



11th International Conference on the Zoogeography, Ecology and Evolution of Greece and Adjacent Regions.

September 21-25, 2009, Irakleion, Crete, Greece

Resolution

Halt the degradation of island wetlands of Greece

Today, Friday the 25th of September 2009, a round table on “*The importance and conservation status of the island wetlands of Greece*” was held in Heraklion Crete, in the framework of the 11th International Conference on the Zoogeography, Ecology and Evolution of Greece and Adjacent Regions (11th ICZEGAR) at the initiative of WWF Greece.

Scientists and practitioners who participated in this event extend a pledge to all interested parties, including the Greek Government, the European Commission, local governments and administrations, academia, the NGO community, donor agencies, and the public, on the urgent conservation of the immensely important wetland ecosystems of the Greek islands.

In particular, the undersigned scientists:

1. **Aware** that Greek island wetlands perform multiple ecological functions of high importance, in terms of supporting biodiversity, hosting endemic species and rare habitat types, sustaining soil and water-cycle attributes and services, combating desertification and maintaining mosaic landscapes of social, cultural and ecological importance;
2. **Noting** that according to the latest findings of WWF Greece in this field, Greek islands host an exceptional network of at least 806 wetlands larger than 0.1 ha that expands over 80 islands (485 in 67 islands of the Aegean, 200 in Crete and 2 satellite islands and 121 in 10 Ionian Islands);
3. **Conscious** of the global ecological importance of this network for avifauna as stop-over and refueling sites for millions of migrating and wintering birds;
4. **Acknowledging** the tremendous land development and seasonal pressures on the natural resource on most of the Greek islands, which result in abrupt land-use changes, water stresses and exceeding of environmental carrying capacities;
5. **Acknowledging** that cross-cutting inefficiencies in the Greek land-use planning and environmental protection system, as well as serious inadequacies in environmental legislation enforcement, accentuate the aforementioned problems;
6. **Alarmed** at the fact that most Greek island wetlands have been increasingly degraded and shrunk during the last decades and that this trend is continuing today through filling with rubble, building and road construction, pollution, draining, deprivation of fresh-water inputs and over-grazing;
7. **Alarmed** by the fact that such small freshwater and coastal ecosystems appear particularly sensitive against the impacts of climate change, whereas they could and



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should be preserved in order to play a key role in combating climate change impacts at the local level;

8. **Noting** that Greece is a Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention, and is therefore committed to conserve and promote the wise use of all its wetlands through national and local actions;
9. **Recalling** that in recommendation 7.2 of Ramsar COP 7 (San Jose, Costa Rica 1999) on the significance of small wetland ecosystems, COP urged “*all Contracting Parties with small island wetland ecosystems within their territory to give special attention to ensuring the application of the Convention for these areas in recognition of their fragility and special management needs, and, where appropriate, to consider the inclusion of those wetlands in the List of Wetlands of International Importance*”;
10. **Recalling** the Council Directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC), the Council Directive on the conservation of habitats and wild fauna and flora (92/43/EEC), the EU Water Framework Directive (Council Directive 2000/60/EC) and the European Landscape Convention;
11. **Highlighting** the fact that many of the wetlands in concern are already protected under the aforementioned regulations, or in that manner qualify for such protection;
12. **Stressing** that immediate action for the conservation of these fragile ecosystems and halting their further destruction is eminent if their ecological attributes and services are to be maintained and that thorough planning for the restoration of lost or degraded wetlands is required;

STRONGLY ENCOURAGE all interested parties to take-up immediate action, in their respective fields of competence, to initiate and support plans and programs for the conservation of the Greek island wetlands.

CALL UPON the Greek Government to guarantee the necessary legal protection of island wetlands, through the effective implementation of pertinent national laws, the fulfillment of obligations against European and international treaties and the institutionalization of necessary new legal and administrative instruments.

URGE the Greek Government to secure their conservation status as a matter of priority, since failure to effectively protect island wetlands may not only breach national and European legal provisions and obligations against international treaties, but may also cause serious environmental impacts to certain Greek islands;

CALL UPON the European Commission to work towards the conservation of this unique wetland network and to exhaust its capacities in promoting relevant conservation actions, monitoring the effectiveness of national measures to this end and assuring that the protection of these unique habitats constitutes an EU-wide priority.

ASK donor agencies and institutions to demonstrate their interest in this field and to actively support projects that target the conservation and rehabilitation of island wetlands, including research projects working for the thorough documentation of their ecological attributes and values.



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In relation to the above, Greek national and local authorities are **PARTICULARLY URGED** to prioritize the following actions and measures :

1. The Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works should prepare a presidential degree by which island streams and torrents and their estuaries will be declared as of special environmental importance (e.g., as has been done for Attiki).
2. The responsible ministries and authorities to proceed with the delineation of the boundaries of all streams and torrents, especially those that form estuarine wetlands.
3. To include all coastal wetlands in the legal description of the coastal zone and to set up legal provisions for their strict protection as seashore elements. Priority has to be given in drawing the seashore-lines and beach-lines at wetland areas.
4. National and local administration services should prioritize the monitoring, wardening and protection of island wetlands.
5. During the national cadastral survey in islands, priority should be given to areas hosting wetlands.
6. The main proposals of the ENV/GR/000685¹ LIFE - Environment program should be applied to all water reservoirs of the islands.
7. No more dams should be constructed in islands. River bank-side reservoirs with gentle slopes and soil bottoms are more ecologically sound.
8. Attention should be given to the conservation of those island wetlands which are located within NATURA 2000 sites.
9. Special attention should be paid to certain adaptations needed in the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive in respect to the small watershed size in islands.
10. Island wetlands should be among the protection priorities of the ongoing local spatial planning exercises (General Town Planning, and Zone Planning & Residential Management of Open Cities).²
11. Information on the values of and threats to island wetlands should be systematically mainstreamed to the general public, and particularly to island societies, tourism and real estate operators and visitors.

We ask from the Organizing Committee of the 11th International Congress on the Zoogeography, Ecology and Evolution of Greece and Adjacent Regions (11th ICZEGAR) to forward this Resolution to the European, national, regional and prefectural authorities.

¹ "Mediterranean Reservoirs and Wetlands. A demonstration of multiple-objective Management in the island of Crete" University of Crete, Natural History Museum

² The vast majority of the island wetlands of Greece have been already inventoried by the WWF Hellas and are included in the GrIsWet and GeoGrIsWet databases which are freely provided after request.