

CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

25th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Gland, Switzerland: 23- 27 October 2000

DOC. SC25-30
Addendum

Agenda item 22.9

Location and financing of the MedWet Coordination function

1. On 13 October 2000 the Bureau received by fax the attached letter from the Deputy Minister for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works of Greece, containing a “Proposal of the Government of Greece for the MedWet Coordination”, and requesting the Secretary General “to place it in front of the members of the Standing Committee, during its meeting of 24-27 October 2000”.
2. The Secretary General will try to obtain further clarification from the Greek Government about some practical aspects of this proposal in order to be in a position to brief the Standing Committee. The issues that still require clarification are, *inter alia*, a) the nature of the agreement that should be signed on this matter with the Greek Government; b) the nature of the arrangements that should be made with the Coordination Unit of UNEP for the Mediterranean Action Plan, where it is proposed to locate the MedWet Coordination; and c) staff hiring and supervision.
3. The Secretary General hopes that, in spite of the short time available, MedWet/Com countries that are voting members in the Standing Committee (Algeria, France and Spain) will be able to make the necessary consultations, so as to be in a position to advise the Standing Committee on the decision that should be taken on this matter. To facilitate these consultations, the Bureau is faxing this Addendum to the interested parties on Monday, 16 October 2000.

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13 October 2000
R.N. 1979

Mr. Delmar Blasco
Secretary General
Convention on Wetlands
Rue de Mauverney 28
CH-1196, Gland
Switzerland

Re: Proposal of the Government of Greece for the MedWet Coordination Function

Dear Mr. Blasco

At the last meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee, held in Djerba, Tunisia on 2-5 April 2000, the representative of the Greek Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works suggested that time should be provided to all interested Mediterranean governments to make voluntary proposals for hosting and funding the MedWet Coordination function.

A deadline of 30 June 2000 was agreed for such proposals. We were not able to meet that deadline, as our Ministry wanted to avoid any sense of competition on this matter, and especially with the Government of Spain with which we have close bonds of cooperation. We supported, therefore, the convocation of a meeting in Spain of the MedWet donor states on the MedWet Coordination. Then we hoped that a meeting would be arranged by the Portuguese and later by the French Presidencies of the European Union, but nothing happened. Finally we accepted the invitation sent by Dr. Aldo Cosentino, the Director General of the Italian Ministry of Environment. Strangely enough this meeting also did not materialize, in spite of our repeated contacts with the Italian Ministry.

That is why, as we are convinced now that the meeting in Rome will not be held, we feel obliged – much to our regret - to send you our proposal on the MedWet Coordination without consultation with the other EU Member States, and to ask you to place it in front of the members of the Standing Committee, during its meeting of 24-27 October 2000.

Greece's position on MedWet and on its Coordination

Our position on the future of the MedWet Initiative and on its Coordination has been included in our reply to Dr. Cosentino's invitation, which has been communicated to you and to the other four EU Member States in the Mediterranean, and is the following:

“1. Greece and Italy have been the first two countries to support strongly the establishment of MedWet since the Grado Symposium in February 1991. (In fact it was Italy that submitted the proposal for the MedWet1 project to the European Commission in 1992, which formed the first major step of MedWet.) Since then the Government of Greece has supported the development of this important Mediterranean initiative, technically, financially and politically. As you know, our Ministry has contributed financially to both the MedWet1 and MedWet2 projects,

has hosted and funded the MedWet Secretariat at the Greek Biotope / Wetland Centre in Thessaloniki since 1997, and has hosted also in Thessaloniki the first meeting of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee in 1998.

2. This strong and unequivocal support of the MedWet Initiative under the aegis of the Convention on Wetlands is due to our belief in the value of Mediterranean collaboration, based upon the solid historical, cultural and political links that bind the peoples around the Basin. In addition, as EU-member states in the Mediterranean, we feel it is our responsibility to assist the countries of the East and the South in strengthening their capacity and institutions, so that they can manage better their natural resources sustainably, and especially wetlands.

3. In addition, since the beginning of MedWet, the coordinator of this initiative has been based in Athens and has been in close contact with this Ministry, as well as the UNEP Coordinating Office for the Mediterranean Action Plan, also established in Athens. We are thus quite well informed about the activities of the current MedWet Coordinator and have appreciated greatly his efforts to build MedWet during the last 10 years, in a spirit of equitable collaboration, effectiveness and minimal bureaucracy, and to broaden in fields such as integrated coastal zone management, water resources, sustainable development, and through new networks of regions, sites and national non-governmental organisations.

