



Background document

The context

The Mediterranean Basin is rich in wetlands that play a key role in the region's water cycle, characterised by the uneven distribution of water resources. However, an estimated 50% of Mediterranean wetlands have been lost during the twentieth century- and the degradation of many of those remaining has undermined their role and reduced substantially their services to humanity.

The problem was clearly documented during a major international symposium held in the Italian town of Grado from 3-10 February 1991. This led to a decision for joint action - encapsulated in the Grado Declaration and Strategy-, which resulted in 1992 in the establishment of MedWet, the first regional initiative of the Ramsar Convention.

Two decades later, in early February 2012, a similar pan-Mediterranean Symposium is organised in the Moroccan city of Agadir to review the situation, assess the new challenges and plan for the next twenty years.

Objectives of the Symposium

The major objectives of the Agadir Symposium can be summarised as follows:

- To review progress made since the 1991 Grado Declaration and to assess the changes happening in the Mediterranean -especially on the water cycle- and their potential impact on water-related ecosystems.
- In view of these changes, to promote and optimise the wetland ecosystems services to humanity (as documented by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment).
- To identify and propose ways to achieve sustainable water and wetland resource use and to secure the invaluable services that water-related ecosystems provide now and in the future.
- To obtain commitments from major stakeholders in the Mediterranean region on actions in favour of wetlands and the good use of their services.
- To reorient and strengthen the MedWet Initiative with an updated vision and strategic directions, so that it can contribute substantially to the achievement of the above objectives.

New factors and challenges

At the beginning of the third millennium, the Mediterranean is in turmoil.

In the past 20 years, the resident population in the countries around the Basin has increased from 378 to 465 million, mainly in North Africa and the Middle East. Tourism in turn has reached 270 million per year from 167 million in 1990. In addition, legal and illegal immigration flows have been growing at rapid rates.

These trends are not unrelated to the present turmoil. In the countries of the South and East of the Mediterranean, regime changes have already happened in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, while political unrest -sometimes leading to military conflict- affects many other countries, creating expectations for democratic developments and social and economic modernisation. The Palestinian issue remains still unresolved. In the North of the Basin, Greece and Portugal are facing extremely serious economic problems, while Spain and Italy are taking drastic measures to cope with high debt. Thus the financial disparity between the North and the South is decreasing in a perverse manner.

Certain positive efforts have been noted in recent years. These include the Union for the Mediterranean launched by the EU, which has been blocked to a large extent by conflicts over the Palestinian issue. On the northern side of the Basin, EU Directives (such as those on water, habitats and birds) and the Natura 2000 ecological network have resulted in positive steps, including new protected areas with water-related ecosystems. Still limited progress has been made through actions of multilateral agreements and other international organisations, which have increased significantly in recent years, targeting the South and East of the Basin. In the past, these efforts have had moderate results and have failed to make decisive improvements. The political and economic fluidity that reigns at present -in spite of positive expectations- undermines efforts to develop sound predictions for the future.

Concerning water-related ecosystems, improved knowledge of their status and trends is being achieved through the operation and development by the Tour du Valat research centre and its partners of the Mediterranean Wetland Observatory, in the framework of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com).

The main probable conclusions that can be drawn from recent developments and events are the following:

- The legitimate requests of permanent inhabitants around the Basin for ensuring their subsistence requirements and improved living conditions -compounded by the needs of transient visitors- will exacerbate human pressures on wetlands, especially in coastal areas. On the other hand, wetland resources and services when exploited sustainably can contribute decisively to the improvement of living standards, by preventing deterioration of important resources.
- The impacts of climate change, as well as increasing human demands, may change the Mediterranean map, exerting stronger pressures on water resources and making the role of wetlands in managing the water cycle even more important.
- The dire economic situation in many Mediterranean countries will discourage costly infrastructure megaprojects and will hopefully lead to modest and sustainable interventions that may favour natural ecosystem services, such as those provided by wetlands. It could also encourage uncontrolled developments with little oversight - at the expense of wetlands and people that rely on them.
- The capacity of the water and wetland management community across the region has improved substantially.

Wetland services and water

Wetlands provide valuable natural resources and services to humanity. The former include water, fish and molluscs, biomass, salt, reeds and other useful materials, while the latter include pollution control, flood protection, shoreline stabilisation, water storage and many others. The provision of freshwater is particularly crucial, especially in the dryer parts of the Mediterranean. Wetlands constitute the ecological systems and infrastructure through which the hydrological cycles provide humanity with basic freshwater resources at little cost and over the long term.

