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improving **W**etland **G**overnance through a **C**ommunity **O**f **P**ractice

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Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean

POLICY BRIEF

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WeGoCoop project in a nutshell

The WeGoCoop project is funded by **Interreg Euro-MED 2021-2027 programme** and promotes across the Mediterranean the implementation of **Wetland Contracts**, a voluntary-based collaborative governance tool tested in more than 20 previous EU-funded projects.

The project aims to analyse the **state of the art of Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean** and to establish a **Community of Practice (CoP) among public entities, private organizations and individual experts** engaged in these community-led wetland governance processes, capitalizing on the outcomes of previous projects, sharing challenges and solutions.

A **virtual platform** has been launched to **map and continuously update the signed Wetland Contracts across the Mediterranean**, while also serving as a **hub for knowledge exchange and transfer** within the CoP.

Meanwhile, the project will exchange experiences, methodologies, and strategies and **transfer the tool to new contexts** in the Euro-Mediterranean region and the Middle Eastern and Southern Mediterranean region.

WEGOCOOP PROJECT WEBSITE

→ <https://wegocoop.interreg-euro-med.eu/>

MED PLATFORM ON WETLAND CONTRACTS

→ <https://wetlandsgovernance.eu/>

Getting around this document



What is this policy brief about?

This policy brief concerns the consolidation of the **Wetland Contract** tool, a public-private voluntary agreement for the integrated and participatory management of wetlands and their basins, aimed at improving wetland management, empowering local communities, stakeholders and authorities, and translating policies into actions. Its focus is on developing strategies for the sustainable development and management of wetlands that are firmly grounded in the principles of a just and sustainable ecological transition.



Where does this policy brief apply?

This policy brief builds on the decades-long experience of Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean, covering **rivers, lakes, ponds, coastal lagoons, marine coastal waters, and aquifers** (according to the definition of “wetland” specified in the Ramsar Convention), including their basins, with a view to consolidating it on the European side and promoting it in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. The approach of the Wetland Contract has been applied to support multi-level governance of MPAs too. The main message of the policy brief focuses on the Mediterranean as an advanced laboratory of local governance best practices, in a context recognized as a global climate change hotspot and a hub of socio-economic and geopolitical dynamics, where effective governance of wetland conservation represents a critical challenge.



When was this policy brief created?

This policy brief was developed between 2024 and 2025 within the framework of the **Interreg Euro-MED WeGoCoop project**. It draws on **25 years of EU-funded initiatives** that have contributed to testing, refining, and disseminating the Wetland Contract approach across the Mediterranean region. During this two-year period, thanks to the WeGoCoop project, these efforts were further advanced through a dedicated capacity-building initiative, two technical meetings, three local seminars, three local roadshows and an international conference.



Who prepared this policy brief and who is it for?

This policy brief was drafted by the **partnership of the Interreg Euro-MED WeGoCoop project**, under the coordination of **MedWet**, with the contribution of representatives of the **Mediterranean Wetland Contract Community of Practice**, which has been active for over 40 years and formalized thanks to this EU project. Some **key initiatives and organizations at Mediterranean level** contributed too. It is addressed to policy makers at both the EU level, in EU Member States and across the MENA region.



Why was this policy brief prepared?

This policy brief aims to promote the **upscaling** of the Wetland Contract practice in the Mediterranean, boosting their **dissemination** and **effectiveness**, with the ultimate goal of contributing to **improved governance** and supporting the **sustainable management of Mediterranean wetlands**, both within the EU and beyond, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In particular, the role of Wetland Contracts in bridging top-down policy frameworks with bottom-up community action is highlighted. While existing wetland management instruments represent an essential cornerstone for integrating environmental sustainability principles and supporting conservation and restoration initiatives, they nonetheless require the complementary involvement, active engagement, and shared responsibility of all stakeholders concerned with wetland governance. The Wetland Contract provides a substantial contribution in this direction.

Wetland Contracts: an overview

A Wetland Contract is a **voluntary and participatory agreement** designed to improve the **governance and sustainable management of wetlands and their basins**. It is not a legal document, but rather a shared commitment among all the stakeholders who have an interest in a wetland - such as local authorities, communities, landowners, NGOs, research institutions, and private actors.

The main goal of a Wetland Contract is to create a **common framework of cooperation**, where different parties agree on:

- an **area-wide strategy**, covering the entire wetland and, if relevant, its watershed;
- **shared objectives**, defined collectively and based on the ecological, social, and economic value of the site;
- **concrete actions**, distributed among stakeholders, so that each actor contributes according to their role and capacity;
- **monitoring and evaluation tools**, to track progress, ensure accountability, and adapt management strategies over time.

In practical terms, a Wetland Contract can include measures such as habitat restoration, water management, awareness raising, sustainable agriculture, responsible consumption and production, or ecotourism. Each measure is linked to clear **responsibilities, timeline, budget and indicators**.

