status, in order to evaluate trends and to document progress. The next section deals with this issue in greater detail.



Monitoring biodiversity in the Camargue

In addition, it was necessary to know the degree of ecological change suffered by wetlands. The combination of a large diversity of wetland types in the Mediterranean and a great variety of ecological changes (changes in wetland area, in water quality and quantity, over-exploitation of wetland resources, introduction of exotic species) generates a vast array of possible issues to monitor. Thus, a framework for planning monitoring programmes in Mediterranean wetlands was developed, being complemented by a description of the main monitoring indicators and techniques, an extensive bibliography and a number of case studies. All of this was published as a methodological guide [Tomàs Vives 1996].

Management of wetlands seemed also a priority, but it was soon discovered that it evoked different concepts to various people. There was considerable diversity as to the extent of management actions, from the facing of strictly technical problems to the control of anthropic activities in wetlands and their hydrological basins, and to the improvement of the legal and administrative situation. Each approach required different staffing, skills and tools. Also, there was considerable disagreement as to the ways to provide assistance. Thus under MedWet, diverse actions were carried out targeting wetland managers, such as:

- analysis of the legal and administrative frameworks in a number of countries, with proposals for their improvement [Morillo *et al* 1996];
- critical presentation of case studies of wetlands grouped in

³⁹ From the Technical Annex to its contract.

categories, which would allow wetland managers to search valuable information [Morillo *et al* 1996];

- a practical guidebook for wetland managers with detailed practical advice on specific matters [Bouvier *et al* 1996];
- training modules for management;
- booklets in the MedWet / Tour du Valat Publications that addressed issues of importance to wetland managers [see Bibliography].
- technical assistance for the development of site management plans.

The work produced proved useful, in spite of the fact that its dissemination was far from systematic. A lesson we learned here is that getting the methods and tools produced to those that need to apply them is a difficult task, that it should be planned as part of each project, and that sufficient resources must be allocated to it. In addition, it became clear that well-focused training is necessary for each method and tool. The many languages in the Mediterranean proved to be an additional difficulty. Efforts were made to produce all documents in at least English and French; however, translations in Arabic and Spanish and other Mediterranean languages (i.e. Catalan and Turkish) presented serious problems and were achieved only sporadically.

An additional weakness was that the various management tools were produced during MedWet1 by different organisations (mainly DGCN



Water buffalos crossing Kerkini Lake (Greece)



III. 5: Management plans initiated through MedWet



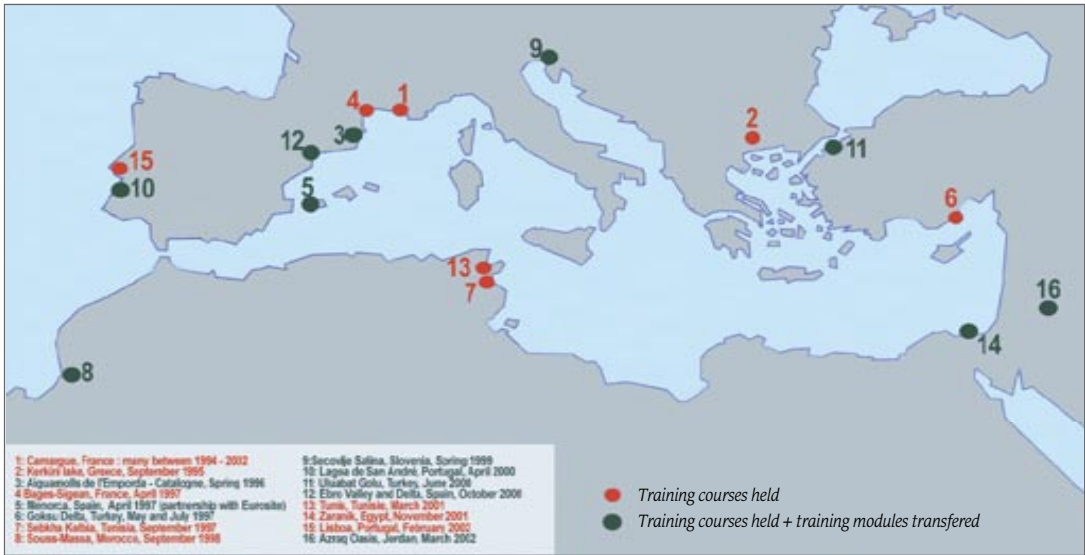
MedWet / Tour du Valat training modules

and Tour du Valat) and there was no possibility to integrate them in a well-structured “toolbox”. Perhaps this is a task to be carried out by the new MedWet Co-ordination Unit.

As capacity building for managing wetlands needed strengthening, training was considered as an important tool. A number of training modules were prepared (by Tour du Valat), and on their basis training courses were organised in various parts of the Basin. Participants included not only wetland managers, but decision-makers and staff involved with wetland policies. This is a process that is continuing up to the present.

Training modules

In the early days of MedWet, it quickly appeared that no organisation was carrying out specific wetland-related training in the Mediterranean. In this context it was decided, rather than establishing a Mediterranean training centre, to build training capacity in existing organisations in various countries, ensuring a faster and more efficient transfer. We thus focussed our efforts on people involved in wetland conservation and willing to train other people, and provided them with simple and clear training material aimed at enabling them to deliver a professional and targeted training course. These materials include (i) methodological and practical guides laying the basis of training organisation, and (ii) training modules on various key subjects⁴⁰, very easy to implement and adapt to different local contexts. This approach has revealed to be successful and a number of training modules have been adapted to local situations in different countries by people without prior training experience.



III. 6: Training activities organised by MedWet

⁴⁰ See Bibliography p. 87

Improving public awareness was considered as an absolute necessity. An innovative methodology was produced by WWF Italia as part of the MedWet1 project, which included a very careful evaluation process. It was tested in a number of pilot sites (both within and outside the European Union) with very positive results. After 1998, however, there was no organisation willing to continue work in this area, and thus there was no further progress in applying and improving the methodology. Now, with the launching of the Ramsar Outreach Programme by the COP in 1999, MedWet should join in the efforts that are being carried out to implement the Programme. This should include the designation and active involvement of governmental and non-governmental focal points on wetland education, communication and public awareness (CEPA), in all MedWet countries, as required by Resolution VII.9.

The decision to bring the latest scientific knowledge to those that manage wetlands in a user-friendly form proved very much needed. The 11 booklets prepared so far within the continuing MedWet / Tour du Valat Publications Series were based on the latest results of applied research in each field, but were written in a straightforward and easily understood manner. These booklets deal with both general and specific themes relevant to Mediterranean wetlands conservation and seek to assist wetland managers and decision-makers in addressing concrete or more generic problems. They have been well-received and appreciated.

Here also, dissemination of the booklets was not planned in a systematic manner, so that they could reach all those that might benefit from them. Certainly in the future Internet distribution could provide the answer. The problem of languages as well was not fully resolved. All booklets were published in English and French, with one only in Spanish. Efforts are being made at present to have the main ones translated into Arabic (by SEHUMED), and actually two have been completed.

After MedWet1, a number of other tools were developed, especially on:

- the socio-economic aspects of wetlands (see section below);
- participation of local populations in wetland management;
- protocols for water sampling;
- guidelines for sustainable tourism;
- method for inventorying cultural values.



Characteristic publications in the MedWet / Tour du Valat series

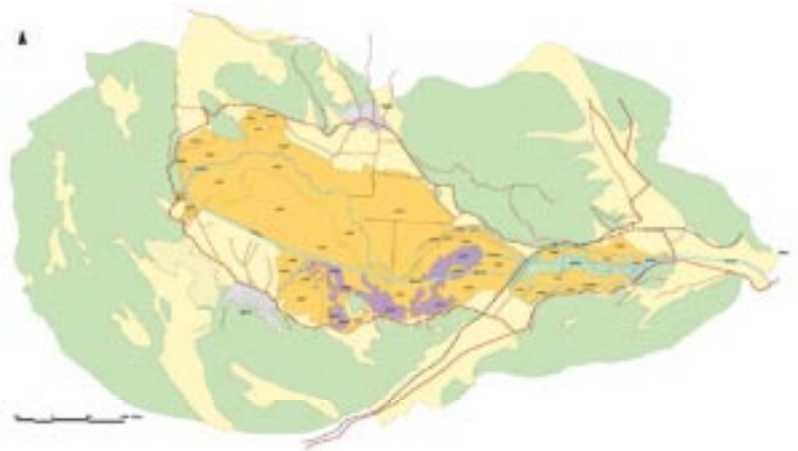


Secovlje Salinas (Slovenia)

Towards a common knowledge of Mediterranean wetlands

One of the noble goals formulated during the Grado Symposium was to work towards an integrated inventory of all Mediterranean wetlands, which would permit a full and objective knowledge of their status and conditions. A survey concerning inventories in the Mediterranean, carried out during MedWet1 [Hecker and Tomàs Vives 1995], demonstrated that there was no widely accepted system, even on the classification of wetlands, and very few national inventories had been carried out, and those with widely different approaches.

Wetlands International and ICN, the Portuguese Institute of Nature Conservation, later joined by EKBY, the Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre, and by the *Institut Scientifique de Rabat*, and supported by an international scientific advisory group, undertook the task of developing a new inventory system for the region [Costa *et al* 1996]. The first step was to define the data sets to be completed and to be used for an efficient characterisation of Mediterranean wetlands, their values and functions. It was consequently required to develop a wetland classification system based on the existing experience in the Mediterranean countries, the European Union and else where [Farinha *et al* 1996]. Data fields were selected according to the specificities of Mediterranean wetlands and the needs of wetland inventories [Hecker *et al* 1996]. Dictionaries of habitats, species, human activities, impacts, designations, administrative divisions, etc. were imported from the Natura 2000 / CORINE-Biotopes database, and criteria and typology from the Ramsar convention were adopted. In this way, compatibility with both the Natura 2000 and Ramsar systems was guaranteed.



