



**Water and Wetlands in the Mediterranean**  
from Grado to Agadir  
**the next 20 years**

International Symposium - Agadir, Morocco 6-8 February 2012

*(FINAL DRAFT)*

## **The Agadir Guidelines**

*Practical proposals to value and ensure the sustainable use of water-related ecosystems in the Mediterranean*

### **An event to celebrate**

On 6-8 February 2012, an international symposium on Water and Wetlands in the Mediterranean was held under the high patronage of HM King Mohammed VI of Morocco in the city of Agadir. HRH Princess Lalla Hasnaa delivered an opening address on the subject.

The Symposium was organised by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, its Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) and the Moroccan High Commission on Waters and Forests and Desertification Control. It brought together 262 participants from 21 Mediterranean and other countries, including the MedWet non-governmental member organisations BirdLife International, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN-Med), Tour du Valat (and its Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory), Wetlands International, and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-MedPO) (cf. the detailed participants list).

The Symposium benefited from active contributions by new partners, notably the Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), the Global Footprint Network, the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean, the Mediterranean Water Institute (IME), the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (Med-INA), the Observatory of the Sahara and Sahel (OSS), the Regional Activity Centres for Environment and Development (Plan Bleu) and for Special Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP-MAP), the Union for the Mediterranean, and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

Financial support was provided by the MAVA Foundation for Nature, Italian Ministry of Environment, Moroccan High Commission on Waters and Forests and Desertification Control and MedWet. The Symposium was a major event, commemorating the precursory symposium on "Managing Mediterranean wetlands and their birds for the

year 2000 and beyond”, held at Grado (Italy) in February 1991, at which the idea of MedWet was born.

The Agadir Symposium was the opportunity to note and celebrate the achievements of the last twenty years for the sustainable use of water-related ecosystems in the Mediterranean - since the creation of MedWet - and to commemorate also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ramsar Convention. The achievements were highlighted by:

- acknowledging the success of this Pan-Mediterranean forum and active network,
- recognizing the substantial capacity for cooperation and the synergies that emerged,
- identifying the existence and fostering the development of a significant number of demonstration sites for good practice, spread across the Mediterranean basin, and
- recognizing the value of the lessons learnt through the execution of multi-sectoral and complementary projects at different scales.

The major objectives of the Agadir Symposium were to:

- review progress made by partners in the MedWet Initiative since 1991,
- assess changes in the Mediterranean, especially those affecting the water cycle,
- promote more effective management of wetland ecosystems services for human well-being,
- identify and promote ways for sustainable water and wetland resource use,
- obtain commitments by major stakeholders to undertake actions for wetland ecosystem management and conservation, and
- orient and strengthen the MedWet Initiative through the development of strategic guidelines, so that it can substantially contribute to these objectives.

Key issues concerning water and wetland ecosystems and their intimate relationships were analysed and debated in plenary sessions and in thematic workshops (six in English and six in French). The details are summarized in the proceedings of the Agadir Symposium.

Three concise reports were produced for practical use and reference after the event:

- 1) the **Mediterranean Wetlands Outlook 2012**, a synthesis on status and trends summarizing the evolution during the past twenty years that led to the current situation, and identifying perspectives for action,
- 2) a roster of projects and actions concerning water and wetlands in the Mediterranean, included in the **Agadir Commitments**, to become an evolving reference list under MedWet to encourage exchange of information and closer collaboration, in order to achieve synergy and to identify remaining gaps, and
- 3) the conference conclusions (below), compiled by the participants during the symposium, to serve as the **Agadir Guidelines**, to provide concrete proposals for

specific focus of attention, programmes to be developed, and actions to be implemented, hopefully over the next twenty years or so.

## **Key messages from the first Wetland Observatory report**

Functional wetland ecosystems provide productive and regulating services to human societies, such as food, biodiversity, construction materials, water and the attenuation of floods and droughts. A large part of Mediterranean agriculture - an important economic and employment sector - relies on water resources that can only be sustained through wise wetland management. Such sustainable management needs increased involvement of the development sectors and local operational stakeholders.