Thus, wetlands constitute a major element of the water cycle. Their functions depend on a certain water regime that needs to be ensured by the operation of large-scale water infrastructure (such as dams), but also by the operation of many elements of small-scale infrastructure. In return, wetlands tend to balance the water cycle and provide supporting services. That is why they should be carefully considered as useful elements in water planning and management schemes.

It follows that managing wetlands more effectively will result in better, more sustainable and less costly provision of good quality water resources. This is the crucial part of a general framework of sustainability, the basis for any other societal and welfare aspects especially in the Mediterranean

Main themes

Six main themes have been selected for particular attention during the Symposium. These themes will be treated in specific thematic sessions, which will be planned jointly by the lead organisations mentioned below. Each theme will be approached at the international and the national level, while also giving attention to local initiatives. They will be illustrated by concrete examples.

1. Ecosystem-based approaches to water-resource management (wetlands in the water cycle, pollution, allocation of water and irrigation, hydroelectric energy).
GWP-Med + Wetlands International + WWF-MedPO

In a changing world, the Mediterranean region is already facing serious challenges with regards to its water resources management. There is growing pressure on water resources because of increased demand related to demographic growth, economic and social changes and related development models chosen by States. Already 180 million people in the region have to do with far less than the internationally accepted minimum amount of water required for meeting human needs, mostly in the southern and eastern states of the Basin. With high rates of population growth and lifestyle choices increasingly biased towards a more water intensive economy (e.g. giving priority to food and energy sources) the demand from people is only going to increase in the short to medium term.

For decades now, wetland ecosystems in the region have been under serious threat because of the priority given to development and mistaken perceptions of the value of wetland ecosystems and their services. Agricultural development, domestic water and industrial needs have dominated water resource decision-making, meaning that water resources that maintain wetland ecosystems have been diverted, transferred to other regions or impounded to serve other uses. Furthermore the high risk of floods in the region from flashy and unpredictable rivers means that often flood defence has taken predominantly civil engineering approaches to risk management, significantly altering natural water regimes and

separating wetlands from their water sources. The result is that many of the region's wetlands have been seriously degraded or simply lost.

To support the role of wetlands as natural infrastructure in water management the following must be achieved:

- Strengthening the implementation of policies related to water use that respects the natural environment.
- Decentralising water management systems and taking into account local social and governance structures.
- Increasing the awareness of water management authorities -frequently accustomed to a strictly engineering approach- and helping them to adopt approaches that would look at water resources more comprehensively in order to provide equal benefits and services to all sides of the water equation.

2. Adaptation to climate change and wetland services (including those that help to reduce desertification).

UfM + OSS + MedWet

The situation of water penury is likely to be aggravated by global climate change, predicted to result in reduced water resources in this part of the world due to an anticipated decline in rainfall combined with increased evaporative loss and extended periods of drought. Predictability of the climate and water availability is also likely to diminish, increasing uncertainty and further challenging water managers to balance different water users' needs.

Maintaining and enhancing the wellbeing of Mediterranean people will thus require efforts to adapt to both climate and non-climate drivers of change in an integrated manner. Wetlands play a role in both the mitigation and the adaptation to climate change. Indeed, while wetlands are crucial -yet often ignored- carbon sinks with higher carbon storage capacities than terrestrial systems, they also enhance the resilience of communities to shocks and stresses. Replacing this buffering capacity with human-made infrastructure is often not only extremely costly but suboptimal and unevenly distributed. Understanding how wetlands support adaptation strategies in light of climate and other changes becomes a fundamental element of sustainable management. To do so, the following objectives should be aimed for:

- To understand how wetlands will be affected by climate but also other important drivers of change (population increase, urbanisation, intensification etc.).
- To relate changes in the marine/coastal environment to changes in terrestrial systems, which means relating water management to coastal management.
- To understand better how wetland functions and services relate and support various facets of human wellbeing, including the capacity to adapt to rapid climatic, environmental and social changes.
- To strengthen not only the understanding of wetland ecosystem services but also the need for wise governance of multiple resources at different scales.

3. Maintaining wetland services despite increasing human pressures (demographic change and urbanisation, tourism, land use changes, major infrastructure development), especially in coastal areas.