Ill. 7: Habitat map of a Greek Wetland according to MedWet classification

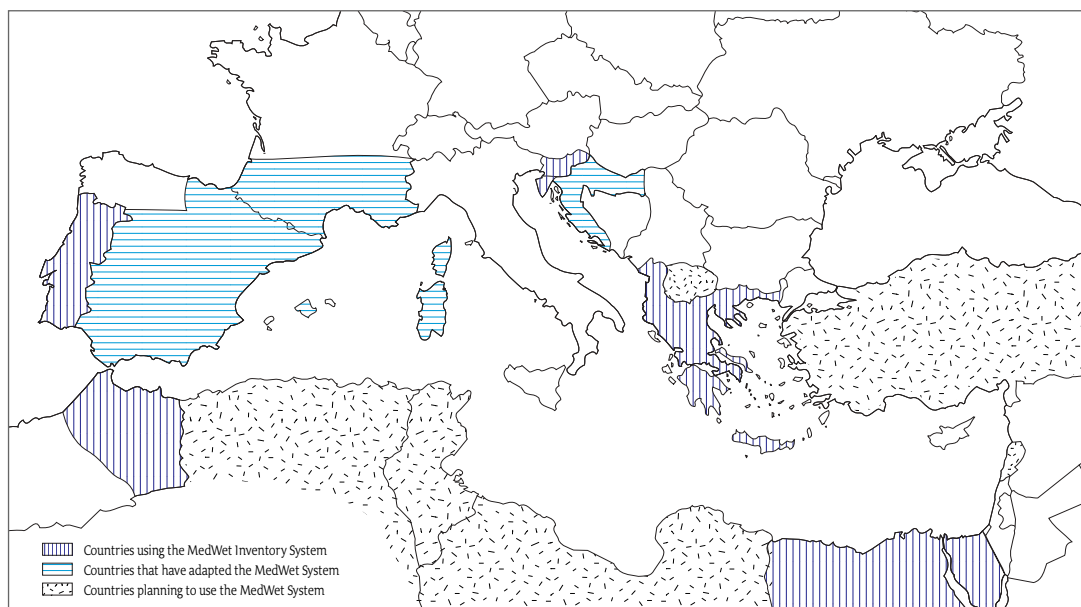
A habitat description system was developed based on that used for the US Wetland Inventory⁴¹ [Farinha *et al* 1996]. Conventions for photo-interpretation and mapping [Zalidis *et al* 1996] were also prepared and tested. The method was completed by a database software and manual [Tomàs Vives 1996] to allow storage of all the data in an electronic format; the database was based on a previous model developed by the Asian Wetland Bureau in Indonesia.

The MedWet Inventory System was widely tested with positive results in a number of countries (Portugal, Morocco, Greece) and more locally, at certain sites in France, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. The final MedWet Inventory tools were published in 1996 in five volumes of guidance, data entry forms, the habitat description system and an electronic database⁴². The system operates on the following three levels, with an ease of movement among them:

- catchment area (or hydrological basin);
- wetland sites;
- specific habitats within each site.

It has been conceived not only as a means to register in a systematic way current knowledge on wetlands, but also as a tool providing useful baseline information for management, allowing in depth understanding of the situation in each wetland and assessing the impact of management measures.

The MedWet Inventory System was presented officially during the Mediterranean Workshop at Ramsar COP7 in May 1999 and in the Pan-European Ramsar Meeting in October 2001. It has been adopted by Portugal, Slovenia, Greece and Albania, and a number of other European countries, while somewhat modified versions are being used in France and Spain. In 2001 MedWet has signed an agreement with the Libyan government to assist in the use of the System for the national wetland inventory in that country. The six countries involved in the MedWet/Coast project (Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and the Palestine Authority) are applying the system. Other countries (such as Algeria and Turkey), as well as the regions participating in the MedWet/Regions network, have expressed their willingness to use the system. In addition, strong interest was shown from states in Africa and South America⁴³. In addition, the Ramsar STRP has been considering the MedWet System as one of the possible models for global use, while the Regional Activity Centre for Special Protection Areas (RAC/SPA) of UNEP/MAP has proposed to use the MedWet methodology as a basis for a common typology of coastal wetlands.



III. 8: Towards a Mediterranean Wetlands Inventory

In the meanwhile, the tools of the System were being refined, and mainly the database that needed to be adapted to the information technology progress. During 2001, EKBV prepared a new version of the MedWet Database, on a Microsoft Visual Basic platform that is user-friendly and includes a number of important new features such as:

- the incorporation of time series, so that consecutive inventories of the same site can be carried out and compared;
- addition of map display and spatial find elements.

This was presented during the MedWet/Com4 meeting in Sesimbra, in May and created strong interests from many sides.

A growing demand for the use of the MedWet Inventory System created difficulties in providing the required services to the future users, and especially training of national staff. After the end of MedWet1 and MedWet2, there was no organisational framework and appropriate funds to carry out support functions, and this impeded the rapid spread of the system.

In late 2000⁴⁴, a structure was agreed among all the organisations involved establishing:

⁴¹ As described in: Cowardin L.M., V. Carter, F.C. Golet and E.T. Caroe (1979), *Classification of wetlands and deepwater habitats of the United States*, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington DC, USA.

⁴² There has been such a high demand for these publications that most are now out of print, but available from the Wetlands International web site http://www.wetlands.org/pubs/wetland_pub.html.

⁴³ Such as Columbia in South America, South Africa, and in West Africa Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Niger and Togo.

⁴⁴ At the 5th Meeting of the MedWet Team, held in Thessaloniki on 10-12 December 2000.

- a MedWet Inventories Working Group (IWG), based in Portugal and headed by ICN, to plan and promote the use of the System;
- a Database Technical Unit, within EKBY in Thessaloniki, with a responsibility for the refinement of the MedWet Database.

It is hoped that within 2002 the MedWet IWG and the MWD Technical Unit will be able to provide the technical tools and advice required to all potential users. This will be helped by the recent establishment in Lisbon of the Portuguese Wetland Centre, where the MedWet IWG is based, with the assistance of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit.

The MedWet Inventory System has also been adopted as a basic tool by the MedWetCoast project. In this context, a training workshop on the use of the System was held in Lisbon, in February 2002. Participants included not only experts from the countries involved in MedWetCoast, but also interested individuals from other parts of the Mediterranean.

It is clear now that this System has proven highly successful, but that it needs strong administrative, technical and financial support, if the goal of obtaining a common Inventory of Mediterranean Wetlands by the year 2010 is to be reached.

Networking

The development of the MedWet Inventory System illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the MedWet approach. From the very first beginning, MedWet was not seen as a structure, but as a catalyst, a co-ordination mechanism that would bring together existing organisations and initiatives to focus on crucial wetlands issues, in order to create synergy. As a result, the conscious choice was made that it should rely on existing organisations, inter-governmental, governmental or NGOs.

That is why the core MedWet structure has always been minimal. In the first period until 1996 the co-ordination of MedWet was done on a voluntary and part-time basis⁴⁵. The existence of a Secretariat in Rome assisted greatly, but the distance from Athens to Rome created additional difficulties. Only in 1997 a co-ordinator was appointed on a professional basis, thanks to a financial contribution of the NGO sector. Again he was established in Athens with a Secretariat this time in Thessaloniki, with similar difficulties.

The new Co-ordination Unit established in Athens in 2001 combines the co-ordinator and the policy advisor with the two other professionals seconded by EKBY, all located at its premises in Athens. Its creation was decided as a step aiming not only to resolve the functional problems of the past, but also as a major step in the institutional establishment of MedWet as the first regional representation of the Ramsar Convention. To this end, not only the financial support provided by the MedWet countries, but also the political endorsement of the initiative are *sine qua non* conditions.

Practically all of the technical work of MedWet has been carried out by partner organisations. The core has been provided by three wetland centres (EKBY, SEHUMED and Tour du Valat). Efforts have started to establish a North African Wetland Network, and already Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have decided to participate. Also Portugal has announced the establishment of a Portuguese Wetland Centre (CEZH), which was inaugurated in February 2002 and has become a member of the MedWet Technical Network, soon to be joined by the North African counterpart. Each centre participating in the network will be able to use all of the MedWet tools, but also take the lead in certain areas and develop methods and tools for the whole Mediterranean Basin.

Table 3: Wetland centres involved in MedWet

Wetlan centre	Focal area
EKBY (founded in 1991)	Cartography and GIS Monitoring Restoration of wetlands Water management
SEHUMED (founded in 1997)	Water pollution Tourism and wetlands Cultural values of wetlands
Tour du Valat (founded in 1954)	Training Use of research results Management of wetlands
Portuguese Wetland Centre (just established)	Inventory of wetlands
North African Wetland Network (in progress)	Socio-economic issues Water resources management

⁴⁵ By the MedWet Co-ordination Group, whose chairman was based in Athens.

It must be mentioned here that the individual contribution of the three existing wetland centres to MedWet has been very substantial and often critical. In the next phase, an effort will be required to better harmonise the MedWet-related work carried out by each of the centres, in order to ensure that these efforts are mutually supportive and complementary.

A number of other organisations complemented the work of the three wetland centres. Thus ICN and Wetlands International played a key role in inventories. Collaboration with IUCN focused on the integrated management of hydrological basins. WWF was asked to lead on public awareness, in view of their previous involvement in MedWet1, but without any results yet. It is hoped now that WWF MedPO will co-ordinate, with its new freshwater officer, the MedWet/NGOs network, consisting of national organisations involved in wetland work. BirdLife International has agreed to develop a joint project on the conservation of wetland-related species, but little has been done on this yet. Of course, all these organisations, as well as the three wetland centres, are members of MedWet/Com. The conclusion is that there is a consistent willingness to collaborate from all those involved, however, a lot depends on the priorities and internal administrative and financial constraints of the partner organisations. The MedWet Co-ordination needs to devote considerable time and effort in making such joint ventures work and in taking up the slack at certain periods.

The Bern Convention played an important role in the first phases of MedWet. However, its capacity has decreased and during the last three years its contribution has been rather platonic. On the other hand, collaboration between MedWet and the Barcelona Convention started in 1992, but it has remained strong and is becoming more and more substantial, especially after the memorandum of understanding signed by UNEP Co-ordination Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Ramsar Bureau. Besides MedWet participation in the Mediterranean Committee on Sustainable Development under UNEP MAP during 2000-2001, the collaboration now focuses on the following specific activities :

- Libyan biodiversity programme run by RAC-SPA, in which MedWet covers the part concerning wetlands, including planning an inventory of Libyan wetlands;
- co-ordination on inventory work and use of the MedWet classification of wetlands by the Barcelona Convention in its SPAMI programme;
- participation in the guidance of the Biodiversity Strategic Action Programme, managed by RAC-SPA, including specific activities in the framework of the project.



III. 9: Collaborating organisations



Pumping station on Small Montlong, Camargue (France)

In addition, MedWet works closely with *Plan Bleu*, the Mediterranean Institute on Water (IME), the Centre for Environment and Development of Arab Regions and Europe (CEDARE) and the Mediterranean Water Network (MWN) on water issues in the framework of GWP-Med, as well as with PAP-RAC on integrated coastal management.

The participation of MedWet in GWP-Med, a network devoted to the integrated management of water resources in the region, is a strong indication of its acceptance as one of the key actors in the Mediterranean on wetland and water issues. Invited in May 2000, to become a core member of the Mediterranean Technical Advisory Committee of the Global Water Partnership (MEDTAC-GWP), MedWet took part diligently in its activities, assisted in preparing its rules of procedure, and organised the transition from MEDTAC to GWP-Med, which occurred during the second semester of 2001. At present, MedWet is focussing on the environmental impact of irrigated agriculture on wetlands, within the framework of the GWP-Med work plan for 2002, with Nejib Benessaiah leading the activities proposed.



