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| WHATS GOING ON?

Dear Readers,

Here we are again for a new issue of this newsletter, one of the main information tools activated in the framework of the WetNet project. This issue comes with some exciting news! First of all we are much happy to announce that the WetNet website is now available in the Med Programme web-platform. Please visit the site at <https://wetnet.interreg-med.eu/>. Of course do not forget to stay connected with our social networks: Twitter (@wetnetmed) and Facebook (@wetnet). Now you can follow this project in several ways and stay informed about future activities.

This newsletter provides us the chance to update the public about some additional advances undertaken within the project. In 2017, project partners met in Seville (Spain), Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Gozo (Malta) in order to establish the basis for a fruitful cooperation. All project management issues were set and the partners continued their capacity building processes on wetland governance. The testing activities were initiated by all partners with the final identification of the nine pilot areas and the preparation of the preliminary framework documents. Soon new documents will be available online!.

A draft of the guidelines for Wetland Contract implementation will be released in 2018 and an International Summer School on Wetland Contracts (the first one in the World so far) will be organized. The milestones for contributing to a more sustainable management of Mediterranean wetlands are going to be placed soon!

Enjoy this issue for now.

Claudio Perin, Regione del Veneto

| PILOT AREAS IN WETNET PROJECT

The problems tackled by WETNET intertwine scientific-environmental aspects and governance concerns. They transcend national boundaries, impacting the fragile wetlands and interconnected environment, especially for bird species. The project acknowledges these challenges by establishing a transnational and multi-stakeholder approach directed at improving wetland management. A transnational vision is necessary for upscaling issues raised and achievements gained from the pilot sites. These sites may be limited in scale, but they are representative of the European Mediterranean geographical area.

To achieve our goal and provide suitable outputs for proper EU transferability, it is necessary to simultaneously work on the project methodology with a variety of different partners.

Partners were selected to represent the different typologies of authorities and stakeholders operating in the target field in the involved countries (Region, Province, Park authority, Governmental Agency, Research Center, and NGO for biodiversity protection).

This structure allows the project to consider the different aspects of wetland management in different Member States, as each partner will bring their experiences from their country including specific regulations and practices, stakes and skills. Through a continuous mutual exchange, a transnational knowledge base will be built, to draft the Wetland Contracts. This base will also help each partner recognize and address the needs within the pilot actions.

Thus, the participatory WETNET approach and the partnership composition will directly shape the core activities of the project, jointly developing a common model for the Wetland Contracts. This will allow for increased dissemination of findings and WETNET outputs, as every partner will actively contribute to the communication strategy, bridging thematic networks at EU level.

The pilots areas, selected for the WETNET project are:

N.	PILOT AREA	PARTNER	COUNTRY
1	CAORLE LAGOON SYSTEM	Veneto Region	Italy
2	VERCELLI LOWLANDS	Province of Vercelli	Italy
3	LJUBLJANSKO BARJE NATURE PARK	ZRC SAZU - Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts	Slovenia
4	ODIEL MARSHES	FAMP - Andalusian Federation of Towns and Provinces	Spain
5	ALBUFERA DE VALENCIA	SEO/BirdLife - Spanish Ornithological Society	Spain
6	CAÑIZAR LAGOON	SARGA - Government of Aragon	Spain
7	MELIDES LAGOON	RCDI - Development and Innovation Network	Portugal
8	ISLAND OF GOZO	Gozo Development Agency - Gozo Regional Committee	Malta
9	VERDIER MARSHES	Tour du Valat Foundation	France



PILOT AREA #1: CAORLE LAGOON SYSTEM

LOCATION: VENETO (ITALY)

PARTNER: VENETO REGION (VR)



REGIONE DEL VENETO

PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 5.119 ha

PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: about 33.358 ha (entire territorial system).

TYPE: Rivers and channels with fresh water, coastal lagoons with brackish water.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: Most of the area is part of the Natura 2000 network. It is also an area of natural-environmental protection identified by the Regional Territorial Coordination Plan and subject to environmental constraints.

MAIN FEATURES: The area is characterized by a wide range of natural and artificial waterways (the latter linked to reclamation activities). The most important rivers are the Tagliamento, Livenza and Lemene. The Nicesolo and Lovi lagoon-channels cross and collect in the lagoons of Caorle and Bibione. As regards the settlement system, two distinct areas



are distinguished: the densely urbanized coastline with large seaside resorts and the extensive reclaimed territory behind it, characterized by highly developed agriculture and fishery ponds toward the coast. One of them - Valle Vecchia (Old Valley) - is one of the few non-urbanized stretches of the Venetian coast, hosting a precious natural capital.



