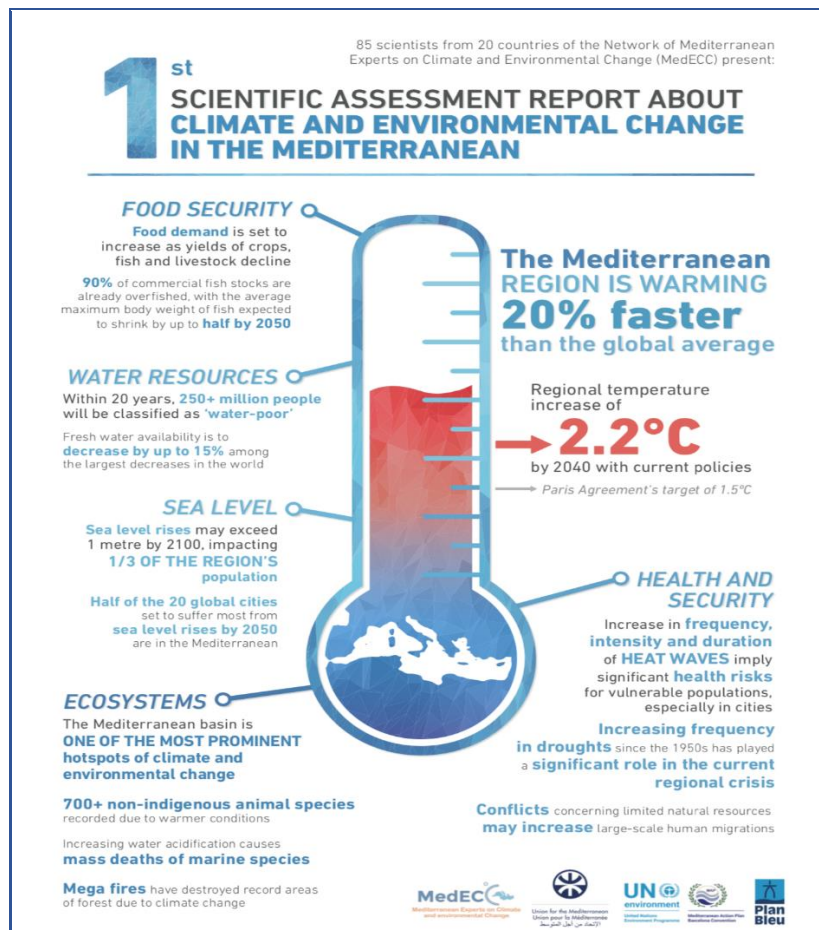


# Time for action to save coastal wetlands!

A natural and cost-effective solution to ensure the resilience of coastal communities, local economies and natural ecosystems in a context of severe ecological and climatic crisis in the Mediterranean Basin

*Policy note to the attention of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and Observers*

Riparian countries of the Mediterranean Basin are facing today unprecedented challenges: climate change combined with ecological changes are already affecting the Mediterranean region 20% more than the rest of the world with increasing risks of flood, coastal inundations, drought, erosion and fire. The last available scientific reports warn: in the next decades climate change is likely to threaten food and water security, human livelihood, health and security, natural ecosystems and economies more than anywhere else on the planet.



The Mediterranean Sea has a coastline of 46,000 km at the interface of land and sea. It provides essential natural resources and ecosystem services that sustain Mediterranean economies, human well-being and create wealth for local communities. But combined unsustainable developments in the last 45 years, such as touristic and industrial infrastructures, have severely damaged coastal natural ecosystems and threaten their natural functions. In addition, coastal zones are at the forefront of climate change increasing further coastal risks for local communities.

Yet, Mediterranean coastal areas also hold part of the solution: its wetlands. The Mediterranean Basin contains between 19 and 26 million ha of wetlands that provide crucial resources and services to local people such as providing and purifying water, mitigating the impacts of extreme climatic events such as flood or drought, acting as buffer zones for sea-level rise and sequestering vast quantities of CO<sub>2</sub>. These wellsprings of biodiversity represent cost-effective 'nature-based solutions' to increase the resilience of the Mediterranean society and ecosystems to climate and ecological changes. But the reality is that the Mediterranean region has lost 48% of its natural wetlands between 1970 and 2013 and the areal extent of coastal wetlands has shrunk by 10% in the last decades compromising their capacity to secure critical goods and benefits in the future.

As recently recalled by the last IPBES report on the state of global biodiversity and the fifth GIEC report on global climate, it is still time to reverse the trend of current dramatic biodiversity loss combined with uncontrolled climate change, on the condition that we act now!

The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention by adopting and signing the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol in 2008 have committed themselves to implement in their respective countries the provisions of the Protocol for *the Protection and sustainable use of the coastal zone* (art.8) and in particular *Wetlands and estuaries* (art.10 1.) through an integrated coastal zone management approach.

Concerned about the continuous degradation of Mediterranean coastal areas and wetlands, the Mediterranean Wetlands Initiative of the Ramsar Convention (MedWet), as Observer to the Barcelona Convention:

- 1) Fully supports the Objectives and General Principles of the CRF, among them the importance to *Address natural hazards and the effect of natural disasters, in particular coastal erosion and climate change, ... by promoting ecosystem approach and nature-based*



*solutions to maintain or restore the natural capacity of the coast to adapt to changes (Par. III b) of the CRF°*

- 2) Urges Contracting Parties and the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention to address simultaneously coastal wetlands loss and degradation and climate change as an urgent and priority objective in the coming years, to include it into the main decisions and the implementation measures of the Convention,
- 3) Urges Contracting Parties to incorporate coastal wetlands conservation and management into the overall coastal land use planning and management as well as in all their sectorial policies,
- 4) Urges Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to promote the role of coastal wetlands as nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change impacts and to provide environmental and socio-economic benefits to people locally and regionally and to achieve many of the SDGs set by the United Nations in its 2030 Agenda,
- 5) Urges the Contracting Parties and the Secretariat to adopt financial incentives and allocate sufficient funds and efforts to reinforce capacity building and public awareness for local authorities and other relevant stakeholders for a better implementation of the relevant international commitments,
- 6) Strongly recommend Mediterranean countries to support the Mediterranean Wetlands Managers Network (<https://medwetmanagers.net/>), coordinated by MedWet, to organise exchanges of good practices on integrated management and conservation of coastal wetlands.

The available scientific analysis explains that, unless fundamental changes are adopted at all levels of the Mediterranean society, the general objectives of the Barcelona Convention will not be met and neither the Mediterranean Sustainable Development Strategy with the view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. But what is really at stake is not the fulfilling of international commitments, but the very existence of millions of people living around the Mediterranean Basin as well as its economic, social and political stability. Time has come for Mediterranean countries to adopt a Green New Deal for the conservation and sustainable management of its coastal zones, involving all the national stakeholders concerned, in order to help mitigate the effects of global changes for future generations.

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