Managing water levels in the Camargue, France

Perhaps the major network built by MedWet and the Ramsar Bureau is the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee. In Grado, this was conceived as a forum, bringing together all major stakeholders involved with wetlands in the region. It took seven years before this concept became a reality. According to its rules, approved in 1998, Med-Wet/Com has the following functions :

“The Committee shall provide advice and guidance to the Convention on Wetlands Bureau and to the MedWet Team on all matters pertaining to the Convention in the particular geographic region of the Mediterranean Basin, especially in relation to the implementation of the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy, and shall carry out such other functions entrusted to it by The Standing Committee of the Convention.

The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee will promote the co-ordination of wetland-related activities in the region, and will ensure communication and co-ordination with other relevant bodies. Its main aim is to build strong synergy in favour of wetland conservation and sustainable use, and to avoid duplication of other existing or projected initiatives.”

Its members are:

- governments of countries in the wider Mediterranean Region, irrespective of whether they are Ramsar Contracting Parties⁴⁶;
- other entities with an interest in the conservation and wise use of Mediterranean wetlands;
- intergovernmental and other international organisations with activities related to Mediterranean wetlands;
- federations or networks of national NGOs, or individual NGOs from Mediterranean countries (maximum of 1 per country) with a proven record of activities related to wetlands.

At present they include all 25 governments in the region, many international conventions and authorities, practically all major international NGOs active in the region and wetland centres. What is still missing is a greater representation of the donor community, which must be further cultivated, in spite of their usual wish to maintain a certain distance.

Table 4: States members of MedWet/Com

Ramsar Contracting Party	No sites	Area of sites (ha)	Date of accession
Albania	1	20000	29 Mar. 1996
Algeria	13	1866340	04 Mar. 1984
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	7411	23 Sep. 2001
Bulgaria	5	2803	24 Jan. 1976
Croatia	4	80455	25 Jun. 1991
Cyprus	1	1585	11 Nov. 2001
Egypt	2	105700	09 Sep. 1988
France	18	795085	01 Dec. 1986
Greece	10	163501	21 Dec. 1975
Israel	2	366	12 Mar. 1997
Italy	46	57136	14 Apr. 1977
Jordan	1	7372	10 May 1977
Lebanon	4	1075	16 Aug. 1999
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	2	NA	05 Aug. 2000
Malta	2	16	30 Jan. 1989
Monaco	1	10	20 Dec. 1997
Morocco	4	14350	20 Oct. 1980
Portugal	12	66096	24 Mar. 1981
Slovenia	2	955	25 Jun. 1991
Spain	38	158216	04 Sep. 1982
Syrian Arab Republic	1	10000	05 Jul. 1998
The FYR of Macedonia	1	18920	08 Sep. 1991
Tunisia	1	12600	24 Mar. 1981
Turkey	9	159300	13 Nov. 1994
Yugoslavia	4	39861	27 Apr. 1992



Traditional fish traps in the Biguglia Lagoon, Corsica (France)

Interest in MedWet/Com has been considerable, as demonstrated by the general willingness of member countries to host its meetings (Greece in 1998, Spain in 1999, Tunisia in 2000, Portugal in 2001, Turkey in 2003⁴⁷).

The success of a regional wetlands committee depends on a number of key factors. In the case of MedWet/Com, they were the following:

first, MedWet/Com had to become involved in substantial discussions and gain the assurance that its advice is really heeded in the guidance of MedWet. To achieve this, careful preparation of meetings was required, good information flow and transparent and objective reporting;

second, MedWet/Com members, and particularly states, should not consider their membership as limited to attending a yearly meeting, but as entailing active participation in the activities of MedWet. In the past decade, naturally some members have shown intense interest during certain periods, which might decrease in others, usually for internal political, administrative or financial reasons. Still there are members that have been consistently active, while a few others only nominally present. It is these last cases that merit the attention and encouragement of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit, so that they can participate more actively in the future.

Already membership in MedWet/Com has approached forty; it is becoming cumbersome and cannot continue to grow indefinitely. The question then is how to involve other important stakeholders in the MedWet Initiative. In response, a proposal has been approved by MedWet/Com3 in 2000 for initiating the establishment of three new MedWet networks. These networks would be co-ordinated by one of their members and would be represented through this member in MedWet/Com.

Tour du Valat offered to assist in the preparatory work for a MedWet/Regions Network, bringing together all the sub-national institutions that had a degree of autonomy and responsibility for wetlands in their area. At present the network consists of 9 regions⁴⁸ and it has held various meetings between 2000 and 2002. At

⁴⁶ Today, all of them are Ramsar Contracting Parties.

⁴⁷ No MedWet/Com meeting has been planned in 2002 due to the preparations for Ramsar COP8, in which an informal Mediterranean workshop will be organised.

⁴⁸ France: Languedoc-Roussillon, Corsica, PACA, Spain: Andalusia, Balearic Islands, Catalonia, Murcia, Valencia, Italy: Toscana.

its first meetings, it has decided to focus on the collection and dissemination of information related to wetlands and to develop a related project for funding under Interreg III B that will be co-ordinated by the Balearic Islands. Morocco, through the work carried out in MedWetCoast will participate in the network.

WWF MedPO volunteered to organise a **MedWet/NGOs Network** that would consist of national organisations, with a demonstrated track record of wetland activities. Unfortunately, there have been delays in funding the post of Freshwater Officer, who was only selected in mid 2002. It is hoped, therefore, that it will soon be possible to launch the network during the year.

The third, **MedWet/Sites Network**, would consist of sites that had participated in MedWet activities (such as the 14 sites of MedWet1 and MedWet2 and the 15 sites of MedWetCoast). Membership would allow exchange of information and know-how and a general effort for improving their management, so that finally it would become a quality classification. No organisation has offered to undertake this task, and it should be now up to the MedWet Co-ordination Unit to launch it as soon as feasible.

Transboundary collaboration

Regional initiatives, such as MedWet, can play a catalytic role in encouraging collaboration on transboundary wetland sites. On one level, they can provide momentum and administrative and technical support, in overcoming bureaucratic inertia. On the political level, however, a regional initiative operating in the framework of an international convention can create a climate of equity and neutrality, build up confidence, and assist governments to abandon initial reservations.

A characteristic example is the case of the **Prespa Lakes**, a unique wetland with very high biodiversity and rich cultural heritage⁴⁹. In 1999, the Society for the Protection of Prespa⁵⁰ submitted to the government of Greece a proposal for establishing a transboundary park, bringing together Albania, Greece and the FYR of Macedonia. MedWet, which was involved from the very beginning, contacted the three governments and convinced them of the need for rapid action. Thus on 2 February 2000, the three prime ministers met in the Aghios Germanos village in Prespa, on the occasion



*Signalisation at Aiguamolls de l'Empordà
MedWet1 pilot site in Catalunya (Spain)*



Mikro Prespa Lake (Greece)

of the World Wetland Day celebration, to announce the establishment of the Prespa Park, in the presence of the Ramsar Secretary General and other dignitaries.

But this momentous announcement was not immediately followed by action. A few months later, during the MedWet/Com3 meeting in Djerba, the three government representatives were invited to discuss the next steps. As again there was general agreement but perhaps a degree of inertia, in October MedWet took the initiative to convene a meeting of the three sides in Tirana (funded by Ramsar and chaired by its Secretary General). The meeting was very successful, as it agreed on a collaboration system and established the Prespa Park Co-ordination Committee, consisting of representatives of the central governments, the local communities and the NGOs, with MedWet as an observer, as well as a Secretariat.

⁴⁹ Prespa includes significant colonies of *Pelecanus crispus* and *P. onocrotalus* (currently about 500 pairs), as well as major Byzantine monuments. There are Ramsar Sites on both the Greek and the Macedonian side.

⁵⁰ Encouraged by the Ramsar Award it received the same year, during COP7 in Costa Rica.

Since then, the Co-ordination Committee has met several times, overcoming political difficulties in the area, and building capacity and a solid co-operation structure. It is completing a strategic action plan for the whole Prespa region, and is developing a GEF project and other activities, with the assistance of UNDP and of the German and Greek governments.

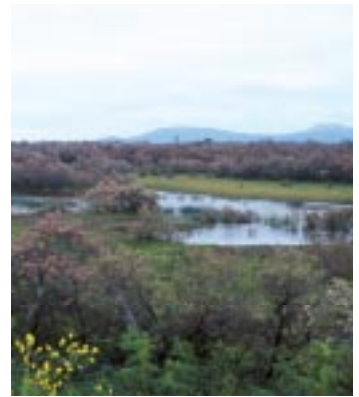
The success of the Prespa model encouraged MedWet to proceed with similar efforts. Thus a project was developed in 2001 with Wetlands International as the leader and the support of MedWet for the co-operation of Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey on the **Evros / Maritsa / Meric River**. The river is a sensitive militarily frontier zone with strong military presence and serious diplomatic difficulties must be overcome. In the case of **Dojran Lake**, shared by Greece and the FYR of Macedonia, a first meeting between experts and decision-makers of the two countries was convened by MedWet at EKBY in Thessaloniki, in December 2001, laying the foundations for long-term collaboration, focussing on water resources. In January 2002, MedWet encouraged the collaboration between Croatia and Slovenia on the joint management of the **Dragonja River**.

In the framework of the MedWet2 project, the **Neretva River** delta was selected as a case study. At that time, in early 1998, the concept of a wider initiative covering the whole river and all wetlands associated with it was first formulated, bringing together Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which shared its flow, and efforts started to encourage it. Thus MedWet contributed to the efforts of the Ramsar Bureau to facilitate the entry of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Convention on Wetlands, achieved in 2001, participated in the monitoring of the LIFE project on Hutova Blato⁵¹ and supported a Ramsar Small Grants Fund for preparatory work. Its results were presented in a workshop in Mostar and Metkovic in March 2002, with the participation of Ramsar / Med-Wet⁵², during which the future collaboration was debated and very positive conclusions were drawn.

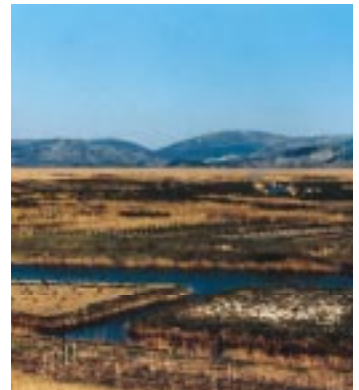
The experience gained indicates that transboundary collaboration is possible and can bring significant results, especially where water resources are shared. However, they require from those facilitating it considerable effort and time, a high degree of diplomacy and especially obstinate persistence.



Fishermen in Mikro Prespa (Greece)



The Evros/Maritsa/Meric River (Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey)



Neretva River Delta (Croatia)

Social and cultural aspects

During the early meetings of MedWet, the representatives of countries from the South and East of the Basin insisted on the need of incorporating socio-economic aspects in the programme of the initiative, which were not carefully considered at that time. With this in mind, the issue was included in the MedWet2 project. According to its operational plan (May 1996), the new sector had the following principal aims:

- to review the economic uses of wetland resources in the Mediterranean, with emphasis on the five countries participating in the extension project, from which concrete data would be obtained;
- to analyse the impact of these economic activities on the ecological functions of wetlands;
- to propose guidelines for the sustainable management of economic activities in wetlands;
- to quantify the value of other wetland functions that are not directly related to productive activities, such as aquifer recharge, flood control, shore stabilisation;
- to present in an integrated form the social aspects of the relation between wetlands and local communities.



