



**MedWet**

L'initiative pour les zones humides méditerranéennes  
The Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative  
مبادرة المناطق الرطبة المتوسطية

**Doc. MedWet/Com12 – 2**

## **MedWet/Com 12**

**Palais de la Porte Dorée, Paris (France), 7 – 11 February 2016**

**Agenda item 2 – Review of MedWet operations since MedWet/ Com 11, and in particular since the move of the MedWet Secretariat to France in May 2014, including the Financial Report at 31 December 2015**

**Action requested:** The MedWet/Com is requested to comment on the report and to note it.

### **Report of the MedWet Coordinator**

The present report covers the period since MedWet/Com 11 (Bucharest, July 2012) but in particular the period 1 May 2014 – 30 November 2015. It has been prepared by the current MedWet Coordinator, who took up his functions on 1 May 2014.

#### **Follow-up to the Agadir Symposium**

1. The most significant MedWet action after MedWet/Com 11 (held at the time of the 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to Ramsar, Bucharest, Romania, 6-13 July 2012) was the follow-up to the *International Symposium on Water and Wetlands in the Mediterranean – From Grado to Agadir: The next 20 years*, which had been held in Agadir, Morocco, on 6-8 February 2012, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the wetland symposium held in Grado, Italy, in 1991, which launched the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative.
2. The Agadir Symposium was a very well attended meeting, with some 250 participants. The Agadir Commitments list was one of the major outputs of the meeting. The programmes and projects inscribed in the list – with the approval of the main actors concerned – represented a

good indicator of concrete contributions to wetland conservation and wise use in the Mediterranean Basin. The key objective of list of commitments was to create synergies.

3. The proceedings of the Symposium were published in English and French and distributed to all participants and more widely. Unfortunately, MedWet was unable to capitalize further on the momentum created by the Agadir Symposium, in part due to the decision in 2013 to move the Secretariat from Athens, Greece, to Arles, France, which created a vacuum in the operations of the Initiative.

### **Establishment of the MedWet Secretariat in France**

4. At the end of 2013, the decision was taken to accept the French Government's offer to move the MedWet Secretariat to France, in view of the fact that, after more than 12 years of very generous funding and political support, the Greek Government was unable to continue supporting the Secretariat.
5. The MedWet Secretariat was formally established in France as a non-for-profit organization with the name of "Association Secretariat MedWet", in line with the French Law of 1901 that regulates the creation and functioning of this type of organization. The members of the Association are four individuals: Mr. Thymio Papayannis (Honorary Member of the MedWet/Com) as President; Mr. Jean Jalbert (Director General of the Research Centre for the Conservation of Mediterranean Wetlands of La Tour du Valat) as Treasurer; Mr. Tobias Salathé (Senior Adviser for Europe at the Ramsar Secretariat) as Secretary; and Mr. Antonio Troya (Director of the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation), as member. The Association must comply with the provisions of the French law of 1901.
6. The Association has opened a bank account under the name "Secretariat MedWet" to manage the MedWet funds and is the legal employer of the MedWet Secretariat staff according to French labour laws.
7. The Research Centre for the Conservation of Mediterranean Wetlands of La Tour du Valat (TdV) has made available to MedWet some 100m<sup>2</sup> of independent office spaces comprising three offices. A contract has been signed between the two institutions for this hosting. TdV is offering to MedWet, for a rent of 750 Euros per month, all the required services for its operation in those premises.

### **Funding**

8. For this transitional period when the Greek Government ceased to fund the operations of the MedWet Secretariat, the MAVA Foundation for Nature Conservation has approved a bridge grant to MedWet of 170,000 Euros per year for a three-year period: 1 August 2014 to 31 July 2017. In addition, the French Government has secured a three-year grant of 45,000 Euros per year from the French Water Agency Rhône-Alpes-Corse which goes from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2017.
9. The 26 Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention that are members of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) continue to pay an annual contribution to the MedWet budget that totals 145,000 Euros per year. (This is the actual amount expected to be received, but not all the Parties actually make their contributions every year.)

