

Brussels, 29 September 2026

Wetlands and water-related ecosystems must be part of the Mediterranean's water response

We welcome the Union for the Mediterranean's Ministerial Declaration on Water, adopted in Rome on 28 September 2026. Ministers recognise the growing pressure on water resources and the harm caused by pollution, droughts and floods. We welcome their commitment to consider water, energy, food and ecosystems together, and to anticipate water-related disasters rather than respond only after they happen.

We are disappointed, however, that wetlands and other water-related ecosystems are not recognised as part of the solution. Rivers, lakes, floodplains, marshes, deltas and coastal lagoons are **natural water infrastructure**. They help clean water, retain it during dry periods and reduce flooding. Protecting and restoring them can offer cost-effective solutions to several water challenges at once.

In our letter ahead of the meeting, we called for investment in landscape water retention. Giving rivers room to spread and allowing water to soak into the ground can recharge aquifers and keep water available for longer. This work should be included in existing water, land-use and disaster risk plans. Scaling up **ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR)** in this way can help communities prepare for droughts, floods and fires, while reducing pressure on shared water sources.

Restoring and protecting the water cycle from source to sea is a priority of the EU Water Resilience Strategy. It should guide **every water-related investment** in the Mediterranean, including those in agriculture, energy, urban development and water supply. Governments and investors should assess how projects will affect the wider river basin and its capacity to retain water.

The UfM can strengthen cooperation with the **Convention on Wetlands** to bring wetland protection and restoration into regional water planning. We invite UfM member states that have not yet done so to join the **Freshwater Challenge** and commit to restoring and protecting rivers and wetlands.

Country-led **Wetland Partnerships** could help put these commitments into practice. By bringing governments, local authorities, communities, civil society and financial partners together around national priorities, they could support better water governance, joint planning and cooperation across borders where needed.

We call on the UfM and its member states to include wetland protection, restoration and landscape water retention in the developing **Rome Initiative on Water**, the regional water–energy–food–ecosystems action framework and water finance decisions. We remain committed to supporting the development of the framework and the implementation of the Rome Initiative.



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