Ecomuseum building in Massa (Morocco)

These aims were to be achieved on three levels, with conclusions drawn for each:

- the Mediterranean Basin;
- the five countries participating in the project (Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Morocco and Tunisia);
- Five wetland sites selected, one in each country, which served as case studies⁵³.

The work was carried out mainly by national experts in the five countries involved, co-ordinated by Nejib Benessaiah, a planning consultant from Tunisia. They were assisted by international experts and a workshop to draw the final conclusions was organised in Sousse, Tunisia in June 1997⁵⁴. The results were published in book form, in Arabic, English and French [Benessaiah 1998].

The main conclusions concern the proposal for a systemic strategy for sustainable management of wetlands, which capitalised on

⁵¹ Part of the Neretva River wetlands, it was designated by BiH as its first Ramsar site.

⁵² Represented by Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Regional Co-ordinator for Europe, and Spyros Kouvelis, MedWet Co-ordinator.

⁵³ Kune-Vain Lagoons (Albania), Béni-Bélaïd (Algeria), Neretva Delta (Croatia), Merja Zerga (Morocco) and Sebkhath El Kelbia (Tunisia).

the experience gained from the five sites and extrapolated it to the national and Mediterranean levels.

During the preparation of the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy, inclusion of guidelines for the sustainable management of wetland resources were debated, but were not finally included, as it was felt that at that time there was not enough knowledge to serve as a solid basis. In the meanwhile, considerable work has been done by a number of organisations in this area. One could mention the integrated programmes on rice fields and reed beds of Tour du Valat, SEHUMED's work on sustainable tourism and wetlands, the activities of GWP-Med and IUCN on water resource management. The time is approaching, therefore, that such guidelines should be prepared and debated.

Through the development of the North African Wetlands Network and the establishment of a number of transboundary initiatives, such as Prespa Park, Dojran Lake and Neretva River, it has become apparent that effective conservation and management is not possible without a strong component on the social and economic uses and needs of the people who live and depend on the wetlands and their resources. It was for this reason that the issue of socio-economic aspects is now at the centre of the priorities of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit, with the objective to develop and use as extensively as possible the relevant methodologies and tools.



Rice fields in the Camargue being inundated (France)



Byzantine church of Sveti Jovan Kaneo at Ohrid Lake (FYR of Macedonia)

Through all these activities, it soon became apparent that socio-economic aspects were also related to the cultural values of wetlands, as these values were usually a transcending expression of the use of resources. With this in mind, MedWet organised the technical session on the cultural values of wetlands during MedWet/Com3 in Djerba, during which the links between sustainability and culture were investigated. The conclusion was that social, cultural and economic aspects are intricately related as parts of the same entity, and thus must be faced in an integrated manner.

A year later, during the technical session of MedWet/Com4 in Sesimbra, this approach was tested in assessing the status and prospects of Mediterranean salinas and trying to balance their traditional cultural values with their long-term sustainable operation.

At present, MedWet is proceeding with the testing of an inventory for cultural values prepared by SEHUMED in two MedWetCoast sites (Zaranik Lake in Egypt and cap Bon in Tunisia), in Prespa Lakes and in the Albufera de Valencia.

These efforts have had a wider impact on the work of the Convention, and have led to the Technical Session 5 of Ramsar COP8, with the theme: "Cultural aspects of wetlands as a tool for their conservation and sustainable use".

It is hoped that during the first decade of the 21st century, MedWet will devote a growing part of its efforts and resources in promoting such an integrated approach to wetlands, so that anthropic and natural aspects are handled in a harmonious way.

Wetlands in the coastal context

In the mid-'90s, as the MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects were approaching their completion, a much larger project was conceived. Piloted for MedWet by Tour du Valat, it went through the laborious process of GEF project development⁵⁴. Once the first brief was submitted, it became apparent that a second project proposal had been submitted by the French government's *Conservatoire du Littoral* for the coastal areas of the region. Reasonably, the GEF

⁵⁴ Directed by Professor Mohamed Belhaj (Morocco), it was entitled "An economic valuation of wetlands".

⁵⁵ One should mention here the particular contribution in this hard and lengthy effort of Jamie Skinner, Conservation Director at Tour du Valat, who was succeeded in 1998 by Jean Jalbert.

Secretariat proposed a fusion of the two projects, which MedWet accepted gladly. The reason was substantial and not opportunistic. We had all been convinced that wetlands, connected by the flow of water with their hydrological basin, could not be faced in an isolated manner, but as a part of larger geographical entities. As the coastal zones are such an entity in which numerous wetlands are located, it made eminent sense to develop a joint approach.

This position was presented clearly at a workshop organised by the *Conservatoire du Littoral* in Hyères in April 1995⁵⁶.

This positive response on collaboration, the hard work carried out by colleagues in Tour du Valat and the *Conservatoire du Littoral*, and the support of UNDP, have led to the development of the MedWetCoast project. The project, now in its third year, involves activities in each of the participating countries and a regional component facilitated by Lamia Mansour, based at Tour du Valat under contract with UNDP. Its major objectives are the following:

- at the local level:
 - implementing sustainable and intersectoral management in 15 pilot sites (threatened wetlands and coastal sites);
- at the national level:
 - developing innovative legal frameworks for removing the causes of biodiversity degradation;
 - reinforcing the institutions involved in the management of natural resources and promoting co-ordinated policies;
- at the regional level:
 - strengthening capacities through training and technical assistance;
 - developing and sharing the Mediterranean experience through networking.

More specifically, they also include:

- conserving the terrestrial biodiversity of global or regional importance in 15 Mediterranean coastal / wetland sites;
- developing management techniques adapted to wetland and coastal environments;
- encouraging institutions to take wetland and integrated coastal management into account in the local and national plans of each country;
- developing administrative systems ensuring the coherence of sustainable management in local and national plans;
- creating partnerships between local authorities and civil society when considering protection in the context of integrated social and economic development;



Secovlje Salinas (Slovenia)



Aquaculture of tilapias in Burullus Lake (Egypt)

- exchanging information and practices between partners, other countries and organisations of the Mediterranean Basin thus avoiding duplication and sharing experience;
- developing skills, exchanging expertise and ensuring the transmission of information necessary for the protection of coastal ecosystems and wetlands in the Mediterranean.

A key concern, being discussed within MedWet, but also with the Barcelona Convention and other partners, is how to ensure the sustainability of the momentum created thanks to MedWetCoast and the continuing use of its results, not only for the countries directly involved, but for the benefit of the whole Mediterranean. The answer is not obvious and the difficulty indicates the need to build the sustainability prevision in all major projects, so that effective and long-term use of their outputs can be ensured.

Already efforts have been initiated to extend the MedWetCoast approach to Algeria, Syria and Turkey, while Libya seems interested.

Besides MedWetCoast, collaboration has been growing with PAP-RAC on the Coastal Areas Management Programmes (CAMPs)⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ See Papayannis Th. and J. Skinner "The conservation of Mediterranean wetlands within the wider costal context", p. 60, in *Utiliser les politiques foncières pour la protection du littoral méditerranéen – Actes du colloque*, Les Cahiers du Conservatoire du Littoral, Paris, France, pp. 272.

⁵⁷ MedWet was represented by Thymio Papayannis in the workshop for the evaluation of the CAMPs, held in Malta on 17-19 January 2002.



Sultan Sazligi marshes (Turkey)

Chapter 3: Experience gained

MedWet has been the very first regional⁵⁸ effort for the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands. Well-established after 10 years and widely accepted, it has gained considerable experience, both positive and negative, which could be shared with other similar initiatives to follow. Already similar collaboration efforts have started in the Baltic Sea (BaltWet) and in the Black Sea (BlackSeaWet) regions, and certainly more will follow in the years to come. With the encouragement provided by the COP7 Resolution, the MedWet structure and partners are ready to provide technical assistance and advice to these efforts and to assist in their launching and growth.

As a first step, we have drawn from 10 years hard work in the Mediterranean certain key lessons that may be useful to other regional efforts and have documented them briefly from our own experience.

Dealing with regional disparities

Before even initiating a collaboration initiative, a thorough understanding of the social, economic and political context in the region must be well analysed and understood. Existing regional disparities and points of conflict must be taken into account.

In the case of the Mediterranean, the economic disparities between the EU-member states and most of the rest are enormous; and, unfortunately, they may not diminish within this decade⁵⁹. To deal with this potentially explosive situation, it was decided in the beginning of MedWet:

- to use the wealth of the EU-member states in providing financial support to activities in the South and East of the Basin;
- to make every effort so that the Mediterranean countries, developing or in transition, and their representatives were given their appropriate place in MedWet, and that their financial weakness was never translated into a status of inferiority.

The beginning was not easy, as it was also undermined by animosities created by the Gulf War. The memories of a colonial past

⁵⁸ Perhaps “interregional” is a better term, as the Mediterranean includes parts of three Ramsar regions: Africa, Asia and Europe.

⁵⁹ According to published EC estimates.

remained and suspicion was often evident. It took years of consistent efforts to convince everybody that

- the aims of MedWet were wetland conservation and sustainable use of wetland resources for the peoples of the Mediterranean, without any hidden political agenda;
- MedWet was not serving the interests of any of the large powers;
- it faced all Mediterraneans in an equitable manner, and was attempting to create an equitable climate of collaboration in peace and friendship.

This is perhaps the greatest achievement of MedWet, expressed succinctly by Abdellah El Mastour from Morocco at the Mediterranean workshop during COP7: “We feel here as brothers.”

This positive result required a deep understanding and appreciation of Islam, and the knowledge of the wise guidance included in the Qur'an on nature and water. It made inevitable the respectful support of institutions and services in developing countries that lacked sometimes the capacity to carry out their tasks effectively. It rendered essential a careful handling of the Israel / Palestinian conflict, by indicating at each step that MedWet was not the platform on which it could be resolved, that wetlands existed on both sides of the conflict and required attention, that we should look at the situation in a long-term perspective, in which the conservation of the natural heritage and resources was necessary for all people in the region⁶⁰.

A very crucial component of MedWet has been the involvement of the major stakeholders in wetland issues in the region. It has to be recognised though, that one group of stakeholders, namely the developed countries of the European Union, have not always been fully engaged. This may be because of the failure to understand that their participation in this endeavour is essential, even when they may not need assistance to deal with wetlands conservation and wise use at the same level of the other countries of the Basin.

Thus, the major points to be noted are the following:

- social and economic disparities must be considered and efforts made so that they are used in a positive way;
- existing disparities should never be allowed to create feelings of inferiority or a two-speed collaboration system;
- points of conflict cannot be ignored; they must be handled in a sensitive and careful manner, but must not be allowed to become key issues in the efforts focussing on wetlands;
- although the participation of governments and organisations is



Ill. X: Fishermen in Tindja, Ichkeul Lake (Tunisia)

crucial, finally the work is carried out by committed individuals from both the public and private sector. These must be treated in a sensitive, respectful and equitable manner. At the end of the line, it is people that count.