Plan Bleu + CEDARE

In the next two decades, the Mediterranean will continue to experience major land use changes including significant population growth/re-distribution, increased tourism and resort development, urbanisation and modernisation of the agriculture sector. These human pressures will combine with climatic changes to place considerable pressure on wetlands

and associated water resources. Coastal wetlands, already degraded in light of their position downstream of cumulative catchment pressures, will be particularly threatened due to their proximity to historic settlement areas and their selection as prime locations for large infrastructure developments (urbanisation, tourism facilities, road arteries and harbours). Many coastal wetlands will become trapped between these human pressures and changing coastal processes such as sea level rise and increased coastal erosion, thus threatening the ability of wetlands to provide services to future generations. To face these problems the following measures are appropriate:

- To predict trends and spatially plan developments taking into account future changes (e.g. sea level rise, population changes in tourism, intensity of resort use and increase in living standards).
- To approach coastal management in a more integrated manner, examining both marine and terrestrial processes that affect coastal ecosystems and livelihoods.
- To use opportunities to plan different types of tourism and mixed land uses in order to reduce human pressures in the Mediterranean from increasing populations.
- To reduce pressures on water and their impact on wetlands and pressures on wetland space for agriculture, urbanisation, large infrastructure (such as dams, road arteries and harbours).

4. The cultural heritage of wetlands and its values for Mediterranean societies (landscapes, archaeology and historic buildings, traditional practices, sacred sites, secular and religious social events).

UNESCO / WHC + Ramsar CWG + MAVA Foundation

Optimising the services and values of water related ecosystems requires the active involvement of human beings. Traditional activities for using wetland resources and services -still surviving in parts of the Mediterranean Basin- have resulted in a rich cultural heritage. This heritage can be used to reconnect people with wetlands.

At the local level, the appreciation of wetlands by inhabitants in their vicinity can be strengthened by promoting understanding of their cultural aspects. Secular and religious social events can play an especially major role in reviving the links between people and wetlands, contributing thus to their conservation and wise use.

On another level, the cultural heritage of wetlands can add to the attraction of sites for national and international visitors. Sites that combine both nature and culture in an integrated manner can, not only attract a larger number of visitors, benefiting local economies, but also teach people about the different ways in which different cultures have balanced the wise use of resources. In that regard, 'sacred' sites are important learning sites for sustainability and can provide a strong motive for wetland conservation.

5. Achieving wise (sustainable) use of wetland-related resources (agriculture, stock breeding, fishing, aquaculture, salt extraction, building materials).

Global Footprint Network + Tour du Valat Research Centre + EMWIS

Wetlands are important components of a sustainable landscape mosaic, and are nearly always directly or indirectly related to the sustainability of agriculture, stock-breeding, fishing and aquaculture and the extraction of salt, timber and firewood, the collection of wetland products and medicinal plants and other activities.

Wetlands also contribute to the subsistence of local communities, while also playing a major role in the viability of key commercial sectors. Aquaculture greatly depends on the water purification function of wetlands and similarly, agriculture depends on a properly functioning water cycle. Wetlands are not only essential for the subsistence and economic

wellbeing of local communities, but also to more distant urban populations, through the interconnected supply chains of sectors that depend on wetlands.

Understanding the balance between conservation and exploitation of wetland resources and their links to current as well as future generations cannot be achieved without addressing the interrelated processes of different sectors and actors. Too often, resources are managed separately, ecosystems divided artificially and short-term goals favoured over longer-term management.

To achieve a wiser and more sustainable use of wetland-related resources over the long-term, governance and decision-making should aim:

- To recognise not only the commercial value of wetland-related resources but also the role that they play in the subsistence and wellbeing of current and future generations (e.g. food security, medicine, cultural/spiritual importance).
- To develop sustainability guidelines for all sectors that impact on or are impacted by wetlands -taking into account both ecological and social considerations- while ensuring that trade-offs and synergies between sectors are addressed.
- To adopt a dialogue-based approach to ensure that all stakeholders are represented equitably and are able to negotiate the use of a common resource.

6. Biodiversity values dependent on wetland ecosystems (including direct services to humanity, science and education).

UNEP/MAP / RAC-SPA + IUCN

We have to distinguish two types of biodiversity values supported by wetland ecosystems: the intrinsic value and the anthropocentric values.