4. For all these reasons, we have a positive concern about the future development of MedWet, especially after it has been endorsed as an integral part of the Convention on Wetlands and as a global model for the implementation of this Convention by Ramsar COP7 Resolution VII.22. In this spirit, we are investigating ways in which Greece can contribute further to the further strengthening of the MedWet Initiative.”

The Greek proposal

We believe that the future of the MedWet Initiative has been clearly described in Resolution VII.22 of the 7th Conference of the Contracting Parties, in San Jose, Costa Rica in May 1999. This Resolution, however, has not addressed issues of financing the MedWet Initiative, especially as to its Coordination and the operating costs of the Mediterranean Wetlands Committee. In this respect, it is clear to the Government of Greece that:

- as in the past, and as befitting a regional initiative, the costs of MedWet must be borne by the Mediterranean states, as well as by other partners of the initiative;
- such financial arrangements must be discussed and approved by the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

As COP8 will only be held in 2002, and as there are no other sources of financing at present, the Government of Greece submits respectfully the following interim proposal for the two years 2001 and 2002, until a final decision is taken by COP8 in Valencia, Spain.

1. The MedWet Coordination and the MedWet Secretariat (which is currently ensured by the Greek Biotope / Wetland Center in Thessaloniki) will be consolidated in Athens.

2. We shall provide 50 m2 of fully furnished and equipped office space, adjacent to the Coordinating Unit of UNEP for the Mediterranean Action Plan, on Vassileos Constantinou Avenue 48, and cover all operating costs for 2001-2002. The MedWet office will have access to the library and other facilities of the UNEP/MAP Unit.
3. The Government of Greece will put at the disposal of the Ramsar Bureau the necessary funds to cover the salary, social costs and travel expenses of the MedWet Coordinator for the two-year period. In case this is a non-Greek person, work permits and other arrangements will be facilitated.
4. In addition, the Government of Greece will cover 30% of the time of Mr. Thymio Papayannis, the current MedWet Coordinator, as well as related travel costs during the first year, so that he can assist the new Coordinator, especially as to relations with outside organizations and other strategic issues, and thus ensure a smooth transition.
5. The Secretariat will consist of two qualified staff members from the Greek Biotope / Wetland Center, who will be established at the Athens MedWet Office. The MedWet Coordinator will be asked to assist in the preparation of their terms of reference and in their selection.
6. Further to Secretariat assistance, the MedWet Coordinator will have at his/her disposal as requested the help of wetland specialists from the staff of the Greek Biotope / Wetland Center or similar Greek scientific institutions totaling 12 working months per year.
7. The Greek Biotope / Wetland Center will continue naturally the activities that have been agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ramsar Convention in 1999.

We estimate that the above elements of our proposal will total approximately 175,000 EUROS per year (excluding the GBWC secretariat already covered by our Ministry).

Advantages of the Greek proposal

Greece is a small state in the North East of the Mediterranean, a member of the European Union and of the ONE, but has achieved only recently high economic development status. It maintains close relations with the Balkan states in its vicinity, with Turkey and Israel and with the Arab states in the East and South of the Basin. Therefore, it is very well located to host the MedWet Coordination for the period 2001-2002.

The MedWet Coordinator has been established in Athens since his appointment in 1997. Even before, since the inception of MedWet in 1991, its seat has been Athens. Having the new Coordinator also established in this historic city would ensure continuity and would simplify matters during a difficult transition period.

Through the MedWet Initiative, links between the Ramsar Convention and the Barcelona Convention – which did not exist before - have been established. In fact we are informed that a Memorandum of Collaboration between the two conventions has been agreed. Having the office

of the MedWet Coordination next to the headquarters of UNEP/MAP will contribute to even closer collaboration on a practical, operational level.

Working closely with the Barcelona Convention will also bring the Convention on Wetlands and the MedWet Initiative in contact with additional governmental services in many countries, with which it does not have yet close relations.

Finally, the consolidation of the MedWet Coordination with the MedWet Secretarial Unit of the Greek Biotope / Wetland Center would ensure effectiveness and synergy, and make good use of funds from our Ministry, which otherwise would not be available for MedWet, but would be used for other conservation priorities within Greece.

We hope that the Standing Committee will give favorable attention to our proposal. The Ministry representatives who will attend the meeting on 24-27 October, will be authorized to provide any necessary clarifications and to answer related questions.

Sincerely yours

H. Efthymiopoulos
Deputy Minister for the Environment
Planning and Public Works