Assessing the need

Once the regional framework is well understood, an assessment of the need for international co-operation must be made. It is not evident that such co-operation is needed in all cases. Possibly, bi- or multi-lateral agreements may render it superfluous, or large countries may not find in it any advantages. The existence of such a need and its realisation by decision-makers and other stakeholders in the countries involved is a critical prerequisite, because regional efforts will not be successful unless they are endogenous (“bottom-up”) and are backed with the enthusiastic support of their region⁶¹.

Of course, if this need exists, it must be nurtured, strengthened and channelled towards concrete collaboration action. This is the role of the group that takes up the responsibility to launch the regional initiative. It is not an easy task, and it requires considerable time and consistent efforts.

In the case of MedWet, initial encouragement and support was provided by both organisations and governments, while flexibility and drive mainly by the NGOs. Both facilitated greatly the launching of the initiative, but convincing all other states and stakeholders to participate took six years of continuous and demanding work. The way to achieve positive results is gradual involvement through concrete actions. Visionary schemes are often difficult to comprehend and to obtain support. On the other hand, actions to resolve specific problems and to cover widely perceived needs gain strong backing and win active involvement.

⁶⁰ During the first meeting of MedWet/Com, workshops were to be divided on a geographical basis (West, Centre and East of the Basin). As the Arab states protested, a simple solution was found to defuse the situation: two workshops were organised, one in English and one in French, which worked without any further difficulty. The model was adopted for all subsequent MedWet meetings.

⁶¹ In the case of BlackSeaWet, it should be noted that the representatives of all 8 range states of the Black Sea expressed their strong support of the initiative, during the past Ramsar Pan-European Meeting (Bled, Slovenia, October 2001).

Creating a co-ordination mechanism

To create such a positive climate of support and participation, a catalyst is required. This can be an existing organisation in the region or an international body. It can be formal or informal, at least in a first phase. It can originate in the public or the NGO sector. There are, however, certain guidelines that are important to consider in any regional collaboration initiative.

First, this mechanism must remain small, informal and very “light”, from the administrative and financial perspective. Not only is this necessary because of the initial lack of resources, but to retain a high degree of flexibility and initiative. We have seen in MedWet, how work started with an informal small group, which later became a Co-ordination Group with wider participation, and finally an official structure, the MedWet Co-ordination Unit, but still small and agile.

Second, the catalyst must undertake an active role in bringing together key actors, developing activities, obtaining funding. In the case of MedWet, the initial small group contacted key governments and institutions, obtained the support of the EC, drafted the first project proposal for MedWet1, organised the initial meetings. They did this on a voluntary basis, with no funds available, sparing no effort. Without it, MedWet would have remained a theoretical proposal in some forgotten documents. This is perhaps what is needed in the Black Sea, where collaboration efforts are widely expected, but considerably delayed. A catalysing group is needed to launch the initiative.

Third, the co-ordination mechanism, albeit small and perhaps voluntary - at least during the initial phase - must operate in a professional and efficient manner. Sloppiness, delays, lack of clear perspectives will cause confusion, create doubts and rapidly erode support. It is only natural that the initial team must be up to the measure of the task, and be able to prove it on a continuous basis.

Laying a solid base

Once a co-ordination mechanism is in place, it is important to consider carefully the first steps. A very important advice is not to devote efforts - and the limited resources available initially - at institution-building, but at concrete activities. Government entities are always reluctant to support the establishment of a new struc-



Protection against overgrazing in Doñana (Spain)

ture, before its necessity is convincingly demonstrated. As to donors, they will rarely fund operational or administrative costs, especially in innovative areas. This might create a “Catch-22” situation, which can be overcome only by voluntary contributions from the private sector during the early phase.

Focussing on concrete activities, in response to existing needs, has the advantage of arriving rapidly at positive results and thus gaining a high level of acceptance in a reasonably short time. This does not mean, however, that initial actions should be only opportunistic and that a solid base for the future should not be laid. In fact, a key consideration must be the sustainability of all actions, which entails the broader use of their results in space and in time. Thus every action will build on previous ones and constitute part of a dynamic whole.

In the case of MedWet, the initial decision taken was to concentrate on the production of methods and tools through two projects with a different geographical scope, involving 10 countries. This was a necessary foundation work, responding to existing needs in the Mediterranean. It included concrete actions on 10 specific pilot sites, but also the broader components of establishing a Mediterranean wetland strategy and developing a socio-economic approach. Thus the balanced mix of objectives of the two projects was perhaps the main reason they gained the official participation of 10 governments and were approved for funding by the EC. Their results provided the base for other MedWet projects that built upon them.

In establishing such concrete activities, we found out that a very useful “tool” was the Logical Framework Analysis. Not only is it widely accepted (or even required) by many donors - including the European Commission -, but it also facilitates clear thinking and an organised expression of the general purpose, the objectives and the actions of each project, as well as the early introduction of indicators, on which success can be evaluated and demonstrated.

Of course, this is not the only approach possible. However, having clear and specific targets that can be implemented within 2-3 years, with high expectations of positive results, is necessary for the successful launching of any collaborative venture.

Developing tools

Methods and tools are always a good beginning. In MedWet, we started with a general survey of what was needed and what was already available, as it is not necessary to “reinvent gunpowder”, but only to adapt it to the specific regional context. Five key areas were identified, where there was strong need, but little technical competence and agreement, and efforts were focused on them. For some, totally innovative work was required; for others the adaptation of existing know-how to the Mediterranean context was more appropriate.

Careful testing of the methods and tools, both during intermediate and the final phases, is an absolute necessity. In the beginning this can be done in an isolated or punctual manner, but it is useful at the end to test the methods and tools in an integrated way. In the early period of MedWet, this was done at pilot or test sites [Papayannis and Montemaggiore 1996].

In this process, one of the main lessons learned is that methods and tools need minds and hands to apply them. This means that they must be developed in relation to existing capacity in the region, while through training and exchanges this capacity should be gradually increased. In turn, the tools can become more sophisticated. A characteristic example was in the area of inventories. The MedWet Inventory System started with hand-written entry forms, which could be filled-in at any wetland site. However, some of the later components of the System (such as cartographic treatment of habitats through GIS) required complex digital hardware and software, which are only sporadically available.

The dissemination of methods and tools, so that they can be made easily available to all those that can make good use of them, is important and must be planned from the beginning, as part of the initial project. As noted, this has been a weakness in MedWet, which is not easy to correct subsequently.

Finally, tools “are not carved in stone” so that they remain unchanged once prepared and tested successfully. They must be considered in a dynamic manner, evolving with time, adapting to changing demands, taking into account progress elsewhere and innovations that occur, and being complemented with additional ones for new areas that concern wetlands and water. This must be conceived as a continuous process, requiring wide participation.



The Kerkini Lake MedWet1 pilot site

Capacity building

In most cases, an analysis of the causes for ineffective management of wetlands indicates that insufficient human resources are available for this task. The same is often true for the lack of clear and decisive wetland policies. Such weaknesses are due to a number of reasons, which include unavailability of financial means, low priority given to wetlands, inappropriate training of staff, jurisdictional conflicts among both different services and levels of administration. They concern usually not only the public, but also the academic, NGO and private sectors.

In any regional initiative, therefore, a decisive and necessary step is to ascertain the available human resources, to assess gaps and to develop a plan for building capacity. This is not always easy and sometimes not even possible.

Within the framework of MedWet, it was found out that the most effective way to build capacity was to entrust existing services and organisations with significant tasks. That is why in both MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects the executants were not foreign consultants but scientists and technicians from the countries involved. They were supported and assisted technically by members of the MedWet Team, who worked closely with them to transfer methods and tools and to assist whenever required. Even in purely administrative tasks, such as financial management of the available funds, we insisted that the main work would be carried out at the local level.

Of course, this resulted in various difficulties, mainly delays, additional and unexpected work and the need sometimes of corrective measures on the basis of feedback received. Such problems, however, were negligible compared to the results obtained. Overcoming an initial incertitude, the specific individuals involved developed a strong sense of pride in their work, an assurance and the ability to collaborate equitably with international experts, without complexes. Gradually, they were able not only to use methods and tools provided by MedWet efficiently, but in addition to contribute to their adaptation to diverse national contexts, to their refinement and improvement.

More classical means of building capacity have also been used with good results. For example, the training workshops organised within MedWet, which combine both theoretical knowledge and practical applications, have been very effective. They have been targeted to

both wetland managers and decision-makers who might affect wetland policies. The publication of the MedWet / Tour du Valat series has also attempted to provide the necessary general and specific knowledge on wetland and water resource management, based on the latest scientific research, in an easily understandable format.

The same approach of reliance on local expertise for execution in parallel with strong efforts at capacity building has been used since in all MedWet projects, and particularly at present in the large MedWetCoast project. What should not be forgotten is that finally it is specific persons that carry out work; that these persons must be given the knowledge and resources they need to complete their tasks well; and that in addition they must receive recognition and be allowed to develop pride and satisfaction from the results of their actions.



MedWetCoast training course in Azraq Oasis (Jordan)

Gaining legitimacy

Doing useful work is not always sufficient to provide legitimacy to a regional collaboration effort; for instance, governments might be reluctant to participate in international ventures with an uncertain character. On the other hand, it is not usually feasible to achieve a status of official recognition, before a track record has been established. There are various ways to resolve these problems and different options to be assessed.

The experience of MedWet provides one possible solution, which has allowed it to operate without undue difficulties and constraints for eight years, until it achieved official recognition.

MedWet started completely informally. However, it sought from the beginning the participation of governments (the five EU-member states in the region) and of intergovernmental organisations (such as the Convention on Wetlands). This gave it enough legitimacy to launch the MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects. Once these were approved, the fact that they were EC projects provided a satisfactory official framework⁶². In 1996, the decision to develop the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy as a regional application of the Ramsar Strategic Plan ensured a general acceptance of this document.

However, during the same year it became evident that MedWet needed to obtain a more institutional structure. The wise decision to place it under the aegis of the Convention on Wetlands, was prepared by presentations on MedWet during both Ramsar COP5 (Kushiro) and COP6 (Brisbane) and was rapidly implemented by the establishment of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (in October 1996), which became an official organ of the Convention at Ramsar COP7 (San José) through Resolution VI.22. Also, the appointment of the MedWet Co-ordinator as outpost member of the Ramsar Bureau helped in strengthening the view of MedWet as an integral part of the Convention.

It should be noted here how useful a regional or trans-regional Wetlands Committee can be. Although it may not have decision-making powers⁶³, the fact that it brings together all stakeholders in an area within the same wetland forum is already of considerable

⁶² Especially as the Steering Committee of MedWet1 was initially chaired by the EC.