10. Thus, the core budget of the MedWet Secretariat presently amounts to 345,000 Euros per year. It should be noted that as from 31 July 2017, the MAVA Foundation contribution will have come to an end. It is not clear if the French Water Agency contribution will continue after 31 March 2017. Thus, at the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the MedWet/Com, which should be held before the end of 2017, an important decision will have to be taken concerning the future funding of the MedWet Secretariat.

### **MedWet staff and consultants**

11. The core MedWet staff consists of the Coordinator, the Communications Officer, and an Assistant.
12. The contract of the Coordinator is for a three year period, coming to an end on 30 April 2017. The contract of the Communications Officer is a permanent contract under French labour law. The Assistant was also hired with a permanent contract but she decided to leave the post on 15 December 2015; a new Assistant is being recruited, offering a fixed-term contract of 18 months for 60% of the time, with half of that time devoted to administration and the other half to communications. Full fluency in Arabic is required in order to be able to start an Arabic section in the MedWet website.
13. In addition to the core staff, when the new Coordinator took over his functions he proposed to retain the services of the former MedWet Coordinator, Nejib Benessaiah, as Senior Advisor based in Athens and working for MedWet at 50% of his time. His contract under this arrangement will cease on 31 March 2016, after 20 months of very useful services. It is understood that Mr Benessaiah will continue to offer services to MedWet as a consultant when so required.
14. For specific and short-term actions, MedWet has recruited several consultants (see the sections on Projects and Communications activities of this report).

### **Accounting**

15. As required by French law, non-for-profit associations have to engage the services of an accounting firm to supervise their accounts and prepare an annual report. MedWet has engaged the firm Marc Brochut, based in the city of Arles, and has now extended the basic requirements of this service so that the firm will be doing most of the accounting work for MedWet, instead of having the accounts kept by the Secretariat.

### **Synergies with TdV and the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory**

16. Institutional relations with TdV are very satisfactory, mainly in connection with administrative issues. Without the active and efficient support of the TdV administration, it would have been impossible for the Coordinator to have the MedWet Secretariat operating effectively in line with the French laws and regulations.
17. MedWet and the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO), established by TdV in 2009 at the request of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com), are maintaining substantive and effective working relations, through frequent information and planning meetings and constant exchange of information on issues of common concern.

18. In general terms, it has been agreed that, of the two, MedWet has a more political and diplomatic function, transmitting to decision-makers the results of the studies carried out by the MWO.
19. The role of the MWO would be increased and be more clear if the proposed Terms of Reference for the MedWet Scientific and Technical Network (MedWet STN) are adopted by the MedWet/Com (see Doc. MedWet/Com12 – 7).
20. The Coordinator believes that the current location of the MedWet Secretariat in the premises of TdV has a series of advantages but also some drawbacks. The advantages have to do with the logistical support received during the installation process and with the possibility of having constant face to face relations with the officers of the MWO. Being close to a major wetland is inspiring for the MedWet staff, and operating from the premises of a prestigious institution is also positive for MedWet.
21. The drawbacks have to do with: a) the isolation that implies operating quite far from a main city and airport, which makes it very difficult for MedWet to receive visitors; b) the inconvenience for the MedWet staff to be far away from a main airport; c) the limited access to the internet (TdV has two SDSL links of two megas each for 100 users, which makes working on the internet a daily challenge. TdV plans to have a new connection with 100 megas but this may take time); d) very limited coverage for portable telephones; and e) the increased carbon foot print of each MedWet staff travelling 30 km to and from work in private cars or by the very limited public transport service.
22. An international organization such as MedWet, for practical reasons, but also as a question of image, needs to be in a location adequate to its nature and function. Thus, it is the opinion of the Coordinator that in the future MedWet and France as the host country should look into this issue and may need to take decisions in this respect.

### **Relations with the host country**

23. The Coordinator has established and maintains very effective and fruitful relations with the MedWet Focal Point in the Water and Biodiversity Division of the French Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy (MEDDE).
24. The Coordinator has met with the former and current Directors of Biodiversity and Water at MEDDE, who have shown a keen interest in MedWet and offered assistance to further some of the key issues raised. These fruitful relations have had a very positive impact on the preparations of the MedWet/Com meeting in Paris.

