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“Wetlands and water: supporting life, sustaining livelihoods”

Kampala, Uganda, 8-15 November 2005

Ramsar COP9 DOC. 8

Report of the MedWet Coordination Unit 2003-2005

Explanatory note by the Ramsar Secretariat

This information document, prepared by the MedWet Coordinator, Spyros Kouvelis, also relates to draft resolution COP9 DR8 on *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*. It will also form the basis of reporting on implementation progress to the 7th meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com7) to be held on 8 November 2005, in Kampala, Uganda.

Introduction

1. The MedWet Coordination Unit was established in Athens, Greece, in July 2001, following Standing Committee Decision SC25-31 which accepted the proposal submitted by the Greek Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works. A Memorandum of Understanding was subsequently signed between the Ministry and the Ramsar Bureau. The commitment made by the Greek Government for the hosting and support of the Coordination Unit was reaffirmed for the 2003-2005 triennium.
2. This report provides a summary analysis of the implementation progress of the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative and the operations of its Coordination Unit for 2003-2005.
3. The report raises a number of issues concerning the future smooth running of the Coordination Unit and the Initiative, notably on financial matters. These have considerable relevance also to COP9's consideration of approval of other proposed regional initiatives in the framework of the Convention (COP9 DR8) and how any such initiatives operate.
4. Parts of this report draw also on analysis of the COP9 National Reports submitted by Mediterranean Basin Contracting Parties.

Implementation of the Convention and its Strategic Plan 2003-2005 in the Mediterranean region

5. Overall 20 out of the 25 Mediterranean Contracting Parties (CPs) had submitted their National Reports in time for inclusion in the Secretariat's analyses and the preparation of this report. This includes three of five CPs in the African part of the region, three of four CPs in the Asian part, and 14 of 16 CPs in the European part.

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6. The analysis of the Mediterranean-specific statistics from COP9 National Reports submitted by Contracting Parties can provide a focus for identifying the priorities for the future work of the MedWet Initiative in the region. In the analysis that follows, statistics are generally presented for 'yes' responses, and for positive answers, which include responses of 'yes', 'partly', 'in progress', and 'being planned'.
7. This analysis shows the following implementation progress in the Mediterranean region:
 - i) Mediterranean countries have paid considerable attention to, and are generally well advanced with, national **wetland inventories**: 35% of the CPs have confirmed that national inventories exist, while all other Contracting Parties replied that work was partly done or is in progress. In most cases the MedWet Inventory Methodology or an adaptation of it is being applied.
 - ii) Action to ensure integration of issues related to **water quality** and the allocation of adequate **water quantity** for the maintenance of the ecological status of wetlands appears to be low. Only 10% of the COP9 National Reports have answered 'yes' in relation to water Quality/Quantity issues and a mere 5% have as yet used the Ramsar COP8 water allocation guidelines for this purpose.
 - iii) **Integration of wetland issues** in national sustainable **development strategies** and **sectoral planning** processes is still unsatisfactory. Only 20-30% of National Reports have answered 'yes' to questions related to integration, and 47-70% have given a positive answer (i.e., 'yes', 'partly', 'in progress', or 'being planned').
 - iv) There has been little development and application of methods for the **assessment of the socio-economic values of wetlands**, with only 25% of the COP9 National Reports answering 'yes' and 75% answering positively overall.
 - v) Addressing **climate change** issues and the integration of the Kyoto Protocol with wetland conservation is very low, with only 6% of NRs replying 'yes' and 24% replying positively overall.
 - vi) **Wetland restoration and rehabilitation** is quite high on the agenda of Mediterranean countries, with 55% of the National Reports answering 'yes' in relation to such projects being developed and 90% positively overall.
 - vii) Although still at an early stage, the guiding principles on **cultural values** appear to be of considerable interest to the Mediterranean CPs, with 26% answering 'yes' about using or applying them, and 63% answering positively overall. This is perhaps to be expected given the significant attention to cultural issues under the MedWet Initiative and the contribution of the MedWet process to the development of the Ramsar guidance on these matters.
 - viii) Communications, Education and Public Awareness (**CEPA**) work seems unfortunately still to be very low on the Mediterranean CPs priorities, whether this regards development of CEPA activities (5% 'yes' and 30% positive), establishment of National CEPA task forces (11% 'yes' and 17% positive) or development of a national CEPA Action Plan (15% yes and 20% positive).

