



Japan supports Albanian Ramsar Site stakeholders

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Japan
Albania

Albania joined the Ramsar Convention soon after its political opening in 1995 and designated its largest coastal lagoon, the Karavasta lagoon, as a Ramsar Site. With the opening of the country to a market-driven economy, the population pressure on the coastal zone increased rapidly and extensive planning activities were held with support from organisations including UNEP and the World Bank. A project funded by the European Union focused specifically on planning the management of the Karavasta lagoon. Nearly twenty years later, the Adriatic and Ionian Sea coasts have seen an impressive growth in urbanisation, but the ecosystem of the Karavasta lagoon and its surroundings has been preserved and is increasingly managed in a sustainable way. The area is valued for its biodiversity, the beauty of its natural landscape, its role in the local economy (it hosts lagoon fisheries, vegetable and livestock farming) and for its touristic appeal (the natural beach attracts annually 300,000 visitors).

Thanks to the [support by the Japan International Cooperation Agency \(JICA\)](#) for the conservation of the Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, local authorities and stakeholders (inhabitants, farmers, fishermen and service providers) are increasingly working together for the sustainable management of the area, including the lagoon, the surrounding coastal plain and its hilly hinterland.



As other major lagoons in the Mediterranean, Karavasta provides important spawning and nursery habitat for economically valuable fish species that are exploited by a local fisheries cooperative.

On 5 March 2014, JICA organised in the capital Tirana a seminar on the sustainable use of the Karavasta Lagoon Ramsar Site with the participation of the local government and stakeholders. The seminar was opened by Ms Djana Bejko, Deputy Minister of the Environment, earlier involved in participatory management of Lake Shkodra, a Ramsar Site shared with Montenegro. To conclude the seminar, stakeholders requested donors and the Ramsar Secretariat to play a more active role in supporting the implementation of the project. The following day, specialists from the Albanian National Tourism Agency and private tourism promoters were invited to discover the ecotourism potential of

the Djvjaka-Karavasta National Park with its peaceful nature and one of the world's few Dalmatian Pelican breeding colonies.



The seminar organised by JICA in Tirana (from left): Sajmir Hoxha (JICA project administrator, former Albanian Ramsar NFP), Ginzo Aoyama (JICA project chief adviser), Nihat Dragoti (Ministry of Environment), Adrian Koci (Divjaka-Karavasta National Park) and Katsutaka Kaikkawa (JICA project expert).

Albania is a dynamic country with rich water resources, beautiful landscapes and an attractive cultural heritage. Foreign tourists tend to limit their visit to Albania's World Heritage Sites, including Butrint National Park, a Ramsar Site with an outstanding cultural heritage. The Djvjaka-Karavasta National Park, however, has also great potential for ecotourism. In 2007, the National Park was extended to cover the entire lagoon catchment (22,230 ha), and it is hoped that the Ramsar Site boundary will soon be modified accordingly.



A recent installation at the edge of a smaller coastal lagoon in the National Park.

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