### **Contacts with partners**

25. The Secretariat has made an effort to re-establish and reinforce contacts with the other institutions present in the Mediterranean including: the Coordination Unit of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP); the Union for the Mediterranean; the Network of Managers of Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (MedPAN); WWF International and its Mediterranean Programme; IUCN HQ and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation; Wetlands International; the Greek Biotope and Wetland Centre (EKBY); the Global Water Partnership-Med; and the Ramsar-related BlackSeaWet Initiative.
26. Re-establishment of contacts with the other institutions constitutes a high priority: the European Commission, the Regional Agency for Environmental Protection in Tuscany (ARPAT)

and other regional bodies in MedWet countries, BirdLife International, and the bilateral development assistance agencies, mainly in the European countries.

### **Contacts with MedWet countries**

27. A special effort has been made to reach out and to establish active relations with the Focal Points and other governmental entities in all MedWet countries. This has been done mainly through postal and e-mail communications addressed to all countries. Unfortunately, the feedback received so far has not been as active as expected, but it is improving.
28. Also in these efforts, the Coordinator has visited Algeria, Greece, Tunisia and Spain and the Senior Advisor has visited Jordan and Tunisia.
29. In addition, letters were sent with the MedWet brochure to the ambassadors in Paris of all MedWet countries to inform them about the MedWet presence in France. A number of embassies acknowledged the contact made.

### **Country profiles**

30. The Secretariat is in the process of creating a “country profile” for each MedWet country. Tunisia was selected as the first pilot case and the Tunisian Focal Point and staff were associated in the formulation of the structure and content of a specifically dedicated website. An agreement has been signed with the MedWet webmaster in Greece in order to install the country profiles within the MedWet website. The first country profiles should be ready for demonstration at the MedWet/Com 12.

### **Relations with the Ramsar Convention and its Secretariat**

31. Very soon after taking up his functions, the Coordinator paid a visit to the Ramsar Secretariat in Switzerland in order to convey his clear intention of working in close cooperation with the Ramsar Secretariat.
32. The Coordinator was disappointed with the feedback received from the Ramsar Secretariat, with the exception of the Senior Advisor for Europe who is very much involved in all MedWet-related issues. It is very much to be hoped that this situation will evolve in a positive direction after the changes in the Ramsar Secretariat, with the departure of the Secretary General on 25 November 2015 and the appointment of Ms. Ania Grobicki, until then Deputy SG, as Acting Secretary General.
33. MedWet hosted a meeting at the MedWet Agora of the all Ramsar Regional Initiatives present at Ramsar COP12 in Uruguay, and the Ramsar Deputy Secretary General attended the meeting. As a result of the discussions there, the draft Resolution on the Operational Guidelines for Ramsar Regional Initiatives (RIs) was amended to include a provision for their revision by the Ramsar Standing Committee in 2016. Also as a result of the meeting in Uruguay, the Ramsar Secretariat organized, for the first time, a full day workshop for all Ramsar Regional Initiatives on 22 November 2015, the day before the opening of the 51<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee. Thirteen out of the 15 RIs were in attendance, and the meeting was productive mainly as a first encounter of the Ramsar RIs with one another. It is hoped that this event will represent a milestone in the way in which the Ramsar Secretariat works with the RIs.
34. At the 51<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee, the MedWet Coordinator made the point that the Regional Initiatives “phenomenon” is something that the Convention should

seriously look into at the next Conference of the Parties. The proliferation of Regional Initiatives could represent a significant asset for the Convention (the first global environmental treaty to have this type of regional arrangements), but it could also become a very disorganized and complicated process if not well managed.