Water is a limited resource in many catchment basins of the Mediterranean. The water stock and the replenishment of the water table are issues that need to be addressed when exploiting groundwater resources and planning water abstraction schemes. Current water over-abstraction rates have to be reduced in many catchment basins, in order to allow for the restoration and sustainable management of river floodplains. Wetland ecosystems provide, regulate and purify water resources for human use. Therefore, integrated water resource management is the most sensitive issue for which decision-makers are to be mobilised.

Effective actions in the Mediterranean for wetland protection and the management of wetland species and resources include the development of protected areas (notably Ramsar Sites) and progress with cooperation at the basin level, in order to increase the knowledge on the values of ecosystem services. These actions provide opportunities for education and awareness-raising, notably through the development of sustainable forms of tourism that create socio-economic benefits at local level.

## **Ecosystem-based approach to water resource management**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 1)*

The importance of wetland ecosystems and the wide range of services they provide for human well-being need to be better acknowledged in policies for water management. This requires the development of robust indicators to monitor and evaluate wetland status, with data that are reliable and can be shared across the region. It also needs to take into account traditional knowledge and the exchange of this information.

Often, a communication gap exists between the wetlands community and the water resource managers. It should be overcome through effective strategies and the implementation of a plan for specific actions. To do so, the different partners need to develop a common language, and give sufficient weight to ecosystems in integrated water resources management, including economic valuation of wetland services.

Securing wetland ecosystems through legal protection can help, including their international recognition through listing under the Ramsar Convention. However, it is also important to elaborate sustainable planning mechanisms for valuable wetland ecosystems that are not covered by specific protection schemes.

Local communities, land-owners and decision makers need to be empowered, so as to enhance their role in integrated wetland and water resources management. Pilot projects show that this is most usefully done within the context of a river basin, and that external start-up financing often provides a crucial incentive for inter-sectoral cooperation.

## **Adaptation to climate change**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 2)*

Wetlands play specific roles in mitigation (*e.g.* carbon sequestration) and adaptation (*e.g.* enhancing resilience) to climate change effects, but the difference between adaptation and mitigation, and its practical implications, are not yet well understood and therefore difficult to convey to local stakeholders.

The Mediterranean basin is extremely vulnerable to climate change. To address this challenge, better transfer of research findings and their integration into the decision-making process is needed. Improved knowledge on climate change effects, such as sea-level rise, drought, floods, landslides, changes in biodiversity and desertification needs to be spread widely so as to engage multi-stakeholder dialogues in relation to integrated natural resources management. Again, this is most usefully done at the planning level for river catchment basins and specific coastal zones.

Exchange and sharing of data and information should be done through international cooperation, in order to build response capacities throughout the region, taking into account good practice as well as traditional local knowledge.

## **Human pressures and wetland services**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 3)*

Direct human pressures on water-related ecosystems in the Mediterranean stem essentially from agriculture, a major economic sector supporting national food security, rural employment, export revenue and provision of raw materials to agro-industries. The Mediterranean coastline and large river valleys have always been attractive for human settlements. Today, about 65% of the Mediterranean population lives in urban areas, and urban development is spreading fast. Industrialization is also spreading, especially around large harbours, creating water pollution and extracting materials. Finally, tourism is a very dynamic sector in the Mediterranean, generating economic growth, income and employment, as the region is receiving about 30% of the world total of international tourists.

It is therefore essential for wetland managers to work together with experts in the sectors exerting pressures on these ecosystems, such as water management, agriculture, land-use planning, industry, transport, tourism, energy, and fisheries. Mutually sharing information, data and experience is important to improve the knowledge needed for decision-making processes at local and national scale, and to encourage the use of trans-sectoral approaches for integrated spatial planning.

At the scale of the Mediterranean basin, MedWet needs to work more closely with organisations active in the field of sustainable development, in order to improve the

effectiveness of international governance and land-use planning, and management at national and local levels. This includes the reinforcement and further development of participatory processes, the integration of different sectors from public services and private business, and the civil society.

Established protected areas (and notably Ramsar Sites) play a key role as model areas for local sustainable development. For the development of specific river basin plans, protected areas fulfill an important role as spatial planning instruments. This role needs to be maintained, further developed and more widely communicated. This will also provide a better visibility to the Ramsar and MedWet approaches for sustainable development.