- ix) Assessment of the issues leading to the inclusion of sites in the **Montreux Record** and implementation of actions to address them is relatively low, with 50% 'yes' and 62% positive replies in the National Reports.
- x) Identification of **transboundary/shared wetland systems** and cooperative management is taking place but needs to be further addressed in the region, with 30% replying 'yes' and 60% positively.
- xi) **Funding assistance** is quite good in the region, with 40% of the CPs responding 'yes' to such assistance having been mobilised and 67% responding positively overall. And
- xii) **Training and research** does not appear to be supported satisfactorily, with countries replying only 15% 'yes' to whether they have been supported in covering this need and 31% replying in a positive way.

The status of Mediterranean wetlands

8. During 2004 the opportunity arose to undertake a *'Qualitative Assessment of the Status of Mediterranean Wetlands'*. This was developed with the input of the MedWet Team in recognition that there had been no Basin-wide assessment of Mediterranean wetlands since the 1991 Grado Conference, which led to the establishment of the MedWet Initiative. The assessment was designed to complement the quantitative wetlands inventory and assessment work being undertaken using the MedWet inventory methodologies, which was not yet available for analysis at the Mediterranean Basin scale.
9. The assessment, undertaken in collaboration with the Ramsar Secretariat by Ms Michele Stark, was carried out through circulation of a simple questionnaire to a wide range of individuals and organizations involved in or in contact with the MedWet Initiative. A good response rate to this circulation was achieved, suggesting that there is considerable interest in, and knowledge of, the status of wetlands in the region. Furthermore, the questionnaire tool developed for the MedWet assessment has subsequently been adapted and used by Wetlands International for a related Europe-wide wetland assessment for the European Environment Agency, and it has also been recognized by the Convention's STRP as a tool for collecting information for the indicators of effectiveness of the implementation of the Convention (COP9 DR1 Annex D and COP9 DOC.18).
10. The results of the assessment were presented in the Technical Session of the 6th meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com6) in December 2004. This exercise has filled a gap on the knowledge of the current status of Mediterranean wetlands, and it has provided some overall conclusions on the past and present trends in the status of Mediterranean wetlands and the main drivers of positive and negative change to their ecological character. The full report of this study is available on the MedWet Web site: http://www.medwet.org/medwetnew/en/00.TEXTS/04.4.1.MEDCOMS/MedCom6/Conclusions/MWC6_Qual_asses_report.doc
11. In summary the assessment concluded that:

- i) The status of some Mediterranean wetlands has improved over the last 13 years, but that of many others has deteriorated.
 - ii) More Mediterranean wetlands are considered now to be deteriorating than over the past 13 years.
 - iii) Conservation management actions (including designation as Ramsar sites), local community awareness, and recognition of cultural values are helping to maintain wetland status, especially in the northern part of the Basin.
 - iv) There continue to be many different major drivers of deteriorating status, notably urban development/infrastructure, urban/industrial pollution, tourism (although this can also contribute positively to maintaining status, especially in inland wetlands), water abstraction, increase in agricultural intensity, agricultural run-off, and hunting.
 - v) Coastal wetlands have deteriorated more, and are currently in a worse state, than are inland wetlands, and this is being driven especially by urban, industrial and infrastructure developments, including tourism, urban and industrial pollution and agricultural intensity and run-off – drivers which are intensifying.
 - vi) Although inland wetlands overall presently have a better status than coastal wetlands, pressures from water abstraction, urban and infrastructure developments, urban and industrial pollution, hunting and agricultural intensity continue, although the rate is diminishing in some places. Such pressures remain greater in the northern than the southern part of the Basin.
12. By combining the results of the analysis of COP9 National Reports and the findings of the qualitative assessment of the status of Mediterranean wetlands, some conclusions can be drawn about the fields of activity in which MedWet should focus its attention for the next triennium, in order to better meet the needs of the Mediterranean Contracting Parties and address the main drivers of negative change. A paper on the proposed priorities will be presented to MedWet/Com7 (to be held on 8 November 2005, Kampala, Uganda) following discussion of it at the MedWet Team meeting (Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat, France, 5/6 October 2005).

