



Prespa Statement

on 'an integrated approach to the cultural and natural values of Mediterranean wetlands'

In the Greek part of the Prespa Lakes, 35 experts from 17 countries met on 23-27 September 2009 to analyse and discuss the possibility and modalities of a common approach to the natural and cultural heritage of Mediterranean wetlands that would result in creating synergies and building consensus.

At the end of the Workshop¹, the participants agreed on the following statement:

1. Taking into account the continuing loss and degradation of Mediterranean wetlands due to a variety of factors such as increasing population and tourism pressures, economic development of coastal areas and resulting land use changes, water resources overexploitation and pollution, as well as major threats associated with climate change including sea level rise, increased temperatures and reduced precipitation;
2. Realising the mutual dependence of the cultural and natural aspects of wetlands, with these ecosystems providing important resources and services to human beings, but often not being properly understood, appreciated and utilised sustainably;
3. Considering that wetland conservation in the Mediterranean Basin depends not only on ecological and scientific considerations, but critically also on human beings and their ethical, cultural and economic values, at all levels, from the local to the international, and that this relationship must be faced in a positive –and not in a negative– manner;
4. It has become clear that an integrated approach to both the natural and cultural heritage of wetlands will improve understanding of the situation and will significantly benefit the conservation of both aspects of heritage. Cultural heritage is taken to mean all the works of human beings, tangible and intangible, from the grand to the vernacular.

Such an approach would require a number of challenging initiatives during the coming years, and these are summarised below.

¹ Organised by Med-INA (Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos) with the collaboration of the Med-Wet Initiative and the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP).

5. A dialogue must be established between cultural heritage experts and those responsible for wetland management in order to (a) understand better the requirements of both sectors (b) develop a common language and (c) ultimately agree on common objectives.
6. The integration of cultural heritage expertise in wetland management efforts must be ensured, as well as ensuring its contribution to the preparation of management plans and the operation of management bodies.
7. The links between natural and cultural heritage (including sacred and religious aspects) must be further studied and communicated among local inhabitants, responsible authorities, visitors and other stakeholders.
8. Local knowledge about the tangible and intangible aspects of wetlands –be it historical, traditional or contemporary– must be preserved through systematic documentation, and must be taken seriously into account.
9. Such knowledge can lead to a more flexible and site-specific management of sites, avoiding generalised practices which may not be appropriate to individual cases.
10. The material, cultural and spiritual needs of local communities must be studied and given significant weight in management decisions.
11. Co-ordinated and integrated presentation of the cultural and natural heritage of wetland sites may in turn provide important benefits for both local communities and visitors, and may raise significantly their awareness about wetland conservation.
12. The guidance on culture and wetlands provided by the Ramsar Convention² should be widely promoted and used by wetland managers and others in their day-to-day activities. Experience in its use should be documented and reviewed, in order to refine and develop its application to specific Mediterranean contexts.
13. There is a strong need for a framework of co-operation in the Mediterranean Basin on efforts to integrate the approach to the conservation of natural and cultural values of wetlands. Such a framework could be provided by the MedWet Initiative and its Culture Network.

² See www.ramsar.org under Activities / Culture and Wetlands / Documents.