## **Values of wetland cultural services**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 4)*

We should acknowledge that cultural and social factors play a key role in shaping the past, present and future of Mediterranean wetlands, enhancing ecosystem resilience and promoting human well-being. We should also appreciate that our value systems are varied and changeable, and above all dependent on local and global social and ecological contexts. Thus, the crucial role of human activities in relation to nature, natural resources and landscapes needs to be recognised, studied and better integrated in policy-making with the ultimate objective of achieving sustainability and well-being.

The richness of the cultural heritage of wetlands and its value to Mediterranean societies is only recently being assessed in an integrative manner, after a long period of highly segmented approaches that led to the loss of much traditional understanding and knowledge. Today it is therefore important to communicate values of culture in wetland conservation, as well as values of wetlands for cultural diversity, and to adapt messages to specific audiences, stakeholders and decision makers.

In order to reach relevant constituencies, communication channels among them need to be strengthened through international institutions and possibly through allies in politics and media, to act as spokespersons for the cause.

The integration of cultural dimensions in the management of wetlands needs to be promoted through:

- changing the usual conservation paradigm, making use of unprecedented windows of opportunity now being offered in social and political contexts,
- adapting and drawing inspiration from relevant local norms and values, as well as traditional knowledge and governance systems,
- implementing and testing the latest research results from human and natural sciences allowing biophysical and cultural interdependencies to be dealt with, such ecological solidarities being the cornerstone of the stewardship of wetlands.

Opportunities exist to enhance cooperation between the three global networks of protected areas: UNESCO's Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO World Heritage Properties and Ramsar Sites, and with their managers to create synergies and to develop good practices for the management of shared sites.

The roster of relevant projects and action commitments on culture and wetlands initiated during this Symposium should be further developed with the assistance of the MedWet Secretariat, the MedWet Culture Network and members of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com), and shared widely to stimulate specific cooperation on activities that meet defined needs.

## **Sustainable use of wetland resources**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 5)*

Many Mediterranean countries have experienced since the 1960s socio-economic changes, economic growth, reduced poverty and improved welfare, in parallel to increased pressures on the environment and wetland resources, such as fish, birds, grazing lands, wild plants and freshwater. To the point that the ecological footprint calculations in 2007 exceed the biocapacity of nearly all Mediterranean countries - by more than 150% in a majority of them.

Sustaining the benefits generated by wetlands for people and future generations requires the commitment of all: policy-makers, civil society, the business sector, international conservation and development organizations and networks, including MedWet, and funding agencies. To this end, national and international conservation objectives and targets should more widely be shared with and linked to supra-national agreements and regional coordination and harmonization mechanisms.

At the national level in Mediterranean countries, inter-sectoral water and wetland resource use policies and action plans need to be further developed and implemented. This will be facilitated by the involvement of wetland-related decision makers and scientists in sustainable development initiatives, and by boosting the participation of civil society.

Environmental considerations need to be mainstreamed with socio-economic development at landscape and river basin levels, and not remain confined to protected areas only. Wetland monitoring systems need therefore to develop more holistic approaches to data collection and interpretation, targeted for decision makers, and including human and social indicators, besides environmental and economic ones.

## **Wetland ecosystems biodiversity and its values**

*(Conclusions of thematic session 6)*

More research on the values of wetland services is required. Case studies should clarify the difference between existence (intrinsic) values, and human-related values, including indirect values (ecological functions), direct values (products), option values (genetic resources for possible future use) and cultural values (including spiritual ones). The value of biodiversity should be based on an inventory and study of key indicators (mainly species) and their functions through a collaborative process for which it would be helpful to prepare specific guidelines, distinguishing between marketable and non-marketable (existence) values.

Research results of economic valuations need to be transmitted to all stakeholders (public and private) and the knowledge on wetland biodiversity needs to be organized by country and become accessible to all, possibly through a database linked to the Mediterranean Wetland Observatory.

The value of wetland biodiversity has to be recognized by national administrations and included into appropriate legislation in view of compensation for damages and degradations. This should be based on the "polluters pay" principle and could include proposals for (marketable) payments for ecosystem services.

