

# Regional initiative on Black Sea Coastal wetlands - BlackSeaWet

BlackSeaWet is presented as a Regional Initiative that is in an advanced stage of development and planned to start in 2009. Widespread consultations have been undertaken and the aims, principles and architecture of the Initiative developed. Consultations are continuing with stakeholders through 2008 (having begun in 2007) to finalise a technical work plan and the details of the Initiative's operational basis (governance, coordination). This is expected to be complete in 2008 before COP10, ready for a 2009 start.

**Background:** Coastal wetlands in the Black Sea include habitats such as reed-dominated marshes, forest riverine flood plains, inland lakes and lagoons, limans, deltas, coastal lagoons and bays, silt and sand flats, as well as artificial wetlands such as fish ponds, rice paddies and salt ponds. 2,486,372 ha of Black Sea coastal wetlands are considered to be of national and international importance and 35 sites totalling 1,953,576 ha, are designated as Ramsar sites. These ecosystems provide important services and benefits to people that have economic value. They act as sources of food and building materials, supply fresh water, provide nursery and breeding grounds for (often commercially important) fish and waterbird species, contribute to sustaining local farming, improve water quality (including to some degree a role in wastewater treatment), help to mitigate floods, protect the shoreline from erosion and recharge groundwater. They also have a vital role in ensuring the health of the Black Sea itself, buffering it from some of the upstream impacts of agriculture, industry, forestry and urbanization and providing habitats that are important to the life cycle of many of the species living there.

Despite the clear importance to biodiversity and benefits to people, Black Sea coastal wetlands have been seriously degraded in recent years, both through activities in the catchment, and also through direct impacts from land reclamation, drainage, pollution and overexploitation. These have been related to unsustainable industry, agriculture, aquaculture, silviculture, navigation and tourism related practices. The result is that many Black Sea coastal wetlands are no longer able to perform their natural functions. In the Black Sea this has damaged fisheries, water quality and tourism generating costs that are considered to be in the region of hundreds of millions of dollars per year. In the coastal wetlands and their surrounding areas it continues to degrade biodiversity and is denying local people access to the resources that they use in their day to day lives.

A Regional Initiative is needed to stimulate and coordinate cooperation around these issues in the region, acting as a means to address regional issues, share knowledge and expertise to address shared issues amongst different countries and stakeholders in the region and stimulate the development of capacity to address them. The issues require a multi-stakeholder approach that engages with government, civil society and increasingly the private sector. The Regional Initiative will undertake to bring these parties together. It has been agreed that key targets will be to

- Stop the loss and degradation of wetlands and their biodiversity by 2020
- Ensure wise use principles are integrated into coastal zone developments
- Engage local people in planning and decision-making
- Complete the ecological network around the Black and Azov Sea coasts
- Combine wetland conservation in integrated water resource management and integrated coastal zone management approaches
- Mainstream wetland conservation in sectors whose activities are contributing to degradation

***The overall aim of new regional initiative – BlackSeaWet is to catalyse the conservation and sustainable development of Black Sea coastal wetlands.***

The need for the Initiative is well supported by Contracting Parties in the region. The BlackSeaWet concept was originally a recommendation of the workshop on Black Sea coastal wetlands held in Odessa in September 2000 attended by representatives of all the major Basin countries. At this meeting Wetlands International was asked to take the lead in the Initiative's development. The development of the Initiative was again supported by the Ramsar European Regional meeting in Bled, Slovenia 2001. Most recently Basin countries represented by the Ukrainian government (the host country for Wetlands International Black Sea Programme) indicated their support for the developing Initiative during Ramsar COP9, Uganda (see Resolution IX.7).

A Dutch funded project, lead by Wetlands International is facilitating the development of the foundations for the Initiative and has received letters of support from Bulgaria, Romania, Russian Federation (Krasnodvar Oblast), Turkey and Ukraine. The project has supported a regional needs analysis that has consulted each Basin country to identify priority needs and actions. This information was brought together at a regional conference "Stopping the loss of Black Sea Coastal Wetlands: the establishment of a regional initiative", held on 30-31<sup>st</sup> October 2007 in Odessa, Ukraine. 46 participants representing government ministries, national and international non-government organisations, international Conventions (including the Ramsar Convention) and scientific institutions from Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine discussed the basis for future cooperation in the field of wise use of coastal wetlands along the coast of the Black and Azov Seas. The conference, organized by Wetlands International Black Sea Programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine, concluded that:

- The need for a regional wetland initiative as expressed in the Odessa 2000 declaration is still necessary and urgently required.
- That the establishment of a regional wetland initiative under the Ramsar Convention (as described under Ramsar CoP Resolution XIII.30) should be undertaken and submitted in time for consideration at the Next Ramsar CoP to be held in South Korea in Changwon, 24<sup>th</sup> October to 4<sup>th</sup> November 2008

It was recommended that the Regional Initiative will be named 'BlackSeaWet' and should address the coastal wetlands and biodiversity of the six States whose territories border the Black and Azov Seas (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine)

The same meeting also adopted a Declaration in which the main component parts of the Initiative are summarized based on consultations leading up to the meeting and stakeholder discussions at the meeting. This consultation process is continuing during 2008 to finalise the specific details of the Initiative. It is planned that by CoP10 later this year in Korea, stakeholders will have agreed to a technical workplan, and the details of governance and coordination. It is then planned that by mid 2009 the Initiative will begin, marked by the first full management Body meeting.

## **Annex 1 Resolution of Odessa-2007 conference**

### **Odessa-2007 Resolution on the establishment of a regional initiative to stop the loss of the coastal wetlands of the Black and Azov Seas**

During the international conference “Stopping the loss of Black Sea Coastal Wetlands: the establishment of a regional initiative”, held on 30-31<sup>st</sup> October 2007 in Odessa, Ukraine, 46 participants representing government ministries, national and international non-government organisations, international Conventions and scientific institutions from Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine discussed the basis for future cooperation in the field of wise use of coastal wetlands along the coast of the Black and Azov Seas. The workshop was organized by Wetlands International Black Sea Programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine and financed by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Food Quality and the Dutch Embassy in Kiev, Ukraine.

#### *The participants of the workshop:*

Recognising that the biological diversity of the Black and Azov Sea represents a natural and cultural heritage of exceptional international interest which should be conserved and sustainably used for present and future generations

Further recognising that the services provided by these wetlands to people are often of great significance at the local, regional and national and international levels providing social and economic benefits that should be taken into account during the planning and implementation of activities by different sectors in and around coastal areas

Noting that the degradation and loss of these ecosystems has been proceeding over many years and seems likely to continue at an increasing rate for years to come as the region develops and pressure on land use increases.

#### *Taking into account:*

- the adoption of the Bucharest Convention on ‘The Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution’ in 1992
- the establishment of the Black Sea Environmental Programme in 1993 and its achievements through the implementation of the two action plans that have so far been implemented
- the establishment of the Landscape and Biodiversity Protocol in 2002 and its subsequent ratification in 2007
- the achievements and progress made through the implementation of the Regional UNDP-GEF ‘Black Sea Ecosystems Recovery Project’ (2002-07)
- the progress made in implementing the actions identified under the 1994 IWRB report ‘Conservation of Black Sea Wetlands: a review and preliminary action plan’ and the Wetlands International 2002 report ‘Black Sea Conservation Priorities’
- the success of regional wetland initiatives established under the Ramsar Convention in promoting the wise use of wetlands and the guidance of the Convention under CoP Resolution XIII.30
- the request of the 4th European Regional Meeting on the Ramsar Convention held in Bled, Slovenia in 2001 for a regional wetland initiative for the Black Sea Region and the reference to the development of such an initiative in the report of the meeting (point 39)
- the importance of the coastal wetlands of the Black and Azov Seas for internationally significant populations of migrating waterbirds in relation to the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)
- the Odessa-2000 ‘Declaration on the Wetlands of the Black and Azov Seas’ that arose from the meeting held in September 2000, in which the need for a Ramsar Convention regional initiative to promote activities on the conservation and sustainable use of the coastal wetlands in the Black Sea region, based on inter-regional cooperation was highlighted
- the recent accession to the European Union by Bulgaria and Romania and the implications for policy and implementation that are associated with this in the Black Sea Region

- the European Commission 'Black Sea Synergy' initiative (2007) that is designed to develop cooperation between the Black Sea Region and the EU as a means to help stimulate development and stability and which specifically addresses environment amongst other key focal areas
- the programmes of key international conservation organisations (BirdLife International, IUCN, Wetlands International, WWF) active in the region

*Unanimously concluded that:*

- The need for a regional wetland initiative as expressed in the Odessa 2000 declaration is still necessary and urgently required.
- That the establishment of a regional wetland initiative under the Ramsar Convention (as described under Ramsar CoP Resolution XIII.30) should be undertaken to ensure submission to the next Ramsar CoP to be held in South Korea in Changwon, 24<sup>th</sup> October to 4<sup>th</sup> November 2008

*Recommended that:*

- the Regional Initiative will be named 'BlackSeaWet' (BSW) and should address the coastal wetlands and biodiversity of the six States whose territories border the Black and Azov Seas (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine)
- the Initiative should have a Vision and Objectives based on the following:

Vision: In 20 years time the coastal wetlands of the Black Sea and Azov Seas are sustainably used, healthy ecosystems that provide the basis for conservation of wetland dependent biodiversity, support services for people and are equal in area and health to the current time.