The first argument for the intrinsic value of biodiversity is the idea that humans are part of nature. So we need to protect the biodiversity dependant from wetlands regardless of its value to humans. We can also stress the need to protect the intrinsic value of wetlands and their biodiversity because we (humans) are the direct cause of the loss of biodiversity in wetlands through the degradation and loss of habitat, overexploitation of resources and upstream perturbations of the water cycle.

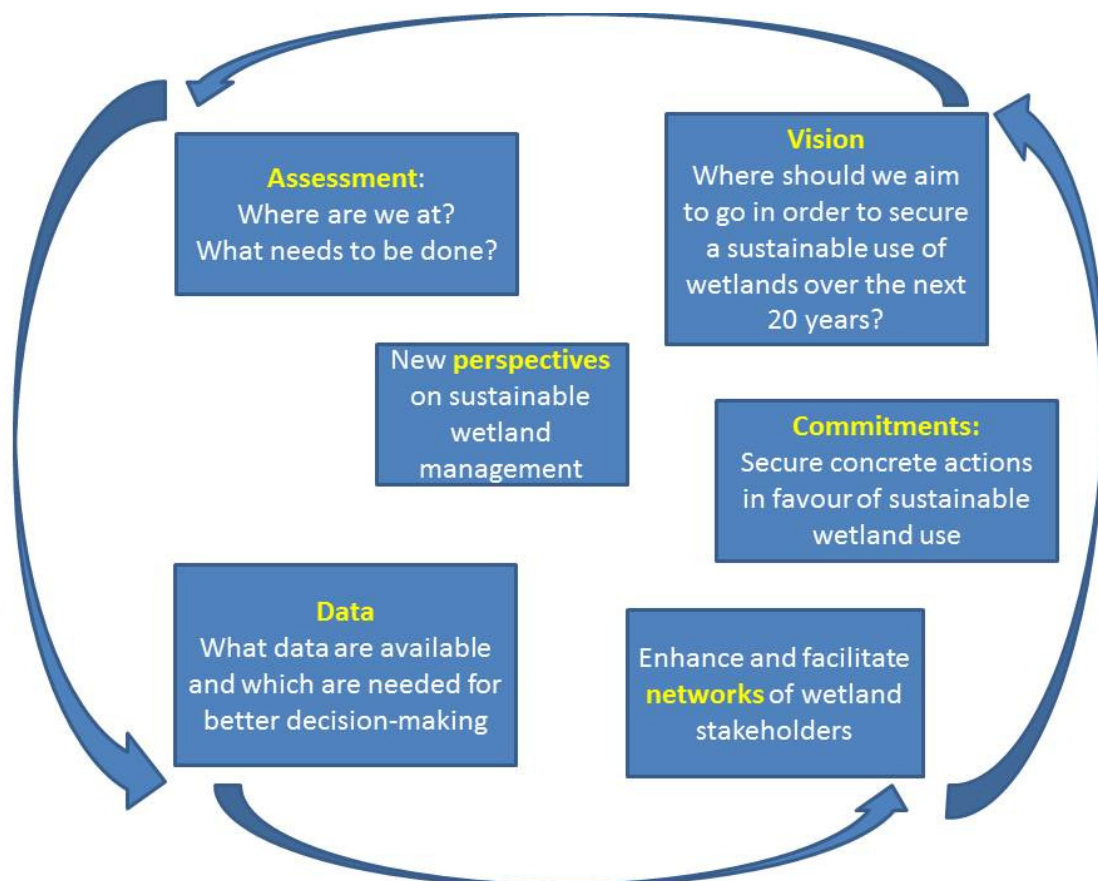
As humans, we are inextricably and wholly dependent on this diversity of living things for survival. Biodiversity, beside its support to genetic diversity, species, populations, communities and ecosystems, and landscapes and regions, provides countless benefits to humans at all these scales. Some of these benefits include:

- Economic benefits, both direct and indirect: Biodiversity in wetland-related ecosystems contributes significantly to human food security. Human receive a wealth of benefits from ecosystems and their related biodiversity. These are described as 'ecosystem services' and include physical products, such as food and medicines, as well as useful services such as pollination of crop plants and climate regulation. Sustainable harvesting of wetland animals, notably fish and birds, is another service provided by wetland biodiversity. In the south and east part of the Mediterranean, it contributes to the subsistence of local populations.
- Aesthetic benefits: biodiversity is directly enhancing leisure and tourism activity while contributing substantially to local economies.
- Scientific and ethical knowledge: wetlands biodiversity with its specific flora and fauna also provide a wide field of research and new medicines.