⁶³ In the Convention on Wetlands, decision-making is the prerogative of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP) and of the Standing Committee.

significance. With appropriate briefing, such a committee can:

- identify key issues or urgent and serious problems;
- set priorities for the work of the regional initiative;
- evaluate the progress of the work completed and assess its quality;
- provide assistance in many areas, including the search of necessary funds.

In this way it can play a very positive role in the success of the regional initiative.

A final word of caution on the issue of legitimacy: while a clear legal status is important in order to gain the support of governmental entities, it should not be forgotten that the regional initiative will ultimately be judged on results. Results require skilled and dedicated individuals, a high level of flexibility and innovation and the willingness to work at times under intense pressure and beyond the normal administrative constraints. Thus care should be taken that these qualities in the initiative and its staff are not stifled within a rigid, bureaucratic framework.

Cultivating wide support

For better or for worse, the fate of wetlands does not depend on a small group of decision-makers and experts. A wide variety of actors - including local populations, and the general public - must be informed, educated and motivated so that they understand wetland values and contribute to their conservation and wise use. For this reason, continuous efforts of communication must be an integral part of a regional action.

In the case of MedWet, considerable progress in this area was made during the first years. A communication method was developed and applied, publications and posters were printed and disseminated, traditional wetland festivals were re-launched⁶⁴.

During the last four years, however, little was done to communicate widely wetland values in the region. MedWet efforts were rather focused on informing an inner circle consisting of Ramsar Contracting Parties (through presentations and publications), as well as other conventions, environmental NGOs and institutions, and individuals already involved with wetland issues. The first major openings to an outside forum happened in 2000, through the participation of MedWet in the activities of both the Mediterranean Committee on Sustainable Development and the Global Water Partnership. This has not been sufficient both in



Religious procession in Spain.

degree and in extent. Much more should be done during this decade to approach and inform other sectors that have an impact on wetlands, such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism; while the general public should not be forgotten.

Thus it is important to do good work, but equally important to make the results widely known, so that they can create a favourable climate and motivate further action. Communication cannot be considered a simple add-on; it must be a key element of the regional strategy, being thus incorporated from the development phase in all projects and activities.

In this context, let us note that even though appropriate use of modern communications means - such as the Internet - must be made, traditional means of communication, especially the printed paper and verbal delivery, remain as valid and effective as ever, especially in developing countries where novel communication technologies might not be widely accessible.

⁶⁴Such as the Festival of the Tarabuso (the Bittern *Butorus stellaris*) in Diaccia Botrona, in Central Italy, on 18 November 1995 [Finistauri 1996].

Achieving synergy

The task of managing well wetland and water resources and conserving this invaluable natural (and often cultural) heritage is a daunting task. It is unrealistic to consider that it can be carried out by one organisation or initiative. That is why regional wetland initiatives must be seen as co-ordinating efforts aiming at synergy.

That is why regional collaboration efforts should start through a systematic review of their area, to identify all actions that could be of help, as well as actors already involved in wetland work or potentially able to help. After the survey, a long and insistent effort must be initiated and maintained to establish contact, build confidence and links, start developing joint activities, avoiding duplication of efforts, and finally convincing other actors to assume full responsibility and implement actions included in the strategy for the region.

A bit of caution is needed here to avoid being drawn into different directions, thus losing the consistency and coherence of action. That is why a clear strategy must be developed as early as possible. In MedWet, this was done through the Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy. Recently, MedWet/Com agreed that such a strategy was not necessary anymore, as the new Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008 would provide a framework of global pertinence, which could be easily adapted to the requirements of the region. What would be needed then is an action plan to implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan, taking into account Mediterranean specificities.

To convince other actors to work closely with you is not an easy task. It requires first to gain credence in their eyes as to your effectiveness, determination and seriousness. In a first phase, you must be ready to do more work than they. You must treat them with justice and generosity, maintain an open and sincere communication with them, and must be willing to give them more credit than they sometimes deserve.

Even then, working with partners is not easy, and not because of bad will or misunderstandings. Partners are organisations, governmental or not, and these experience normal problems, such as staff changes, financial difficulties, restructuring, etc. Thus they might not be able to carry out the work agreed, or may delay it immeasurably. In some cases, the wetlands co-ordinating structure might be able to take up the slack, but this is not always feasible. In MedWet, many of the failures came about because at times our partners

found themselves unable to deliver the results expected within the time frame agreed; on the other hand, successes often depended on the significant contribution of partners.

Even in the best of circumstances, the question of control remains. Collaborative action always implies reduced control possibilities and this may lead to serious difficulties and loss of effectiveness. In MedWet, we have tried to prevent such difficulties through discussions at MedWet/Com, in which most of our partners participate. The existence of a Ramsar strategic framework, approved by all the Contracting Parties and thus widely accepted, has been also helpful in providing clear and indisputable guidance. The establishment of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit, which is already playing a significant role in encouraging the adoption of common priorities and solutions, is also an important step.



Joint training activity with RAC-SPA



Mosaic floor in Butrint wetland (Albania)

Epilogue: A model for the 21st century?

Perspectives for MedWet

During the second decade of its existence, MedWet is certain to evolve so as to serve better the Mediterranean region. Probably, there will be changes in both structure and direction.

Concerning **structure**, MedWet must find the necessary financial resources to maintain a small, but highly efficient, Co-ordination Unit and to cover minimal costs for the operation of MedWet/Com⁶⁵ on a long-term basis. These resources may come from the Mediterranean states, other partners, the Ramsar core budget, or as income from project management.

The Co-ordination Unit must focus on co-ordination and in addition must take up three main tasks:

- plan and implement a communications strategy;
- initiate and assist project development efforts;
- energise in the framework of MedWet the passive members of MedWet/Com.

Most of the technical and practical work will continue to be carried out by wetland centres, members of the MedWet Technical Network. In fact, the three initial centres (Tour du Valat, EKBY and SEHUMED) have played a key role in the first decade of MedWet, whose achievements would not have been possible without their contribution. Such wetland centres are extremely important in developing applied research on wetlands and in establishing links between science and conservation. In addition, they provide bridges between the national context, and local activities at specific sites, with the international collaboration framework provided by MedWet.

From now on, efforts must be made to complete the network of such wetland centres by establishing new ones in strategic areas. Already work for the North African Wetland Network has started, while the Portuguese Wetland Centre is already operational. Spain is also considering the establishment of a national wetland centre,

⁶⁵To cover mainly the travel and subsistence costs of sponsored representatives from developing states and those in transition, in accordance with OECD guidelines.

probably in Valencia, as a tool for the implementation of its National Strategic Action Plan adopted in 1999. Finally, more centres need to be created with the encouragement of MedWet, perhaps in Italy and in the East of the Basin (possibly in Turkey). As a result, issues to be addressed are the efficient operation of such an expanding network and the achievement of substantial co-operation among them.

The collaboration with other conventions (especially with the Barcelona Convention and its Regional Activities Centres) and international NGOs must be clarified and intensified through explicit agreements. Collaboration with the donor community must be strengthened. The links of MedWet with the European Commission must be maintained and strengthened in areas of common interest, such as in the management of Natura 2000 wetland sites and in the area of development assistance for the wise use of wetland resources. As noted, the EC has played a catalytic role in the establishment of MedWet and supported it strongly during its first phases⁶⁶. Lately, however, the links between the EC and MedWet have weakened. It should be a priority task of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit to re-establish them.

Great help in broadening the impact of MedWet and in allowing greater stakeholder participation will be provided through the operation of the new MedWet networks of regions, sites and national NGOs, which must become operational in the next two years.

As far as direction is concerned, MedWet must become more deeply involved in the sustainable use of wetland and water resources. The sporadic work that it has done up to now in this area must be completed, integrated and presented in a useful manner, thus providing the necessary guidance for the whole Basin. MedWet should integrate to this action an approach for the management of the cultural heritage of Mediterranean wetlands⁶⁷, taking fully into account the interests of local populations.

Climate change and its impact on wetlands must become a central issue for MedWet. In a zone that is arid to a considerable extent, the changes in climate will have a profound impact. Certainly river deltas, as well as coastal lagoons and salinas, will be affected. The distribution of species, especially in the marine environment, may change drastically. All of these eventual impacts must be studied well in advance, changes carefully monitored and remedial action, wherever needed and feasible, must be planned wisely and decisively.



Roman amphitheatre in Butrint wetland (Albania)



Oued Massa (Morocco)



Ecotourists in Oued Massa (Morocco)

In addition, MedWet should be promoted and further used as an instrument for sustainable development in the Mediterranean Basin. To achieve this, it must do considerably more work in developing guidelines for the sustainable management of economic activities related to wetlands, and especially for the sustainable use of wetland resources, and the capitalisation of wetland values. In this context, the element of “tolerance thresholds” (*seuils de tolérance*) or “bearing capacity” must be used judiciously to avoid undue pressures on wetlands.

Two sustainable development issues are particularly important in the Mediterranean.

One particular case is the promotion of sustainable tourism, taking into account both the natural and the cultural values of wetlands. The aim here would be double; both to protect sensitive habitats from degradation due to visitors and to the facilities they require, and to obtain through this activity financial benefits - especially employment - for local populations, thus convincing them of the multiple values of their wetlands.

⁶⁶The MedWet Co-ordinator was appointed by the EC as member of its Forum on Environment and Sustainable Development from 1997 to 2001, when the Forum mandate expired.

⁶⁷With an emphasis on World Heritage wetland sites.



Ecotourist group in Aiguamolls de l'Empordà, Catalunya (Spain)

A second concerns salinas, which have been an important traditional activity in the Mediterranean, with a rich natural and cultural heritage. Their exploitation is becoming less and less profitable, and methods must be found to maintain their operation, or if impossible to turn them into protected areas, and not allow drastic changes in their land use, such as urbanisation, tourism or resort facilities, or transport infrastructure. The MedWet Working Group on Salinas must play an important role in providing guidance along these lines.



Traditional practices at Secovlje Salinas (Slovenia)

Bringing together governments and organisations in the joint management of transboundary sites must also merit particular attention. An initial survey of all such potential sites is a first priority. Thus, besides continuing assistance for the operation of the Prespa Park, the collaboration on Neretva River (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia), Evros / Maritsa / Meric River (Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey), Dojran Lake (Greece and the FYR of Macedonia), Dragonja River (Croatia and Slovenia) and others identified by the survey must be encouraged, until concrete results have been obtained and a co-operation structure for each is established and starts operating efficiently. This task should be the responsibility of the MedWet Co-ordination Unit, while the partner wetland centres must be requested to provide technical support.

We feel more and more the necessity to have a clear picture, as much as possible, of the status and the trends of Mediterranean wetlands, in order to feed and orient the MedWet operational plan and to set a baseline for future assessments. In this perspective, a major objective for MedWet will be the completion of the first integrated Inventory of Mediterranean Wetlands by the year 2010, based on the use of the MedWet Inventory System, to which other national inventories could be readily adapted. Efforts towards this



View of Ohrid Lake from St. Clement (FYR of Macedonia)

ambitious objective have already started; but it is certain that achieving it will require considerable efforts and sufficient resources, as well as patience and persistence, but will contribute greatly to collaboration and the sense of unity of the Mediterranean region. Of course, the active participation of all the countries in the region is a prerequisite.