Key targets will be to:

- Stop the loss and degradation of wetlands and their biodiversity by 2020
- Ensure wise use principles are integrated into coastal zone developments
- Engage local people in planning and decision-making
- Complete the ecological network around the Black and Azov Sea coasts
- Combine wetland conservation in integrated water resource management and integrated coastal zone management approaches
- Mainstream wetland conservation in sectors whose activities are contributing to degradation

This should be achieved through activities that address the following objectives:

Objective 1: Harmonise and strengthen conservation legislation in the Black Sea Countries and improve its implementation and enforcement.

Objective 2: Ensure that wetland conservation, management and restoration is underpinned by biodiversity, environmental and socio-economic information and knowledge based on standard approaches to monitoring, data processing and storage.

Objective 3: Raise awareness of civil society, government and private sector stakeholders of wetlands values, degradation and wise use approaches

Objective 4: Reach out to key sectors whose activities affect wetlands and develop innovative approaches and best practices to wetland management

Objective 5: Maintain a regional coordination mechanism for governments, civil society and the private sector that will act as a focus for regional wetland conservation, including information management and exchange, research, communication, resource mobilisation and capacity development

Objective 6: Mainstream wetland conservation into frameworks, strategies, plans and implementation of integrated approaches to water resources and coastal zone management, including river basin management

- BSW be organized based on the following principles and structures:
 

**Governance:** BSW will be governed by a **Management Body** which will comprise the following representatives: Ministries of Environment from the six Black Sea countries, six national level non-government organisations, one from the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, one from the Black Sea Commission Secretariat, up to four international non-governmental organisations active in the region (e.g. Wetlands International, BirdLife International, WWF, IUCN). Meetings of the Management Body will be conducted annually. The costs for annual Management Body meetings should be covered by the host country.

**Regional coordination and communication:** Between meetings of the Management Board an **Interim Coordination Unit** will be responsible for coordination, administration, communication, monitoring and implementation of BSW plans and preparing annual meetings and reports. The Unit will comprise 2 persons – one representative of the Ministry of Environment and the other from a national NGO of the host country. The Interim Coordination Unit will be hosted by a Black Sea country with responsibility rotating periodically.

**National coordination and implementation:** **National Working Groups** will be established in each country for implementation of BSW. They will be responsible for coordination and implementation of initiatives in the country in line with regionally defined goals and targets. They will include representatives of ministries, non-government organisations, scientific and other relevant organizations. Participation will be on a voluntary basis.

*Request that:*

- The following steps be facilitated by Wetlands International Black Sea Office and supported by the Ministries and national level non-government organisations to ensure that BSW is established and subsequently implemented:

Official endorsement and approval:

- Rationale and technical basis for BSW: finalize a BSW ‘Vision’ and ‘Portfolio of Actions’ for submission to Ministries of Environment for each Black Sea country;
- Government endorsement:
  - o the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine to formally invite other Black Sea ministries to officially endorse BSW;
  - o the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Ukraine to support a meeting during which BSW will be formally endorsed ready for submission to the Ramsar Convention (a side-event on the BlackSeaWet Initiative will be included in the agenda of a Ministerial Conference, Kiev in 2008);
- Bucharest Convention support: Through the Black Sea Commission Permanent Secretariat secure recognition of BlackSeaWet as a work programme priority under the Convention and secure a letter of support;
- Cooperation between Ramsar and Bucharest convention: Establish a MoU between Ramsar and the Bucharest Convention to provide a frame and formally identify the mutual interest and political support for a common initiative
- Ramsar Convention recognition: submit all necessary documents to the Ramsar Convention for official recognition of BSW at the next Ramsar COP (South Korea, 2008)

First implementation steps:

- Ministries and non-government organisations will nominate representatives in the BSW Management Body;
- prepare draft ToR for BSW Management Body and draft of first Action Plan
- conduct first meeting of BSW Management Body for approval of ToR and Action Plan
- establish Interim Coordination Unit and formalize National Working Groups
- agree and develop several programme and project proposals for actions on sustainable use and conservation of coastal wetlands