By fostering **dialogue and collaboration**, the Wetland Contract strengthens **ownership**, builds **trust** among stakeholders, and ensures that wetlands are managed not just as ecological sites, but as shared assets providing essential services for **people and nature**. Furthermore, Wetland Contracts recognise the **cultural connections that communities have with wetlands** and the vital role these ecosystems play in sustaining local livelihoods.

The Wetland Contract aligns with several **major international and European frameworks** and has strong potential to support their implementation, ensuring coherence between local actions and global objectives.

At the **global scale**, the Wetland Contract:

- responds to the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, in particular SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land);
- contributes to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**, by promoting nature-based solutions that enhance carbon sequestration, climate resilience, and adaptation;
- supports the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**, through measures that maintain soil health, water retention, and sustainable land use;
- advances the objectives of the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, by safeguarding ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity, while embodying the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach;
- supports the **UN Water Action Agenda (2023)** by turning global water and climate commitments into local action, using wetlands as key ecosystems to protect water, build resilience, and restore the natural balance of the water cycle;
- is fully aligned with the **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**, which explicitly encourages participatory governance approaches for the wise use of wetlands.





At the **European scale**, the Wetland Contract:

- is coherent with the vision and priorities of the **European Green Deal**, which promotes sustainability, resilience, and nature-positive economies;
- contributes to the implementation of key EU Directives relevant to wetlands, including the **Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)**, by promoting integrated water management at the catchment scale, the **Floods Directive (2007/60/EC)**, by supporting ecosystem-based approaches to flood prevention and mitigation, the **Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)** and the **Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)**, by fostering conservation and restoration of habitats and species;
- responds to the objectives of the new **Nature Restoration Regulation**, which sets legally binding targets for restoring degraded ecosystems, including wetlands;
- contributes to the **Water Resilience Strategy** and the broader EU adaptation strategies, by enhancing the multifunctional role of wetlands in water retention, purification, and climate buffering;
- supports the objectives of both the **EU Pact for the Mediterranean** and the **EU Ocean Pact**, by promoting integrated management, ecological restoration, and sustainable use of natural resources.

At the **Mediterranean scale**, the Wetland Contract:

- supports the objectives of the **UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention** – and in particular with Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol, Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Protocol, pollution from Land-Based Sources (LBS) Protocol, as well as the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) - by strengthening participatory, ecosystem-based governance of coastal and wetland areas across the Mediterranean;
- is coherent with the **2030 GreenerMed Agenda**, adopted by 43 member states of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and with the related, dedicated previous activities and policy papers on wetlands in support of Axis 3 of the GreenerMed Agenda on biodiversity/ecosystem restoration and with its cross-cutting contribution to tackling climate change by strengthening the role of wetlands as nature-based solutions for adaptation, mitigation, and resilience across the Mediterranean - the 2030 GreenerMed Agenda provides a territorial mechanism for cooperation and policy coherence among Euro-Mediterranean partners;
- is coherent with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) **Water Agenda (2017)**, **Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Climate Action (2021)** and **Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (2021)**, enhancing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and strengthening local governance.

Beyond compliance with these frameworks, the Wetland Contract also:

- **strengthens multi-level governance**, ensuring that local actions are consistent with regional, national, and international commitments;
- **enhances stakeholder ownership**, creating synergies among public authorities, civil society, landowners, and the private sector;
- **provides a practical mechanism** for integrating scientific knowledge, traditional practices, and policy frameworks into site-level action;
- **acts as a replicable model** that can be adapted to different wetland types and socio-ecological contexts across the Mediterranean and beyond, including transboundary wetlands.

Despite the international, Mediterranean and European regulatory frameworks strongly emphasizing the importance of environmental governance in the integrated management of wetlands, **a policy gap remains in identifying and supporting governance tools to actively engage local communities** - not only through active listening processes but also through **shared responsibility** and **cross-sectoral collaboration** between the private and public sectors.

In summary, the Wetland Contract helps translate international, European, national, and local commitments into tangible, collective actions at the catchment and landscape levels, effectively bridging the gap between policy and practice.





Facts and figures

Health of wetlands in the Mediterranean

Mediterranean wetlands are under severe pressure: 400 million people live near a wetland, built-up areas have increased by 44% since 2000, 30% of wetlands are used for agriculture, and half of them are of poor quality. Climate change, driving a projected sea level rise of +0.34 to +1.06 m by 2100, could eliminate 69-92% of coastal marshes. Despite 56% of historical wetlands potentially lost and 40% of wetland-related species at risk, only 36% of habitats are protected, and just one-third of the 414 Ramsar Sites have an implemented management plan. Further degradation of wetlands could exacerbate climate and biodiversity crises due to the loss of carbon stocks and highly diverse habitats.

(source: Mediterranean Wetland Outlook 3, 2025, and 1st MedECC Mediterranean Assessment Report, 2020)



Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean

The Wetland Contract tool, applied - in line with the Ramsar Convention definition of wetland - to various water bodies mentioned above, is now a well-established instrument in France and Italy, emerging across all Mediterranean EU Member States, and gaining traction in the MENA region, with advanced case studies in Lebanon and Morocco. As of 2025, **254 Wetland Contracts have been signed** in the Mediterranean, with many more currently under development.