Institutional hosting arrangements of the MedWet Coordination Unit

13. In line with Resolution VIII.30, a Memorandum of Collaboration between the Ramsar Bureau and the Greek Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works was signed in June 2003 between the Minister and the Ramsar Secretary General, covering all aspects of the hosting and operation of the MedWet Coordination Unit in Athens, Greece.
14. Following a further meeting between the Ramsar Secretary General and the Deputy Minister of the Environment of Greece in June 2004, the latter confirmed in writing that the Ministry is eager to extend the hosting of the MedWet Coordination Unit in Athens for the triennium 2006-2008, which was re-confirmed by a follow-up letter to the Secretary General prior to the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee.
15. At the same meeting the need to make a change in the legal status of the MedWet Coordination Unit was discussed, such that it will be established as a foundation under the

Ramsar Convention to be approved by a Greek Parliamentary decree. It was agreed that the Ministry would promote as quickly as possible the necessary arrangements to conclude the establishment of the new legal body. Although the Coordination Unit has prepared the necessary documents with a view to having completed the process prior to COP9, by the date of the preparation of this report this has not yet been achieved.

Financial Matters

16. During the 2003-2005 triennium, expenditure by the MedWet Coordination Unit has been kept within the budget as approved by COP8 Resolution VIII.30. Audited financial reports have been provided annually to the Ramsar Secretariat for all the years of the operation of the Unit. Income was also secured in line with Resolution VIII.30 by the three sources as planned: the host country, the MedWet countries, and the Ramsar Secretariat (core Convention budget).
17. However, lack of timely payment (and non-payment) of the dues committed to by Contracting Parties at COP8 and consequent severe cash-flow problems and potential insolvency faced by the Coordination Unit has become a serious issue during the triennium. Some Contracting Parties have paid their dues to the Ramsar Secretariat as agreed by Resolution VIII.30, but in many cases with considerable delay, some having delayed their payment by more than a year and some Parties having not paid any of their dues during this triennium. In addition, the host country paid its dues for 2004 only in January 2005, while for 2005 these dues have not been paid at the time of writing this report (end of September 2005).
18. As a result, the Coordination Unit found itself in a critical financial condition first in December 2004 (having received by that time only 47.5% of the budgeted sum for 2004) and again in August 2005 (having received by that time only 18.6% of the budgeted sum for 2005). As a consequence the Coordination Unit has at these times been unable to pay staff salaries and meet other financial obligations. It must be also noted here that the Coordination Unit does not have any financial reserves or other sources of income with which to cover these cash-flow shortfalls - on the contrary, its operating budget serves also as matching funds for the projects it implements with funding received from other donor agencies. As a result of this situation, the efficient operation of the Unit has been hindered, the Unit's staff have been placed under severe stress, and the smooth implementation of MedWet projects seriously threatened.
19. This recurring situation is not commensurate with the role and profile of an out-posted unit of the Ramsar Secretariat, and it is vital that contributions be paid within the first three months of each year during the 2006-2008 triennium. Given the tight budgetary situation of the Convention, it will not be possible to provide some "safety valves" as the Secretariat was able to do this last triennium. Thus for the Coordination Unit not to face insolvency it will be imperative to achieve timely payments of contributions.
20. Furthermore, the MedWet Initiative has been recognized as the flagship regional initiative operating under the Ramsar Convention, and it is the only such initiative which has been fully operationalised. Should it fail as a consequence of this financial situation recurring in the coming triennium, this will reflect on the Convention as a whole as well as seriously jeopardizing future recognition of the Convention's work and implementation in the Mediterranean region. There are also significant lessons to be learned from this situation in

relation to the potential viability of the burgeoning number of other regional initiatives being proposed for recognition within the Convention (see COP9 DR8).

