

Brian Shipman MRTPI
Integrated Coastal Zone Management expert (PAP/RAC)
“Governance principles of Med Coastal Wetlands”

Webinar Summary

The presentation is based on the work carried out to develop the “Mediterranean Coastal Wetlands – Governance Handbook” of which Brian Shipman was the lead author.

The Handbook has been developed as part of the overarching initiative of the MAVA Foundation ‘Coastal Wetland Action Plan’¹

This is the first governance “recipe book” with linked, easy to use, on-line planning tools to help design efficient governance models that reduce conflict and save time.

Guardians of the world’s most important natural areas like the Mediterranean’s coastal wetlands have to manage complex ecosystems while reconciling a bewildering array of social, economic and political agendas, from the global to the local. This is governance. This is the first governance “recipe book” with linked, easy to use, on-line planning tools to help design efficient governance models that reduce conflict and save time.

The definition of governance is little understood, but the presentation makes it clear that it is:

A dynamic and constantly evolving activity that must respond to changing events at international, national and local levels, while still retaining constant purpose, plan and vision

At its heart governance is about decisions:

- who has the power, authority, and responsibility to make decisions?
- governance is also about how decisions are taken, and how effective and efficient decisions are
- the accountability of the decision-makers is key.

The driving goal must be to achieve good, effective, and equitable governance.

Governance is not the same as management, although the two are closely interrelated - governance driving management while management informs governance in a circular structure. Importantly, governance is all about the long-term - it is not and cannot be a short-term project.

The handbook was informed by the experience of four diverse pilot sites within the Mediterranean including the Oristano Gulf in Sardinia, the Buna Bojana Delta on the border of Albania and Montenegro, the Ghar el Melha RAMSAR site in Tunisia, along with the Prespa Lakes Transboundary Park on the border of Albania, Greece and North Macedonia.

¹ Its preparation was initiated by the Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC) responsible for Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), itself part of the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment). It was supported by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the MAVA Foundation for Nature. Other partners included MedWet, the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP) and the Network of Marine Protected Areas Managers in the Mediterranean (MedPan).

Three generic models of governance were developed, ranging from state directed, through a voluntary contract approach, to a fully subsidiary model. All sites are expected fall somewhere within the spectrum.

There is therefore no single “one size fits all” governance template, but the handbook sets out a simple, universally applicable governance roadmap. A roadmap that fits all the diverse legal and cultural frameworks around the Mediterranean, and one that works with long established wetland structures or newly designated site.

The described Cycle of Governance consists of three basic universally applicable elements: Preparation, Mapping & Planning, Towards Excellence and a Common Vision. The process of developing a governance structure which is soundly based, creates changes in behaviour by stakeholders, delivers results and benefits. One that moves from delivering simple outputs to long-term, sustainable outcomes.

A risk of governance is that it is seen as a bureaucratic, box ticking exercise, something that must be carried out as a duty rather than something of intrinsic value. This was a problem recognised by the IUCN in the publication “Protected Area Governance and Management”, 2015. The IUCN challenged protected area managers to develop governance that is both “vital and adaptive” - governance that is able to learn, evolve in ways that are timely, intelligent, and appropriate for everyone concerned. The self-assessment “Vitality Scorecard” in the handbook is thought to be the first attempt to map and measure this elusive vitality.

Bibliography

- “Mediterranean Coastal Wetlands Governance Handbook” and online Self-Assessment tools
<https://medwet.org/publications>
- Citation: G. L. Worboys, M. Lockwood, A. Kothari, S. Feary and I. Pulsford (eds) (2015) Protected Area Governance and Management, ANU Press, Canberra.