35. MedWet was actively involved in the drafting of two Resolutions submitted to Ramsar COPI2 that were sponsored by MedWet countries: *Ramsar Wetland City Accreditation*, submitted by the Republic of Korea and Tunisia, and *Conservation of Mediterranean island wetlands*, submitted by Greece.
36. MedWet also submitted a substantial number of amendments to the first and second drafts of the 4th Ramsar Strategic Plan, most of which were incorporated in the final draft adopted by the Ramsar Standing Committee for transmission to the COP.
37. The MedWet Coordinator participated in the Ramsar pre-COP regional meetings for Africa and Europe, and on both occasions he organized a briefing meeting for MedWet countries.
38. A project was prepared, with the assistance of a communications consultant, to ensure a significant Mediterranean presence at Ramsar COPI2 in the form of a Mediterranean Agora. The project included, in addition of the Agora as a space to host the Mediterranean community, the following activities:
  - a) the production of a MedWet exhibition of 30 posters on the theme “Our wetlands, our people”, accompanied by postcards in English, French and Spanish reproducing and explaining each poster (the poster for each MedWet country was produced using the national language(s) of that country);
  - b) the production of a first MedWet cartoon in English and French illustrating some of the wetland ecosystem services; and
  - c) the production of the publication, in English and French, *Working for wetlands in the Mediterranean – Progress and challenges*, presenting an analysis of the National Reports submitted to Ramsar by 20 MedWet countries.
39. The Mediterranean Agora, mounted in a building hired for this purpose across the street from the Ramsar COP venue, also hosted exhibitions of MedWet countries and partners and a series of meetings and side events. It also offered Mediterranean gastronomy and hosted three receptions and concerts of Mediterranean music.
40. The Agora was open to the public and local schools and was visited by some 300 school children, especially on the occasion of World Environment Day (5 June) when the students received the delegates at the COP with messages written by themselves. It should be noted that the MedWet Agora was the only activity related to the Ramsar COP that involved the local population. This included a tree-planting activity by children and COP delegates at a nearby wetland that requires reforestation efforts.
41. All the feedback received from Ramsar COP participants indicates that the Mediterranean Agora was perceived as a “good place to be”, both in terms of the activities that were taking place there and the welcoming atmosphere of the place.

42. Grants were received for the Mediterranean Agora project from the French Ministry and WWF International, and the LUMA Foundation may make a contribution for the follow-up to this project.
43. The Agora project was made possible in situ thanks to the efficient collaboration from the Uruguayan NGO Association for the Conservation of Cetaceans (OCC) with which MedWet signed a service contract.
44. After COP12, ideally the MedWet exhibition should circulate in all the MedWet countries, with texts translated into each national language. The Secretariat has made this offer to all MedWet countries but so far no specific requests have been received, which is disappointing.
45. The Secretariat prepared an on-line survey to evaluate the results of the Agora project. The survey was sent to all COP participants, and all of the responses received have been very positive.
46. In addition to the Mediterranean Agora, MedWet had a stand, with a MedWet staff always present, at the exhibition space within the venue of COP12 to inform delegates about MedWet in general and about the programme at the Agora in particular.
47. The Coordinator and the Senior Advisor participated actively in several contact groups during COP12, in particular those dealing with draft Resolutions submitted by MedWet countries.

#### **Preparation of a major Framework for Action for Mediterranean Wetlands**

48. A brainstorming session was held in Arles on 6 February 2015 to start preparing a MedWet action plan. Participants at the session were experts and MedWet partners' representatives, as well as the French MedWet Focal Point.
49. On the basis of the contributions received at the brainstorming session, a first draft of the plan was prepared and then completed with the assistance of two consultants, with the title *Draft MedWet Framework for Action 2016-2030* (the same period as the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN on 27 September 2015). The Framework contemplates a first phase covering the period 2016-2020 dedicated to the implementation in MedWet countries of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ramsar Strategic Plan adopted by Ramsar COP12.
50. The draft Framework was submitted to the French Ministry (MEDDE), inviting the French Government, as the current Chair of the MedWet Steering Group and host of the MedWet Secretariat, to support the Framework and promote it with the other MedWet countries. Under cover of a letter dated 10 November 2015, the Director of Water and Biodiversity at MEDDE transmitted the draft to his counterparts in the ministries hosting the MedWet Focal Points (depending on each country, Deputy Ministers, Presidents of governmental bodies, Secretaries General, High Commissioners, Directors General) inviting them to submit comments on the draft by 10 December 2015. The draft has also been sent to all MedWet partners.