21. The total budget for the operation of the MedWet Coordination Unit for 2006-2008 is presented in draft Resolution COP9 DR8 on *Regional initiatives in the framework of the Ramsar Convention*. It should be noted that this budget is based on the operational needs identified during the period 2003-2005, and the cost estimates are based on the actual expenditures incurred during this period.
22. The budget shows the proposed sources of funding for each cost item, which are as follows:
 - a) the commitment made by the Greek Government to continue hosting the MedWet Coordination Unit and contribute to its funding with the sum of 160,000 Euro per annum for the triennium 2006-2008;
 - b) part of the sum included in the proposed Ramsar core budget for the triennium 2003-2005 for regional initiatives - draft Resolutions COP9 DR8 and COP9 DR13;
 - c) additional annual contributions by the MedWet countries, which should be invoiced together with the annual contributions to the Ramsar core budget; and
 - d) income from project overheads and project implementation undertaken by and through the MedWet Coordination Unit.

MedWet Coordination Unit Staffing

23. During the 2003-2005 triennium the MedWet Coordination Unit operated with the staff structure approved by Resolution VIII.30. The current staffing of the MedWet Coordination Unit is as follows:

MedWet Coordinator	Mr Spyros Kouvelis
MedWet Policy Advisor	Mr Nejb Benessaiah
MedWet Program Development	Ms Aspasia Dimizas
MedWet Communications Officer	Ms Sofia Spirou
MedWet Administrative Assistant	Ms Frosso Mantziou
MedWet Senior Advisor(*)	Mr Thymio Papayannis

(*) Collaborates with the MedWet Coordination Unit on specific issues, on contract basis.

24. Two staff changes have taken place during the triennium. In August 2004 the MedWet Communications Officer, Ms. Maria Anagnostopoulou, stepped down and was succeeded by Ms. Sofia Spirou. In June 2005 the MedWet Programme Development Officer Ms. Angela Kyriazis was succeeded by Ms. Aspasia Dimizas. Both posts were filled following public calls for applications and interviews.

MedWet/Com meetings

25. The Mediterranean Wetlands Committee (MedWet/Com) held two meetings during the triennium. MedWet/Com5 was kindly hosted in Izmir by the Government of Turkey in

June 2003, and MedWet/Com6 was kindly hosted in Tipasa by the Government of Algeria in December 2004.

26. The meetings have reviewed progress with the work of MedWet, discussed and endorsed the Strategic and CEPA Plans for MedWet, endorsed a number of changes in the MedWet/Com rules of procedure, discussed the MedWet Initiative Terms of Reference, and had one Technical Session each – the Technical Session of MedWet/Com5 was on *Wetlands, agriculture and water use interactions* and that of MedWet/Com6 was on *The status of Mediterranean Wetlands: current assessments and future priorities*. A side event on culture was organized at MedWet/Com6. The full documentation, agendas and conclusions of the MedWet/Com meetings and their Technical Sessions can be downloaded from: <http://www.medwet.org/medwetnew/en/04.RESOURCE/04.4.1.medcom.html>.