PILOT AREA #2: VERCELLI LOWPLAIN

LOCATION: PIEDMONT (ITALY)

PARTNER: PROVINCE OF VERCELLI (PV)



PROTECTED WETLAND: 7.192,73 ha

INFLUENCE AREA: 70.736,38 ha

TYPE: Paddy fields with fresh water.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: The pilot area includes 28 municipalities of the Province of Vercelli and corresponds to a portion of the "ambito 24" (ambit 24) defined by the Regional Landscape Plan and the thematic area "rural landscape systems of significant homogeneity and characterization of the crops".

MAIN FEATURES: The area includes part of the Western floodplain of the river Sesia and part of the Northern floodplain of Dora Baltea and Po rivers. It is also characterized by a complex system of irrigation canals and artificial waterways guaranteeing crops irrigation and rice cultivation. Today the agricultural system is industrialized and mainly dominated by rice paddies (submerged culture). The project area is also interested by three Natura 2000 sites, such as the Po River Park (riverine wetland), the "Bosco delle Sorti della Partecipanza di Trino" (forest wetland), the "Risaie vercellesi", "Fontana Gigante", "Palude di San Genuario", "Paludi di San Genuario e San Silvestro" (artificial wetlands).



PILOT AREA #3: LJUBLJANSKO BARJE NATURE PARK

LOCATION: CENTRAL SLOVENIA

PARTNER: RESEARCH CENTRE OF THE SLOVENIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS (ZRC-SAZU)



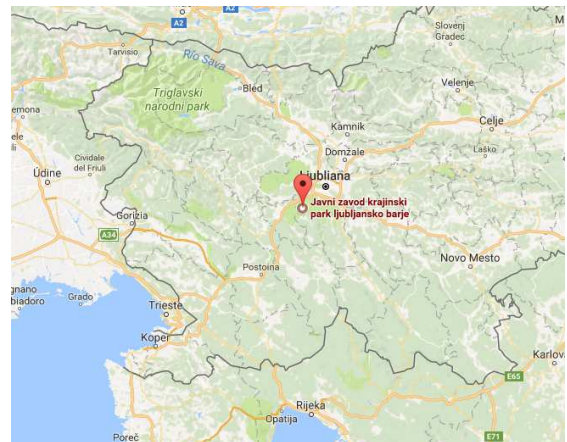
PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 13.505 ha

PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 13.505 ha

TYPE: Floodplain with fresh water.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: Extended protected area – Protected Landscape (IUCN Category V), 2 Ecologically Important Areas, Natura 2000 site.

MAIN FEATURES: The Ljubljansko barje Nature Park is the Slovenia's largest complex of wet grasslands with hedges and forests, shrubs and watercourses located in the area of Ljubljana Marsh, in Central Slovenia, in the southernmost part of the Ljubljana Basin. The area is well-known for its rich biodiversity, which is the result of specific cultivation practices (extensively-mowed meadows). Most of the protected, classified animals and plant species and habitat types are vitally dependent on the preservation of the wetland character of the Ljubljana Marsh ecosystem and on the maintenance of extensively-managed meadows (rational fertilization, late mowing).



PILOT AREA #4: ODIEL MARSHES

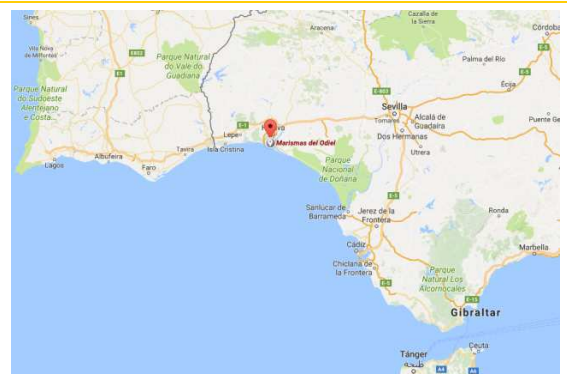
LOCATION: HUELVA (SPAIN)

PARTNER: ANDALUSIAN FEDERATION OF TOWNS AND PROVINCES (FAMP)



PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 7.185 ha

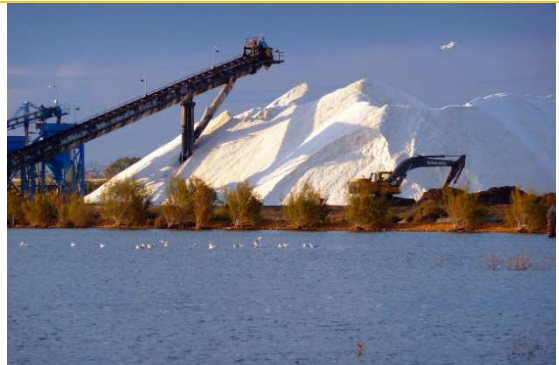
PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 55.115 ha



TYPE: Coastal Marshes with saltwater and freshwater.