Clarifications of the mandates and roles of different administrations are required. The recognition of wetland biodiversity needs to be substantiated through the elaboration of national wetland strategies, national action plans and site-specific management plans, supported by national red lists for species and ecosystems.

Actions have to be taken at all levels: global, Mediterranean, sub-regional, national, provincial and local levels, and include the exchange of data, experience and lessons learnt.

## **Cooperation and partnerships**

The **Mediterranean Wetlands Committee** (MedWet/Com) brings together all Mediterranean states, as well as inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations. It was established in 1998 in the framework of the Ramsar Convention and constitutes a body that needs to play a major role to support international cooperation in the field of water and wetland resources management in the Mediterranean basin. To this end, the membership of MedWet/Com needs to be broadened to include greater representation of the water and other relevant sectors, such as land-use planning, agriculture, tourism, transport, energy, culture, and others. The operation of MedWet/Com must be re-energised and streamlined.

The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee must clarify the needs for relevant and specific outputs to be produced by the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO). This will enable the MWO programme to serve as a major monitoring tool for the status and trends of water and wetland resources and their uses in the Mediterranean, while also responding to urgent information needs on a case-by-case basis. Under the guidance of MedWet/Com, countries, scientific and technical organisations working with MedWet, and others are encouraged to provide data that will ensure an objective, science-based and widely accepted monitoring programme by the MWO.

In this context, the use of satellite-based earth observation tools by different actors should be further promoted through the development and execution of local and regional capacity building projects, as a cost-effective and productive support for water and wetland inventory, assessment and monitoring. Particularly the GlobWetland-II project, generously supported by the European Space Agency, could be expanded to cover the entire Mediterranean region, and serve as a valuable contribution to the development of a Global Wetland Observation System (G-WOS).

The many on-going and planned activities concerning water and wetlands in the Mediterranean need to be better inter-related and coordinated, aiming at greater synergy to promote sustainability in ecological, economic and social terms.

A practical start to this end is the establishment of an evolving roster of projects and actions listed in the ***Agadir Commitments***. The MedWet Secretariat should act as a clearing house for projects listed therein and maintain updated information on their progress, facilitate exchange of information and cooperation between the actors of listed projects and other potentially interested partners. An updated synthesis on the outputs and results produced by the projects listed in the Agadir Commitments should be prepared for each meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, and made accessible on the Internet.

The Agadir Commitments have to be considered as an evolving framework. The inclusion of new projects by their proponents is strongly encouraged. This concerns particularly projects with an emphasis on water management and ecosystem conservation, including applied research. Projects to be included can be focusing at all geographical levels, from local, to regional, national, river basin and Mediterranean-wide.

## **The next 20 years**

The Agadir Symposium brought together an extraordinary amount of expertise, knowledge, ideas and commitment. It was an opportunity to acknowledge that the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative (MedWet) has established an effective operational structure. Through its own dynamic and good will, MedWet has produced over the years a set of practical tools at international scale and continues to foster innovative thinking. Through significant partnerships, MedWet has established a remarkable regional network for cooperation, with a rapidly increasing capacity to integrate site and river basin management across the region. Something to be proud of - indeed a fitting 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

But the World, and particularly the Mediterranean region as a smaller cosmos of its own, has changed much since the time of the Grado Symposium. And further changes and challenges are emerging constantly and rapidly.

The challenges remain huge - so the Symposium participants concluded that:

- We are on the right track - but need to redouble our efforts.
- We need to sharpen the way we communicate and engage with our new partners, in order to share most effectively our expertise and experience with those sectors that do not yet adequately value wetlands and their services.



- We need to consolidate actions by the civil society and locally active non-governmental organisations, to support their activities for environmental education and awareness and to encourage their networking at regional, national and Mediterranean levels.
- We need to strengthen our efforts to involve the younger generations in our projects and meetings. In this way, we can support the school children of Kenitra (Morocco) and Ile Rousse (Corsica) to fulfill the promise they made in Agadir, assuring us that they aim to assume a greater role in our societies and to work closely together in the Mediterranean basin for the good use of our water resources and to manage wisely our precious wetlands.
- We plan to meet again, already in ten years from now, to assess progress of our work and to re-affirm our priorities half-way towards an Agadir+20 Symposium.