Throughout all these activities, a system of constant evaluation, based on verifiable indicators, must be designed and implemented. This should not focus only on the MedWet Initiative but also on the general progress made in the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the region. Already MedWet was subjected to an external evaluation in 1999, but its results were not conclusive. In addition, there is no objective system for assessing the status and trends of Mediterranean wetlands. What is required is a continuous process, both transparent and indisputable, based on well-defined and agreed criteria and indicators, whose conclusions will be reviewed on a yearly basis by Med-Wet/Com, so that corrective action can be initiated whenever necessary.

Towards sub-regional and trans-regional efforts

In addition to these intra-regional directions, MedWet must be ready to dedicate time and resources to assist other regional initiatives to be launched by transferring technical knowledge, methods and tools and sharing both the good and bad experience gained during its 10 years of existence.

At Ramsar COP8 MedWet has to ensure that its contribution and needs are fully reflected in the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2003-2008 that should be adopted by the COP, so that the Initiative is fully anchored in this key tool of the Convention.

It is obvious that the implementation of the Ramsar Strategic Plan requires resources much beyond the current budget of the Convention. Of course, many of the activities are and will be carried out by the Contracting Parties themselves. One additional way to mobilise resources in favour of wetlands is through specific regional initiatives.

During its first decade, MedWet has been able to draw approximately € 30 million for actions concerning Mediterranean wetlands from various donors, both from the region and outside of it. This is a good example for other similar future efforts.

The MedWet model has been widely recognised as useful; in our view, especially if weaknesses and not only strengths, failures together with successes are understood and taken into account.

Thus, it is perhaps advisable for the Ramsar Bureau to take the lead in identifying propitious and mature possibilities for regional collaboration⁶⁸, assess the willingness for international exchanges, and initiate processes for wetland initiatives similar to MedWet, drawing upon its experience. Besides the ongoing efforts along the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, such initiatives might concern:

- the Gulf area in the Middle East;
- the Caspian Sea;
- the Caribbean sub-region;
- the Oceania islands;
- sub regions in Africa (mainly certain river basins).

The potentially valuable contribution of the Ramsar Bureau and of MedWet in such regional initiatives must not lead us to forget that they should strongly rely on endogenous efforts, drawing momentum and resources from their own regions. That is the only way they can expect to become viable and to bring positive and sustainable results to wetland conservation and wise use.

⁶⁸Through its Regional Co-ordinators, who have an intimate knowledge of their regions and the necessary privileged contacts.

Towards the future

The reader of this book will realise that in many ways, MedWet has been a unique experience in the Mediterranean region, by actively promoting networking and collaboration in a region that, although it needs this badly, sometimes fails to see the benefits that this practice could bring.

The creation of a forum within which national administrations, international bodies, NGOs, specialised wetland centres and personalities could equitably put forward their interest, contributions and passion for the wise use of Mediterranean wetlands, within the wider framework of sustainable development, is more that one would have expected when it all started. And this is why MedWet has gained, and continues to gain, a high esteem and recognition in the region and worldwide.

When I took up the duties of MedWet Co-ordinator, I remember that I said to Delmar Blasco, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, and to Thymio Papayannis, the then MedWet Co-ordinator, that I was feeling lucky and honoured, because they entrusted me with the endowment of 10 years of hard work, and with a tool that had endless possibilities. After a year in this position, and judging from the opportunities and collaborations that MedWet has built on, I am persuaded that we are looking at a new period of strong development for MedWet.

Still, this development has to occur within certain parameters/limits, guided by a clear strategy and aiming to reach specific objectives, in line with the new Ramsar Strategic Plan. This is what the Co-ordination Unit of MedWet is here to do, as a pivotal point for bringing increased synergy and effectiveness to this network, that is now very large and strong, to auto-regulate itself. In my view, the following are some of the priorities for the future development of MedWet:

Institutional reinforcement of MedWet: Although MedWet is fully under the auspices of the Ramsar Convention, it is necessary to further strengthen its decision making mechanisms and operations in order to make its work more effective. is a pre-requisite for further developing its work. Parallel to that, MedWet has to ensure a steady flow of funds for its core operation, and assure the participation of all partners, including all the MedWet countries – developed and developing countries alike –, the Convention itself, the country hosting the MedWet Unit, and key donors. The Resolution on Regional Initiatives proposed at COP8 does exactly that, but more importantly opens the way for the establishment of other regional initiatives following the example of MedWet.

Further developing a strong programme of activities: Our success is measured by our actions and results. During the next triennium MedWet is expected to develop a set of coherent projects and actions, bringing together the expertise of all its centres and partners, and providing the necessary leadership for wetland conservation and wise use as a contribution to sustainable development in the entire region. Mobilising the necessary funds for this programme will also constitute a measure of success.

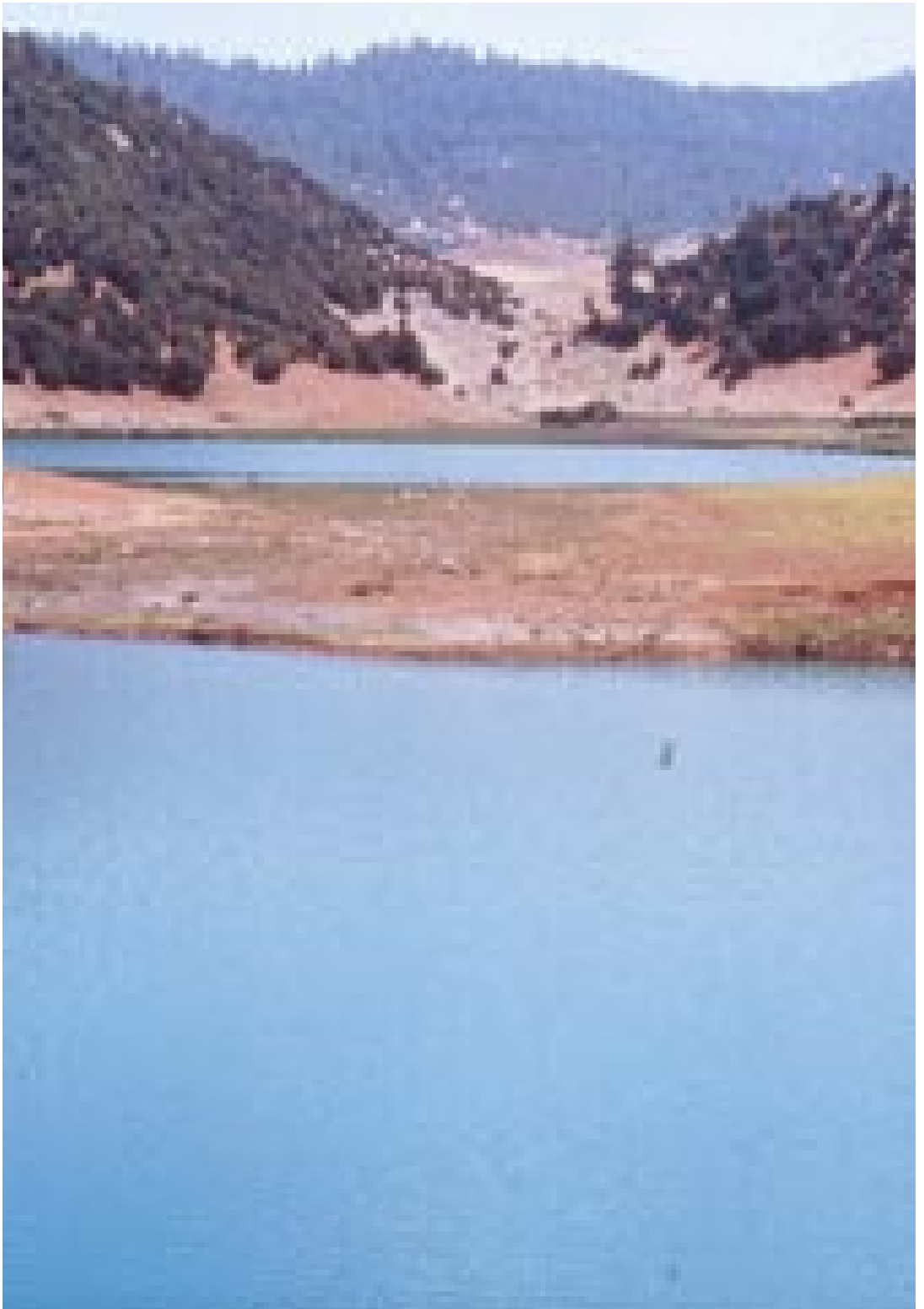
Reaching out to the entire Mediterranean region: Through its work, MedWet has managed to establish a strong level of participation from all its partners. However, from time to time and for different reasons, some parts of the Mediterranean seem to miss out of active involvement. Bringing up to steam the lesser involved partners, and assuring the necessary capacity to secure continuity, is a priority for the next triennium. The effort that has started with the establishment of the North African Wetlands Network is the starting point for this.

Developing new tools and refining existing ones: *The technical capacity developed through the work of MedWet is reflected in the tools and methodologies it can provide to its partners. To keep up with the increasing needs and technological developments, MedWet should review and enrich the existing methodologies, for example by introducing remote sensing techniques to its inventory and monitoring tool. In addition, it should develop new fields of expertise, related to wetlands management for conservation and wise use. The highest priority is to integrate into wetland management planning socio-economic valuation methods and mechanisms for water allocation to ensure the effective function of wetland ecosystems.*

Strengthening collaborations: *Valuable partnerships and joint action programmes between MedWet and other bodies and processes are already established within MedWet, such as the collaboration with UNEP/MAP and GWP-Med. Enlarging this circle of valuable partnerships and strengthening the content of joint work constitute a priority to allow adding value to everyone's effort.*

These priorities show some of the basic lines that in my view should be followed by MedWet in the next three years. They are ambitious and demanding, and their realisation will depend a lot on the active participation of all partners. After all, the MedWet initiative is as strong as its partners make it. And history shows that they do a good deal.

*Spyros Kouvelis
MedWet Co-ordinator*



Lake Tigel Mamine, Atlas (Morocco)

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Notes

- For MedWet / Tour du Valat Publications, contact Jean Jalbert at Tour du Valat. For all others, contact Spyros Kouvelis, MedWet Co-ordination Unit. (Contact details on p. 2.) Unfortunately, some of the publications are out of print, but may be available in electronic form.
- Languages: A = Arabic, E = English, F = French, S = Spanish.