MAIN FEATURES: Located in the south of the province of Huelva (Spain), the confluence of the Tinto and Odiel rivers has given rise to a complex of marshes influenced by the tides, known as the Odiel Marshes. Part of its ecological wealth lies in the variety of landscapes that make up this enclave. From tidal marshes, lagoons like Batán and Taraje, passing the beach of El Espigón or the forests of El Almendral, El Acebuchal and La Cascajera.

One of its main enclaves is the island of Enmedio, declared a Natural Reserve for housing one of the largest colonies of European breeding spatulas, a species in danger of extinction. In addition, a walk along this natural site will allow you to observe cormorants, flamingos, various species of seagulls and waders. Salt production is one of the most interesting natural resources in the area. In addition, pine gathering, beekeeping, livestock, fishing and shellfish are part of the activities that it has been traditionally carried out in this natural setting.



PILOT AREA #5: ALBUFERA DE VALENCIA

LOCATION: COMUNITAT VALENCIANA (SPAIN)

PARTNER: SPANISH ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (SEO/BirdLife)



PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 21.120 ha

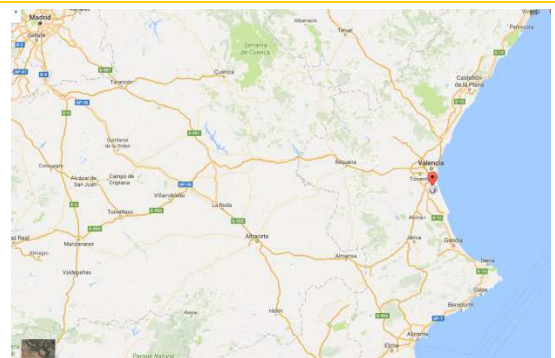
PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 21.120 ha

DEPTH : 1,5 - 0,5 m

TYPE: Coastal wetland with brackish and freshwater.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: Natura 2000 site (SCI and SPA), RAMSAR site and Natural Park.

MAIN FEATURES: L'Albufera is one of the most important coastal wetlands for birds in the Mediterranean. Their main habitats are the coastal lagoon (30 km²), rice fields (140 km² with different uses throughout the year-cycle), coastal pine forest, dunes and brackish, permanent lagoons. The pressures



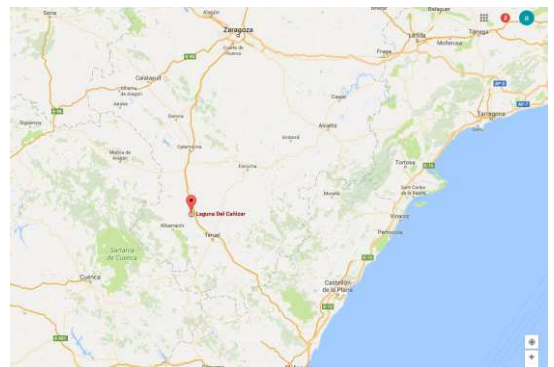
on biodiversity are related mainly to water management, volume and quality of the water entering the wetland system. The main activities carried out are agriculture (specifically linked to biodiversity conservation), fishing, gastronomy and tourism.



PILOT AREA #6: CAÑIZAR LAGOON

LOCATION: ARAGON (SPAIN)

PARTNER: SARGA - GOVERNMENT OF ARAGON



PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 1.130 ha (before drying)

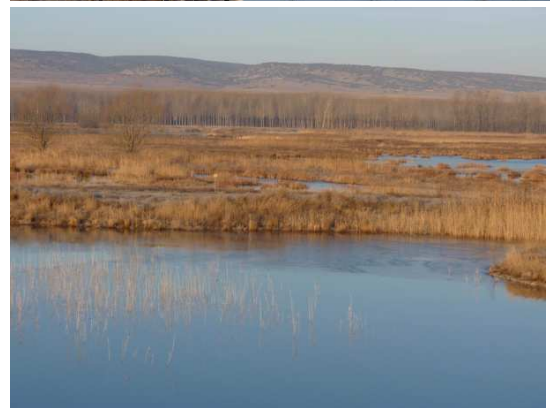
PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 22.500 ha

DEPTH: 2,8 m

TYPE: Inland lagoon with fresh water.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: Included in "Inventory of unique wetlands of Aragon", in the typology of seasonal freshwater lagoon.

MAIN FEATURES: Is the fifth most extensive wetland in the interior of Spain and the second most important for fresh water habitats. In XVIII century the site was drained. Restoration activities were implemented in the site between 2008 and 2012. The area dedicated to the lagoon now exceeds 524 ha with 411 ha of flooded areas and the rest are wet meadows of great ecological value.