Expected outputs

At the conclusion of the Agadir Symposium, we aim to obtain the following outputs to support future work:

- Assessment of two decades of efforts for better wetland conservation and resource use in the Mediterranean. The assessment will outline lessons and insights gained as well as what future efforts need to be developed.
- Database that will detail what concrete data are available and which are needed by decision-makers in order to result in a clearer understanding of values and services of water-related ecosystems, especially in sectors related to water management, territorial planning, tourism and other socio-economic developments.
- New perspectives in wetland conservation and management that include other sectors such as water, culture, social and economic planning.
- Increased networking and cooperation among public administrators and experts from many countries involved with wetlands and water.
- Specific commitments by participating organisations, states and individual experts concerning actions in favour of the sustainable use of wetlands in the coming years.
- Development of a broader and more inclusive vision for the next 20 years of MedWet, with more diverse partnerships, incorporating a deeper understanding of water related ecosystems and acting catalytically to ensure the good use of their values and services.



The future of MedWet

The MedWet Initiative -an inter-regional activity of the Ramsar Convention- was founded 20 years ago, bringing together all Mediterranean states and the Palestinian Territories, intergovernmental organisations, international NGOs and wetland centres in the framework of MedWet/Com, which constitutes its supervisory body. Its first activities concerned the development of tools in wetland inventory, management, dissemination of research results, training of managers and decision-makers and public awareness. These have been applied in various countries in the region, such as Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia. In addition, the MedWet Initiative has promoted the interests of wetlands in many fora, especially those related to water, and has promoted the concept of water dialogues.

During the past decade, its Secretariat has been funded by the Mediterranean States, with Greece generously hosting it and providing approximately 60% of its budget. The difficult financial situation of the main funders of MedWet may undermine its ability to operate as in the past and may lead to others approaches as to its role, staffing, hosting and budget.

The MedWet/Com, a unique international body that brings together on an equitable basis states, multilateral agreements and NGOs is perhaps the strongest component of the MedWet Initiative. After many years of operation, it requires rejuvenation and a critical look at its terms of reference and *modus operandi*. Its membership also needs to be re-examined and broadened to include more partners from sectors related to water and wetlands. Perhaps the future would require that more tasks are undertaken by the members of MedWet/Com, with the MedWet Coordinator playing an executive role, while the MedWet Secretariat is focused on serving the Committee.

In addition, a major role of MedWet in the years to come would be to catalyse and coordinate the commitments agreed at the Agadir Symposium for actions in favour of Mediterranean wetlands, creating synergy among them and optimising their impact.

It is hoped that the diverse participants in the Mediterranean Wetland Symposium will evaluate these and many other ideas and will reach consensus that will guide future actions in favour of wetlands and of the human beings related to them.

The guidance for MedWet will be finally analysed by its Steering Group (chaired by France, with the participation of Morocco, Greece, Jordan, the Ramsar Secretariat and Tour du Valat Research Centre), which will submit its final recommendations to the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) meeting in July 2012 during the 11th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Ramsar (COP11, Bucharest, Romania).

Acronyms

ALECSO	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDARE	The Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe
CEHUM	<i>Centro Español de Humedales</i>
CMS-AEWA	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species - African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement
CIHEAM	<i>Centre international de hautes études agronomiques méditerranéennes</i>
CWG	Ramsar Culture Working Group
EC	European Commission
EMWIS	Euro Mediterranean Water Information System
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
GFN	Global Footprint Network
GWP-Med	Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IME	<i>Institut Méditerranéen de l'Eau</i>
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
Med-INA	Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos
MedWet	Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative, Ramsar Convention
MedWet/Com	Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, Ramsar Convention
MWO	Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory
OSS	Observatory of Sahara and Sahel
Plan Bleu	UNEP-MAP Regional Activity Centre - Environment & Development in the Mediterranean
RAC-SPA	UNEP-MAP Regional Activity Centre - Special Protected Areas
SPANA Morocco	<i>Société de Protection des Animaux et de la Nature</i>
Tour du Valat	Tour du Valat Research Centre, Le Sambuc
TUI	TUI Travel and Resort Company
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)
UNEP-MAP	United Nations Environment Programme - Mediterranean Action Plan
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WHC	UNESCO / World Heritage Convention
WTO	World Tourism Organisation
WWF MedPO	World Wide Fund for Nature, Mediterranean Programme Office