The MedWet Team

27. The MedWet Team (previously named MedWet Technical Network) comprises the MedWet Coordination Unit and the MedWet technical centres. Currently these are the Station Biologique de la Tour du Valat (France), ICN/CEZH (Portugal), EKBY (Greece), SEHUMED (Spain), and ARPAT (Italy).
28. The Team held meetings in April 2003 in Athens, Greece, hosted by the MedWet Coordination Unit, and in March 2004 in Valencia, Spain, hosted by SEHUMED. One more (informal) MedWet Team meeting was held in July 2005 in Alcochete, Portugal, in the sidelines of the MedWet/CODDE project meeting, and a further meeting is scheduled for October 2005 to be hosted by Tour du Valat in Camargue, France. The MedWet Culture Working Group (CWG) was established during the MedWet Team meeting in March 2004.
29. The MedWet Team meetings have discussed basic directions and principles for the collaboration between the centres and the Coordination Unit and the development of the MedWet programme, and reviewed issues pertaining to the upcoming MedWet/Com meetings.
30. In March 2005, the MedWet Team increased its capacity with the addition of one more centre to the existing four. ARPAT - *Agenzia regionale per la protezione ambientale della Toscana*, which has particular expertise on water management issues, became the fifth MedWet Team centre with the signature of the relevant MoC between its Director and the MedWet Coordinator.
31. MedWet Team meetings continue to provide an important forum for the exchange of information between its members, the development of projects and concepts and the establishment of collaborations. It is felt by all MedWet Team members that meetings should be held at more regular intervals, at least twice per year. However, the preparation/logistics and costs of the meetings need to be kept as light as possible as the Coordination Unit cannot afford, in terms of both time and money, to organize two MedWet Team meetings and one MedWet/Com meeting in the course of a year, and at the same time keep up with its other tasks.

MedWet Programme development

32. The MedWet Initiative, through the collaboration of the Coordination Unit with the MedWet Team Centres, has devoted significant efforts to developing new project concepts and proposals during the triennium. In all, MedWet has contributed to the development of regional MedWet projects which have attracted a total of more than 6 Million euro over the last three years.

The table below summarises the current project programme developed by MedWet:

Project	Donor institution	Budget	Comments
MedWet/Maghreb wetlands	EU LIFE 3 rd Countries	1,292,000 EUR	Co-financing provided by Algeria, Morocco Tunisia
MedWet/Regions	EU INTERREG IIIb	2,300,000 EUR	Developed by TdV
MedWet/SUDOE	EU INTERREG IIIc	700,000 EUR	Developed by CEZH/ICN
MedWet/CODDE	EU INTERREG IIIc	1,461,000 EUR	Started on 1.1.2005
Agriculture, Water and Wetlands	InWent / GWP-Med / FAO	120,000 EUR	More activities planned
Neretva River Delta	Principality of Monaco	45,000 EUR	Support extended for next 2 years
Prespa Park	GEF PDF-B / KfW	700,000 EUR	Implemented by UNDP/KfW
TOTAL SUM		6,618,000 EUR	

33. Details of all current and past projects of the MedWet initiative can now be found at: http://www.medwet.org/medwetnew/en/03.PROJECTS/03.0.projects_all.asp
34. At the time of completion of this report, numerous new proposals are being prepared and discussed in collaboration between the MedWet Coordination Unit and the MedWet Team Centres, including proposals until the end of 2005 to the following funding instruments:
- Leonardo da Vinci (Sept'05, MedWet NGOs network, e-training)
 - INTERREG MEDOCC (Sept'05, MedWet Regions network)
 - LIFE Environment (Oct'05, Water Framework Directive)
 - INTERREG CADSES (Nov'05, transboundary collaboration)
 - LIFE 3rd Countries (Nov'05, Capacity building)
 - eContent+ (Nov'05, inventory, training)
 - INTERREG ARCHIMED (Dec'05, culture)
 - GEF (Feb'06, Agriculture)

Communications, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)

35. A significant number of activities were initiated during the triennium in line with the implementation of the MedWet CEPA strategy. Some of the activities undertaken have included:

- establishment of the MedWet CEPA working Group, in order to facilitate exchange and collaboration between the Coordination Unit, the MedWet Team members and the Ramsar Secretariat;
- complete re-design and launching of the new MedWet Web site (<http://www.medwet.org/medwetnew/en/index.asp>), adding new components and increasing visibility;
- development of the MedWet Electronic Newsletter, of which six issues have already been issued;
- organization of successful communication events at the MedWet Coordination Unit building for World Wetlands Days 2004 and 2005;
- development of a concept and preparatory activities for the making of a MedWet film on Mediterranean wetlands and water; and
- establishment of the annual Ramsar / MedWet award for a film on water / wetlands at the *Ecofilms* festival in Rhodes, Greece (<http://www.ecofilms.gr>).