(source: Interreg Euro-MED WeGoCoop project, 2025)



Community of Practice on Mediterranean Wetland Contracts

The Mediterranean Wetland Contract Community of Practice was established in Marseille on November 5th, 2025, and promoted by, in alphabetical order: **Anatoliki S.A.** (Greece); **Association Secrétariat MedWet** (France); **FAMP - Andalusian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces** (Spain); Public institution **Nature Park Vransko jezero** (Croatia); **PPNEA - Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania** (Albania); **RCDI - Development and Innovation Network** (Portugal); and **Roma Tre University - Department of Architecture** (Italy). It is established as an open house for partners from EU-funded projects in the Mediterranean on Wetland Contracts over the past 25 years (23 up to 2025), as well as promoters, coordinators, and stakeholders of Wetland Contracts signed in the Med (254 up to 2025), and any institution, organization and individual committed to enhancing wetland governance in the Mediterranean.

(source: Interreg Euro-MED WeGoCoop project, 2025)





Recommendations



To ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of Wetland Contracts in the Mediterranean (and beyond),

we advocate

to the European Union, its Member States, Middle East and North Africa States for the

recognition of Wetland Contracts as tools for:

engagement of relevant stakeholders for community-led wetland management

1

Wetland Contracts play a key role in facilitating access to information, sharing local knowledge, enabling inclusive decision-making, supporting collaboratively determined choices, and fostering widespread accountability for commitments. They embed the community-led concept in wetland management, creating local ownership and ensuring that conservation and management actions are rooted in the priorities and capacities of the communities themselves.

development of place-based strategies for integrated wetland management

2

Wetland Contracts play a pivotal role in connecting broader regional, national and wetland basins policies with the needs, visions, and capacities of local communities. They facilitate the development of local strategies that are fully aligned with overarching policy frameworks, while simultaneously being carefully adapted to the unique priorities, challenges, and contexts of the wetlands and communities involved. By harmonizing multi-level governance with local realities, Wetland Contracts help prevent or resolve conflicts, foster collaboration among stakeholders, and substantially increase the effectiveness and sustainability of wetland management and conservation actions.

identification of win-win solutions for sustainable wetland management

3

Wetland Contracts offer a unique approach to wetland management by bringing together multiple disciplines and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. They support integrated actions that balance diverse interests and tackle complex environmental, social, and economic challenges. Through inclusive decision-making processes, Wetland Contracts enable nature-based solutions that restore ecosystem functions while delivering tangible benefits to local communities.

enhancement of financial capacity for effective wetland management

4

Wetland Contracts enable a multi-funding approach that combines public and private resources, leveraging opportunities through well-structured short to medium-term action plans. By defining clear financial requirements, assigning responsibilities, and ensuring continuous monitoring, they provide a practical mechanism to deploy available resources efficiently, meet deadlines, and achieve tangible, measurable results.



commitment to support Wetland Contracts through

improved and mainstreamed recognition in relevant policies/strategies

5

Wetland Contracts support the delivery of international, Mediterranean, European, national, and river basin policies and strategies on integrated wetland management. Formal recognition of their role and a clear recommendation for their use would allow policies to be more effectively translated into concrete actions, positioning wetlands as true laboratories of innovation and sustainability and as key drivers of the ecological transition. Such formal recognition is also a prerequisite for building trust in contract-based decision-making processes, which serve as bottom-up governance tools for managing complex systems like wetlands and their catchments (source-to-sea approach).

harmonization of methodological approaches

6

The numerous practical applications of Wetland Contracts across the Mediterranean have led to the development of various approaches and methodologies, accompanied by transnational, national, and local recommendations and guidelines. Harmonizing these different approaches can enhance the replicability and transferability of the instrument, while safeguarding its core principles and at the same time ensuring the flexibility that allows it to be easily adapted to specific national and local contexts.

fostering networking and dissemination

7

Wetland Contracts tackle common challenges across diverse contexts, with networking being pivotal to ensure robust and effective application, including opportunities to expand into new areas where they could play a valuable role (both in EU and MENA regions). Promoting interaction among stakeholders engaged in Wetland Contract initiatives, along with targeted campaigns to share and disseminate best practices, could strengthen the Wetland Contract Community of Practice and help scale-up local efforts to achieve broader regional and transnational impact.

mobilization of financial resources

8

Wetland Contracts provide a structured governance model that requires specific skills and tools for effective implementation, both throughout the process leading to the agreement and during the subsequent phase of commitment execution. Financial support for the participatory decision-making processes of Wetland Contracts is essential, both during the stages leading to the definition of the agreements and throughout the subsequent phases of implementing the commitments. Even financial support or incentive mechanisms for the actions arising from a Wetland Contract will contribute to the effective management of wetlands.

Contributors and Supporting Organizations

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with the contribution of WeGoCoop project partners



and



Natural
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For more information

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