

## **MedWet: 2017 and beyond**

### Background paper

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MedWet is the first and major Ramsar Regional Initiative. Established in 1991, after the Grado Symposium<sup>1</sup>, it has adopted as its mission the Grado statement summarised as:

*To stop and reverse the loss and degradation of Mediterranean wetlands.*

Today, MedWet's membership consists of 27 states – all Contracting Parties of the Ramsar Convention –, as well as international organisations, research centres and NGOs. However, the links between members and the Initiative have weakened considerably.

Major developments affecting MedWet today are the following:

- Since May 2014, the MedWet Secretariat has been hosted by France at Tour du Valat with limited financial support as compared to the arrangement with the former host country Greece.
- The MedWet Coordinator, Delmar Blasco resigned in February 2017.
- In search for a new Coordinator a call for applications was made in November 2016. None of the candidates was selected.
- In the meanwhile, the Chair of MedWet, Gordana Beltram, has filled the gap, assisted by Steering Group members Jean Jalbert, Thymio Papayannis, Tobias Salathé and Antonio Troya.
- A meeting on the re-assessment of MedWet and its direction for the future is planned for 2-3 November 2017 in Ljubljana, Slovenia.
- MedWet is involved in the MAVA Foundation's Mediterranean Strategy 2017 - 2022 from which it receives funds, related to the activities in which it will partake.
- MedWet has reinitiated its participation in donor-funded projects and is in the process of submitting two project proposals for EU funding.
- The sharing of the tasks between MedWet and Tour du Valat needs to be clarified, especially concerning the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO) and the Mediterranean Wetlands Alliance (MWA; being established).

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<sup>1</sup> The Grado Symposium, titled International Symposium on "Managing Mediterranean Wetlands and their Birds", was organised by the International Waterfowl & Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), now Wetlands International, in the town of Grado, Italy, in February 1991.

## **The last decade - Major MedWet developments**

A more detailed timeline of the MedWet Initiative's major milestones since its establishment is provided in Annex I.

### 2006: Extraordinary MedWet/Com meeting in Tirana

A MedWet Steering Group was established to guide and supervise the work of the Initiative.

### 2008: Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory

Proposed by Tour du Valat in the broader framework of MedWet and endorsed by the MedWet/Com.

### 2012: Agadir Symposium (Grado+20)

Convened by MedWet on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Grado Symposium under the patronage of HM King Mohammed VI of Morocco.

Adoption of the Agadir Commitments, which were not implemented and are still relevant.

### 2016: MedWet/Com12

Meeting in Paris on 7-11 February, the Committee approved the proposals of the MedWet Coordinator, Delmar Blasco, concerning:

- Terms of Reference for MedWet.
- ToR of the MedWet Scientific and Technical Network.
- MedWet Framework for Action 2016-2030 'Wetlands for sustainable Development in the Mediterranean Region'.

## **Current realities affecting MedWet**

### Strengths:

- Cultivation of a spirit of equity and collaboration among organisations and individuals involved with Mediterranean wetlands.
- Original governance scheme, where states, international organisations, NGOs and wetland centres have an equal voice.
- Participation of all 27 broader Mediterranean states in the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee.
- Collective 25 years' experience in the management and sustainable use of wetlands.
- The majority of member states are paying their contributions towards MedWet.
- Additional financial support provided by funders such as the MAVA Foundation and through participation in projects.

- Substantial track record and wide Mediterranean network make MedWet well placed to draw project based funding from EU and other funding instruments.
- Technical, scientific and moral support from Mediterranean research centres, international NGOs and experts (such as IUCN, MedINA, Tour du Valat, WWF International).
- MedWet's communication activities have been strengthened and it is gradually establishing itself as a communication hub for Mediterranean wetlands, organisations and stakeholders.
- MedWet has proved to be resilient to the many external pressures.

#### Weaknesses:

- Funding uncertainties and financial fragility.
- Lack of inspired leadership.
- Governance and administrative weaknesses due to structural deficiencies and inadequate staffing of the MedWet Secretariat.
- Too ambitious, too few concrete outcomes.
- Lack of adaptive approach to external change
- Funding uncertainties make it more difficult to attract high level candidates for the coordinator's position.
- Turbulent political and financial situation in a number of MedWet member states, which forces a retreat from non-statutory obligations.
- Negative impact of these developments mainly on local and national NGOs in countries of the South and East of the Mediterranean Basin, making ineffective the MedWet networking efforts.
- Weakening of contacts between the MedWet Secretariat and the members of MedWet/Com.
- Problems of some of the wetland centres supporting MedWet, except for Tour du Valat, and until recently, lack of operation of the MedWet Scientific and Technical Network.

#### Opportunities:

- Global focus on climate change and water issues, potentially positive role of wetlands providing momentum to MedWet.
- Civil society has experienced a strong development in a number of Mediterranean countries, in parallel to the difficulties faced by central governments.
- Hosting of the MedWet Secretariat in Tour du Valat that could provide major benefits for both, but a reassessment and refocusing must be agreed upon by both parties to achieve more productive collaboration and mutual benefits.
- Mobilisation of the MedWet STN –if properly managed–, which may provide multiple benefits to the work of MedWet.

- Establishment of the MedWet Culture Network –in collaboration with MEDINA– opening new perspectives.
- MedWet’s central role in the M3 Outcome of the MAVA Mediterranean Strategy provides MedWet the opportunity to consolidate its position as a communication hub for Mediterranean wetlands.