Addenda

Addendum 1: COP5 Recommendation

REC. C.5.14

Convention on Wetlands of International importance especially as waterfowl habitat

Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties

Kushiro, Japan: 9-16 June 1993

Recommendation on collaboration for Mediterranean Wetlands

NOTING with interest the MedWet initiative for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands;

FURTHER NOTING that this initiative is carried out jointly by the Governments of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the Commission of the European Communities, the Ramsar Bureau, Fondation de la Tour du Valat, IWRB and WWF - International;

ACKNOWLEDGING that the first 3-year preparatory period of MedWet will be of benefit to all countries around the Mediterranean Basin;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the presentation on MedWet made in Workshop D of the present meeting, as well as the very positive meeting on Mediterranean collaboration within the MedWet context held in Kushiro on 14 June 1993, with participants from 13 Mediterranean countries: Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, from the Commission of the European Communities, from the Ramsar Bureau and from ADAME, IWRB and WWF;

RECALLING Recommendation REC. C.4.5 of the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties concerning international collaboration;

The conference of the contracting parties

WELCOMES this regional collaboration activity, and considers it to be a very promising approach to wetland conservation at an international level;

URGES the initial ten MedWet partners to make the utmost efforts for present MedWet activities to include all Mediterranean countries;

ENCOURAGES other Mediterranean Contracting Parties to work closely with the present MedWet partners to achieve MedWet's aims and, in particular, to arrest and reverse the degradation and loss of wet-

lands around the Basin and ensure their wise use; and

REQUESTS the MedWet partners to present a full report on progress of the MedWet initiative at the Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in 1996.

Addendum 2: COP6 Recommendation

Recommendation 6.11: Continuing collaboration for Mediterranean wetlands

1. RECALLING Recommendation 5.14 on collaboration for the Mediterranean wetlands, which welcomed this regional activity and requested the MedWet partners to report on progress of the MedWet initiative at the present meeting;
2. NOTING with interest the progress made during the first phase of the MedWet initiative for the conservation and wise use of Mediterranean wetlands;
3. FURTHER NOTING the extension of MedWet activities through the participation of Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Morocco and Tunisia;
4. EXPRESSING THEIR APPRECIATION to the bodies which have provided funds for the MedWet initiative, notably the European Commission (DG XI), the Governments of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, WWF, Tour du Valat, Wetlands International, the Ramsar Bureau and the GEF;
5. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the Themes for the Future paper from the Government of Italy and the MedWet Coordination Group, entitled "MedWet - a Mediterranean Blueprint for Regional Wetland Cooperation," presented in plenary session of the present meeting on 25 March 1996, and the results of the informal consultations on Mediterranean wetlands held during the present meeting; and
6. BEING INFORMED of the initiative of the MedWet partners and of the Government of Italy to organize an International Conference on Mediterranean wetlands in Venice in June 1996;

The conference of the contracting parties

7. WELCOMES this form of concerted and integrated collaboration between government and non-government partners for the conservation and wise use of Mediterranean wetlands and considers it a promising model for wetland activities in other regions;
8. ENCOURAGES the current partners to extend this collaboration to all the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, opening it to all Mediterranean governments and appropriate institutions, bodies and non-government organizations in the region, including the private sector;
9. ENCOURAGES the remaining states of the Mediterranean to participate in this long-term effort through a Mediterranean Wetland Forum or an equivalent body;
10. URGES all government and non-government organizations and individuals concerned with wetlands in the Mediterranean to commit their best efforts for the preparation and implementation

of a concerted Mediterranean Wetlands Strategy;

11. CALLS on funding agencies, both multilateral and bilateral, and from the private sector, to continue their essential financial support for coordinated action for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands;
12. REQUESTS that a full report on all further developments of collaboration for wetlands in the Mediterranean during the coming three-year period is presented at the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties in 1999; and
13. CALLS on Contracting Parties in the Mediterranean to designate as Ramsar sites those wetlands which meet the approved Ramsar criteria, and in particular those of major significance as links on the migratory route between Europe and Africa.

Addendum 3: COP7 Resolution



Resolution VII.22

“People and Wetlands: The Vital Link”

7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties
to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971),
San José, Costa Rica, 10-18 May 1999

Collaborative structure for Mediterranean wetlands

1. TAKING INTO ACCOUNT eight years of collaborative efforts in favour of Mediterranean wetlands, within the framework of the Convention on Wetlands, and more specifically:

a) the launching in 1991 of a concerted effort for the conservation and wise use of Mediterranean wetlands under the name “Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative” (MedWet) as a joint effort of the Ramsar Bureau, the European Commission (EC), the Italian Government, the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (now Wetlands International), the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat (France), and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF);

b) the implementation of the MedWet1 project (1993-1996), funded to a large extent by the EC and encompassing France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, during which methods and tools for wetland inventory and monitoring, management, application of research results, and public awareness were developed and tested;

c) the implementation of the MedWet2 project (1996-1998), carried out in Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Morocco and Tunisia, funded also to a large extent by the EC and managed by the Ramsar Bureau, during which the MedWet approach was adapted to countries of the East and South of the region, and a new socio-economic approach to wetlands conservation and sustainable use was developed;

d) the adoption of Recommendations 5.14 at Ramsar COP5 (Kushiro, 1993) and 6.11 at Ramsar COP6 (Brisbane, 1996) on the MedWet Initiative;

e) the adoption of the Declaration of Venice and the endorsement of the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy by the Conference on Mediterranean Wetlands, organized by the Italian Government and the Ramsar Bureau in June 1996, within the framework of the MedWet1 project;

f) Decision 19.19 of the Standing Committee of the Convention in October 1996 to establish the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) within the framework of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, consisting at present of 25 governments of the

Mediterranean Basin, the Palestinian Authority, the European Commission, the Barcelona and Bern Conventions, and six wetland centres and international NGOs;

g) the results of the first two meetings of the MedWet/Com held in Thessaloniki, Greece (March 1998) and Valencia, Spain (January 1999), hosted and financed by the Governments of these two countries;

h) the appointment in 1996 by the Secretary General of the Convention of a MedWet Coordinator and the establishment of a secretariat structure, with the financial support of the Governments of France and Greece (and since 1999, of the Government of Spain), as well as of the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat (France) and WWF International; and

i) the launching of two further MedWet projects concerning ten Mediterranean countries, of which one is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF);

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

2. EXPRESSES ITS SATISFACTION at the work carried out so far under the Mediterranean Wetland Initiative and ITS APPRECIATION to the governments and institutions, in particular the European Commission, that have provided financial support to the Initiative; and RECOGNISES it as a model of regional collaboration, based on endogenous efforts and a wide participation of all sectors;
3. APPROVES the establishment of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) within the framework of the Convention, as a forum for collaboration on wetland issues in the Mediterranean and as an advisor to the Convention in this region;
4. ENDORSES the Mediterranean Wetland Strategy and the Venice Declaration, which implement the Ramsar Strategic Plan in the region, as the guiding documents for efforts in the Mediterranean;
5. ENTRUSTS the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee with the task of monitoring the implementation of this Strategy and Declaration, and of adapting them to changing conditions;
6. ENCOURAGES the Contracting Parties around the Mediterranean to use and further develop the methodological tools elaborated under the MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects, with a view to encouraging integrated and sustainable management of wetlands in the region;
7. INVITES Contracting Parties in other regions, with the assistance of the Ramsar Bureau, to consider using relevant MedWet tools, in particular, as requested in Resolution VII.20, the methodology and database for collecting, managing and storing inventory data on wetlands; and URGES countries and organizations involved in the MedWet Initiative to provide technical and financial assistance to other countries for this purpose;
8. ENDORSES the actions taken by the Secretary General of the Convention to establish and supervise a MedWet Team, consisting of a Coordinator and secretarial units, supported financially by voluntary contributions of governments and organizations in the region and elsewhere;

9. URGES Contracting Parties and institutions, in particular the European Commission, to continue providing financial support to the MedWet Initiative, in particular for its work in the developing countries and entities of the Mediterranean region; and
10. ENDORSES the initiative for the establishment of a North African Wetland Centre, and URGES Contracting Parties and institutions to contribute financial support for it.

The author is particularly grateful
to all the colleagues and/or organisations
who have provided photographs for this book,
and who have thus greatly contributed to its quality.
They include the following (in alphabetical order):

M. Anagnostopoulou : page 56,
G. Beltram : pages 44, 60, 80,
N. Benessaiah : pages 29, 33,
CEZH/ICN : page 34,
L. Chilasse : page 86,
A. Crivelli: pages 14, 30, 42, 55, 56, 68,
M. Finlayson : page 22,
Ph. Gerbaux: page 75,
H. Hafner: page 10,
J. Jalbert : pages 13, 19, 33, 57, 61, 70, 78, 79,
N. Kontos : pages 31, 56,
I. Nanopoulou : page 76,
B. Pambour : page 51,
Ch. Perennou : pages 53, 54, 75, 80,
SEHUMED : pages 31, 73,
Tour du Valat: pages 8, 18, 25, 32, 38, 41, 43, 44, 51, 58, 62, 64, 66.

Photographs on pages 28, 59, 81 are by the author.

Useful addresses:

Spyros Kouvelis, MedWet Co-ordinator
MedWet Co-ordination Unit
Villa Kazoulli
Kifissias and Lambraki, Kifissia
145 61 Athens, Greece
T: ++3010 80 89 270, F: ++3010 80 89 274,
E: kouvelis@medwet.org

Delmar Blasco, Secretary General
Convention on Wetlands
Rue Mauverney 28
CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
T: ++41 22 999 0170, F: ++41 22 999 0169,
E: blasco@ramsar.org

Jean Jalbert, Conservation Director
Station biologique de la Tour du Valat
Le Sambuc, 13200 Arles, France
T: ++334 90 97 20 13, F: ++334 90 97 20 19,
E: jalbert@tourduvalat.org

Useful websites

Convention on Wetlands	www.ramsar.org
Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre	www.ekby.gr
MedWet Co-ordination Unit	www.medwet.org
SEHUMED	www.sehumed.uv.es
Station biologique de la Tour du Valat	www.tourduvalat.org
Wetlands International	www.wetland.agro.nl
WWF Mediterranean Programme Office	www.panda.org

ISBN number:

MedWet and regional action

In February 1991, during the Grado Symposium on Mediterranean wetlands, the idea of a concerted regional action – named MedWet - was born. This action brought together governments and non-governmental organisations in the region, and was supported strongly by intergovernmental bodies, such as the Conventions of Barcelona, Bern and Ramsar and the European Commission. Through a series of major projects, MedWet developed methods and tools for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and implemented them in many countries. In addition, it established a solid network of collaboration, within the framework of the Convention on Wetlands, bringing together most of the major stakeholders in the region – the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee.

To assist similar regional initiatives in other parts of the world, this book analyses critically the first 12 years of MedWet, highlighting both positive developments and difficulties faced. On that basis, it attempts to draw lessons for the future and to propose a useful strategy for regional action in favour of wetlands. It is a strategy that includes activities on all levels, from site management to national policies, that brings together all sectors, that acts in the present but plans for the future. More important, it is a strategy built on friendship and respect, which cultivates collaboration in a systematic way.