#### **Projects**

51. MedWet has been involved in an advisory capacity in more than ten projects in the Mediterranean region at different stages of development and/or implementation. The list is available on request.

52. In particular, MedWet is directly involved in the implementation of the MAVA-funded project administered by WWF-Tunisia entitled “MedWet Civil Society Project in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia – Wetland Sentinels”.
53. A consultant is working, with a support of a Working Group of some ten experts, on an evaluation of wetland inventories in the 26 MedWet Countries and Palestine. The intention is to prepare a project proposal in early 2016 with the aim of having inventories finalized by the end of 2017 (see Doc. MedWet/Com12 – 8 (a) – MedWet Work Plan 2016-2017).
54. MedWet Culture - A contract has been signed with the Greek NGO MedINA for the re-launching, on a more solid and ambitious basis, of the MedWet Culture Network. Funds for the MedWet contribution come from the core budget and will cover the period January 2015-July 2017. The implementation of this project is progressing satisfactorily. The website for MedWet Culture has been designed and should become operational very soon, linked to the MedWet website.
55. Another consultant was hired to work on the establishment of the Network of Mediterranean Ramsar Sites Managers (MeRSiM), with a view to promoting exchanges and mutual support among them and to encouraging a more effective implementation of management plans at Ramsar Sites. The development of management plans for the significant number of Ramsar Sites in the region should constitute a high priority for MedWet. Unfortunately, this project has not progressed well and will have to be re-initiated in 2016.
56. MedWet has also been requested to be an Associated Partner in four projects submitted under the EU funding mechanism Interreg MED (see Doc. MedWet/Com12 – 8 (a) – MedWet Work Plan 2016-2017).

### **Communications outreach**

57. The editing, printing and dissemination of 400 copies in English and French of the Agadir Symposium Proceedings was done in Athens by the MedWet Senior Advisor.
58. A new MedWet brochure in Arabic, English and French was produced and is being widely distributed on all possible occasions.
59. A communications consultant, Ms Corinne Brunois, has worked with MedWet during 2015. As a result, after evaluation of the bids presented by six agencies from different Mediterranean countries, the communications agency ADDB in Portugal was selected to develop a new MedWet graphic identity, which was launched on 1 June 2015 at the Ramsar COP in Uruguay.
60. The Communications Officer has worked with the MWO to produce and disseminate some of the MWO publications.
61. The MedWet website content has been fully revised and the design of the site considerably upgraded. Constant efforts are being made to keep the website updated.
62. The MedWet accounts in Facebook and Twitter were launched in September 2014 and are starting to attract more and more friends and followers.

### **Participation in meetings**

63. In addition to Ramsar COP12 and two of its regional preparatory meetings (for Europe and Africa), MedWet has been represented in some 20 national, regional and international meetings organized by MedWet countries and partners.



64. The last main meeting attended by MedWet during the period under review was the 21<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) held in Paris on 30 November-11 December 2015. The MedWet Coordinator registered as a member of the Ramsar delegation in order to have access to the “Blue Zone” reserved for governments and institutions accredited with the UNFCCC Secretariat.
65. The MedWet Communications Officer developed a project funded by the French National Water Agency (ONEMA) in order to ensure, with other MedWet partners, a “wetland presence” in the “Red Zone” here civil society organizations were present, in a space open to the general public (some 40.000 participants were expected at the COP21).
66. Also in relation with the COP21, MedWet made contributions to the draft promoted by the International Network of Basin Organizations (INBO) of the *Paris Pact on water and adaptation to climate change in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers*. At the time of writing, 279 organizations had signed the Pact, with MedWet being one of the first to do so. The Pact was formally presented on 1 December 2015 at a special ceremony at the COP21.