Threats:

- Replacement of collaborative activities among MedWet members by competitive attitudes, resulting in duplication of efforts and confusion.
- General disappointment with collective initiatives in the Mediterranean, which do not seem to address effectively the major political, economic and social issues in the region with a negative impact on MedWet.
- Reliance on project-based funding, which can steer the MedWet Secretariat away from its purpose as the executive body of the MedWet Initiative and its strategic vision.
- Inability to adapt to a changing environment.
- Past role and niche of MedWet undertaken by other organisations.

### **Initial proposals on the future of MedWet**

Analysing previous efforts to re-structure MedWet in its third decade, various radical proposals have been presented to capitalise on its strengths and emerging opportunities, remedy its principal weaknesses, and ensure its future. These can be summarised as follows:

- A. Re-focus the activities of MedWet according to the following sectors and priorities, with concrete outcomes/outputs:
- Climate change and wetlands (A)
  - Wetland and water policies and strategic planning (B)
  - Wetland inventories, monitoring and Observatory (C)
  - Visitor management and wetland protected areas (D)
  - Cultural aspects of Mediterranean Wetlands (E)
  - Communications and awareness raising (F)
  - Applied research for wetland conservation and wise use (G)
  - Economic and social aspects of wetlands (I)
- B. Ensure legitimacy and independence:
- Clarify and formalise the links between MedWet and the Ramsar Convention, while retaining the autonomy of the Regional Initiative through MedWet/Com.

- Define the role of the Ramsar Standing Committee and the Ramsar COP, as well as its Secretary General, versus MedWet leadership, through a COP13 Resolution.
- Ensure the operation of the Initiative through a Secretariat organisation established by the hosting country, which would allow the legal operation of MedWet (as already done by Greece and France).

C. Improving MedWet governance:

- Clarify the composition, roles, rights and responsibilities of (a) the MedWet/Com and its Chairperson, (b) the Steering Group and (c) the Coordinator.
- Appoint a new MedWet Coordinator.
- Strengthen the moral authority of MedWet/Com, with the Ramsar COP maintaining its overarching decision-making prerogatives.
- Make sure that the members of MedWet/Com will be identical with the Ramsar Focal Points.
- Assess carefully the operation of the Steering Group and examine ways to improve it, increasing its effectiveness. Alternatively, consider the abolition of the SG and its replacement by a small MedWet/Com Executive Committee.

D. Ensuring financial stability:

- Incorporate Contracting Parties contributions to MedWet in their regular yearly payments to the Ramsar Convention.
- Negotiate with non-state MedWet/Com members a modest financial contribution yearly to the operation of MedWet.
- Intensify efforts for the development of projects by MedWet in areas where it has comparative advantages and good previous experience. Active involvement of its interested members.
- Focus of MedWet activities on issues that are of major concern to member states and where MedWet can make a difference.

## ANNEX I

### **MedWet Initiative timeline**

The table below summarises milestones of the MedWet Initiative, from its inception at the end of the Grado Symposium to the present.

<i><b>Date</b></i>	<i><b>MedWet/Com</b></i>	<i><b>Coordinator</b></i>	<i><b>Remarks</b></i>
1991	Grado, Italy	Thymio Papayan- nis (TP)	Grado Sympo- sium
1992			MedWet1 EU project with a secretariat established in Rome
1993			
1994			
1995			
1996	MW Conference Venice, Italy		MedWet2 EU project and adoption of the Mediterranean Wetlands Strat- egy (10 year vi- sion)
1997			MedWet Secre- tariat established in the Greek Bio- tope Wetland Centre (EKBY)
1998 (March)	MW/Com1 Thessaloniki, Greece		
1999 (February)	MW/Com2 Valencia, Spain		Ramsar COP8 at Valencia, Spain MedWetCoast project
2000 (April)	MW/Com3 Djerba, Tunisia		TP's resignation
2001	MW/Com4 Sesimbra, Portu- gal	Spyros Kouvelis	
2002	MW/Com5		

	Izmir, Turkey		
2003			
2004	MW/Com6 Tipaza, Algeria		North African Wetlands Net- work (NAWN) project
2005	MW/Com7 Kampala, Uganda		Ramsar COP9 at Kampala, Uganda MedWet CODDE project
2006	MW Steering Group Tirana Albania		
2007	MW/Com8 Frascati, Italy	Adnan Budieri	MedWet evalua- tion by Mike Moser TwinMed and Water Dialogues projects
2008	MW/Com9 Changwon, S. Ko- rea		Ramsar COP10 at Changwon, S. Korea MW Observatory
2009		Nejib Benessaiah (as interim)	
2010	MW/Com10 Corsica, France		
2011	MW/Com11 Bucharest, Roma- nia	Nejib Benessaiah	Ramsar COP11 at Bucharest, Ro- mania
2012 (6-8 Febru- ary)			Agadir Sympo- sium (Grado +20)
2013			
2014		Delmar Blasco (DB)	MW Secretariat moved to France
2015	MedWet Agora at COP12, Punta del Este, Uruguay		Ramsar COP12 at Punta del Este, Uruguay
2016 (February)	MW/Com12 Paris, France		
2017			DB's resignation

2018	MW/Com13 Dubai, United Arab Emirates		Ramsar COP13 at Dubai, United Arab Emirates
2019			
2020			