Conclusions and Recommendations for the future

36. As MedWet prepares to enter a new triennium – its second as a formal Regional Initiative of the Ramsar Convention – and as it will celebrate 15 years since its creation in 1991, it is an appropriate time to reflect on how it can become even more efficient in assisting the Contracting Parties and others in the region whilst maintaining its key values: innovation, collaboration, technical and scientific quality.
37. MedWet continues at the forefront of innovative implementation of the Convention, with its partnership approach involving Contracting Parties, NGOs, scientific and technical institutions, and other organizations, and it remains as yet its only fully-fledged regional initiative. Thus it can provide useful feedback on all the aspects related to the establishment and operation of regional initiatives, including institutional matters, funding, programme development, CEPA, and assistance to the Contracting Parties.
38. Being based on the one hand on the support of the Contracting Parties/Secretariat and being on the other a programme of implementation activities, MedWet has to strike a balance:
 - i) Regarding support from the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat, it is clear that a regional initiative cannot do without either of the two. Financial stability as well as the political engagement secured by the contributions of the countries which are Contracting Parties to the Convention involved in the initiative are essential. A regional initiative exists because the Contracting Parties recognize its value added as a mechanism to support implementation of the Convention. Similarly, the umbilical cord connecting a regional initiative to the Ramsar Secretariat needs to be maintained through political, technical, but also financial - even if minimal - support.

- ii) At the same time, the financial support must be secured in a way that allows the regional initiative to operate smoothly, without the severe cash flow problems that MedWet has faced and is facing.
39. With regard to programme development, a regional initiative such as MedWet again plays the role of a 'testing laboratory' for the development, testing and implementation of methodologies and tools that may eventually be incorporated by the Convention as a whole. In doing this, the initiative must:
- i) identify the priorities within the Ramsar Strategic Plan that have a particular relevance to the region of the initiative, and find ways to adapt and apply them to the regional specificities – in the case of MedWet this translates into being open and flexible as a collaborative structure and ready to embrace innovation.
 - ii) be aware of the needs of the Contracting Parties of the region, so that it retains its relevance to assisting them in implementing the Convention. Technical/scientific partners need to be prepared to evolve and develop new capacities in order to effectively address the needs of the Contracting Parties.
 - iii) understand the opportunities offered by and the interest of donor organizations, so that it may effectively combine the needs of the region and of the Contracting Parties with the mobilization of funds without being opportunistic or donor-driven, but at the same time not missing out on existing opportunities.
40. Ownership and commitment of all partners involved in a regional initiative is equally important:
- i) Contracting Parties should communicate their expectations from the initiative and be forthcoming with ideas on activities that can address their needs.
 - ii) Technical/scientific partners should be eager to propose ideas and fields for common action, to contribute and share with others, assisting the initiative in developing a strong programme.
41. Being an implementation-focused process for the Convention, a regional initiative needs to retain a certain degree of flexibility by striking the right mix of informality and procedure. The existence of a clear and agreed description of the structure and operations of the initiative and the interrelations and roles of all its components is an important step. However, this should exist as a means to facilitate collaboration rather than be permitted to stall progress and reduce flexibility with over-complicated procedures.
42. In conclusion, the MedWet Initiative has continued successfully to evolve and develop over the 2003-2005 triennium. In the coming triennium, it should carefully assess how it can address the above points, in order to become even more efficient.