

12th Meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee
10 February 2016
Paris, France



Acting Secretary General Ania Grobicki
Address to MedWet Committee

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

Thank you very much to MedWet for the opportunity to greet you and address you this evening, on behalf of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat. It gives me great pleasure to be here (together with my daughter Stephanie) at the closing ceremony of the MedWet Committee meeting, in this auspicious year of 2016, the 45th anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the 25th anniversary of MedWet! Despite the environmental challenges that we see in our work and we hear about daily on the news, this is indeed an auspicious and hopeful year because at last, there is policy coherence on the international level creating a balanced and explicit link between environment on one hand, and development on the other – the balance that has been sought for so long, ever since the famous Brundtland report on Sustainable Development in the late 1980s. The policy coherence that I am talking about is of course embodied in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted by all countries last September in New York. Wetlands are mentioned twice – the first time under Goal 6, the water goal, and the second time under Goal 15, the biodiversity goal.

The hopeful spirit of international cooperation is also embodied in the climate agreement that was adopted by all countries here in Paris, just two months ago, which at last shows a meaningful commitment by all countries to tackling climate change.

It is precisely these three issues, water, biodiversity, and climate change, that are now framing the context within which the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands needs to take forward its vital mission of conserving, managing and restoring wetlands worldwide. The second part of this vital mission is to ensure that wetland benefits are recognized and valued by all. The Ramsar 4th Strategic Plan sets out the key goals and targets through which this can be achieved. I believe that we need to become much clearer in our recognition of the dual role that water plays in our economies, in our societies, and in the biosphere – this dual role is both as a resource, essential for agriculture, for industry, and for energy production, and as the medium of life, essential for healthy people and for healthy ecosystems. Under the Sustainable Development Goal on water, for the first time, there is a clear acknowledgement of this continuous link between water supply and sanitation, wastewater management, water efficiency, integrated water resources management and – water-related ecosystems! At the same time as being water users, wetland ecosystems are also water producers, the terrestrial component of the global water cycle. In this context, wetland conservation and wise use are the vital tools we need to ensure the sustainability of our economies, our societies and our biosphere, now and in the future.

And it is through the global water cycle that the impacts of climate change are now largely being manifested – through the extreme events, the more frequent and severe floods, storms and droughts which are ravaging people's lives and livelihoods around the world. Many wetlands, especially in the drought-prone Mediterranean region, are suffering a slow environmental disaster and dramatic changes in their ecological character as they dry up, usually due to a lethal combination of climate change and over-abstraction of water

upstream and from groundwater reserves. The loss of wetlands in turn leads to changes in the microclimate, desertification, and an increase in dust storms and sand storms in the arid countries in the region.

In this context, MedWet can help the Ramsar Parties to better implement the Ramsar Convention and the Ramsar Strategic Plan in their country, as well as through developing joint activities at regional (or sub-regional) scale. On behalf of the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, I would like to say that we truly value MedWet's contribution for the most effective running of RRIs, based on its 25 year long experience, its forward looking and pioneering approach, such as the analysis of different options for a legal status that could be provided to RRIs. As I mentioned this morning, we are looking forward to MedWet's input into the 12 June workshop and close cooperation between the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and MedWet. We believe that the MedWet Science and Technology Network, through the STRP focal points, will greatly strengthen the STRP's work, while the Mediterranean CEPA focal points, through MedWet, will also strengthen the CEPA actions in the region. Thus not a duplication of efforts, but mutual support and strengthening of the knowledge base and the outreach about wetlands conservation and wise use! We also look forward to the engagement of the Mediterranean Parties in the Working Group on the Ramsar Regional Initiative which will be established shortly.

Finally, I would like to mention the implementation of the important Resolutions which all the Contracting Parties agreed at COP12 in Uruguay last June :

- The specific Mediterranean Res. on Med. islands tasking the Med. parties through MedWet to undertake a number of specific wetland actions
- The Res. on wetland city accreditation, with a high number of Med. cities that could be eligible to demonstrate the benefits of wetlands in an urban context
- The Res. on water requirements of wetlands, which of high relevance in arid Med. countries and within the context of climate change in the Med.
- The Res. on disaster risk reduction, of relevance for coastal storm surge reduction and integrated flood management along river valleys and catchments areas inland, as well as the mitigation of dust storms in the region.

On behalf of the Ramsar Secretariat, and working closely together with MedWet, we pledge to dedicate all our efforts to supporting the countries of the Mediterranean in implementing these Resolutions, within the coherent policy frameworks of the Ramsar Strategic Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals. We need this integrated approach, we need this focus on ecosystems, and we urgently need action on the ground on these issues. We no longer have to make a false choice between environment or development – through beautiful, well-managed wetlands, we can have both. Thank you.