The Mediterranean Wetland Observatory: a link between science and policy

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Abstract

Although they are among the ecosystems that globally contribute the most to human well-being, wetlands are also, paradoxically, the ones most threatened by human activities. Knowing the state and evolution of wetlands is a prerequisite for their effective management. The Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory (MWO), set up under the aegis of the MedWet initiative of the Ramsar Convention (www.ramsar.org ; www.medwet.org), aims at convincing decision-makers to take the appropriate measures for their preservation. The participatory way in which it was developed is described in detail.
A classic Drivers-Pressures-State-Impacts-Responses (DPSIR) model was adapted to the specific case of Mediterranean wetlands, as a contribution towards defining a parsimonious indicator set. The MWO produced in 2012 the first Mediterranean wetlands overview. Over 50% of wetlands have disappeared in the region in the 20th century, with declines in wetland biodiversity resulting. A strong and growing pressure on water resources underlies these trends. Irrigated agriculture is the sector that has the most impact on wetlands, but the development of urbanization, public infrastructure and tourism have an increasing impact too. The changes that affect wetlands also impact human well-being, by reducing the many services wetlands provide.
Seven years after the effective launch of the MWO, lessons are drawn on its strengths and weaknesses. Strengths mainly lay in its structure, governance, conceptual model, set of indicators and in the production of results, while weaknesses exist in effectively reaching the MWO stated targets. This self-evaluation leads to discuss possible changes for the future, aiming at better reaching the MWO objectives.

Keywords: Wetlands, Monitoring, Observatory, Knowledge transfer, Targets

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