PILOT AREA #7: MELIDES LAGOON

LOCATION: ALENTEJO (PORTUGAL)

PARTNER: DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION NETWORK (RCDI)



PROTECTEC WETLAND SURFACE: 400 ha

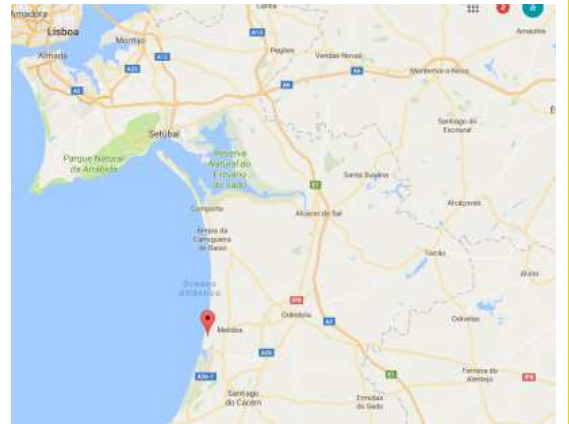
PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 6.500 ha

DEPTH: average 2 meters and a 6 meter tidal channel along the lagoon south bank.

TYPE: Coastal lagoon system with brackish water.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: classified as part of the Comporta/Galé Site (PTCON0034) included in the Natura2000 network.

MAIN FEATURES: A coastal lagoon with 40 hectares of permanent water bodies and an adjacent dune system on the Alentejo ocean coast. The lagoon is periodically opened to the ocean, either naturally or artificially, for water and sediments renewal. Tourism and agriculture (rice fields) are the main economic activities.



PILOT AREA #8: GOZO ISLAND

LOCATION: GOZO (MALTA)

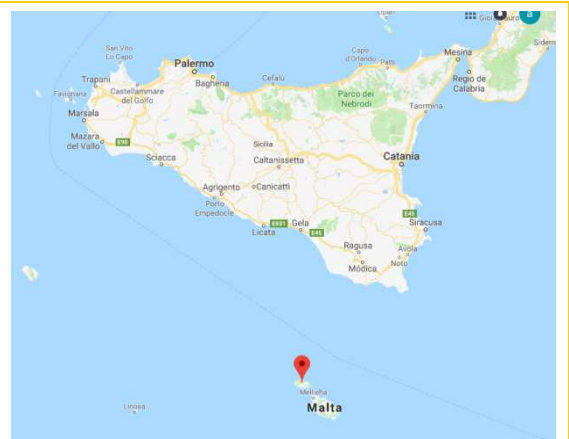
PARTNER: GOZO DEVELOPMENT AGENCY - GOZO REGIONAL COMMITTEE (GDA-GRC)



PROTECTEC WETLAND SURFACE: 1.207,42 ha

PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 6.915,82 ha

TYPE: Inland lagoon.



ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: The water catchment district of the Maltese Islands was established by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) under Article 3 of the WFD for the purposes of the implementation of the WFD (see sub regulation 3 (1) of LN 194/2004). This water catchment district consists of all hydrological sub-catchments, coastal waters up to one nautical mile from the baseline and all ground waters.

MAIN FEATURES: The Gozo part of the Maltese water catchment district include: (i) three coastal water bodies, whose boundaries were determined on the basis of the predominant physical and ecological characteristics, as well as on the nature and magnitude of pressures on the coastal water environment; (ii) small inland surface waters systems linked to the dynamics of dry river valleys, locally called “*widien*” and their associated catchments, and transitional waters linked to coastal processes: they are small streams, water courses or standing waters that flow or receive water flow for limited periods of time during the year; (iii) three protected Natura 2000 sites related to water-dependent habitats, for a total extension of 1.207,42 ha.



PILOT AREA #9: VERDIER MARSHES

LOCATION: RHONE DELTA (FRANCE)

PARTNER: TOUR DU VALAT FOUNDATION (TDV)



PROTECTED WETLAND SURFACE: 120 ha

PILOT AREA INFLUENCE SURFACE: 120 ha

TYPE: Coastal marshes with a mosaic of fresh water and salty step habitats.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES: Included in Nature2000 and part of the Natural Regional Park of the Camargue.

MAIN FEATURES: The Verdier Marshes were fish ponds that were restored to natural wetlands in 2004 as part of a community based wetland project. Today the site is managed between the local association “les Marais du Verdier” in collaboration with the Tour

du Valat Research Institute. The site is open to the public and hosts a variety of socio-cultural activities including livestock grazing, hunting, fishing and bird watching.



WHAT'S A WETLAND CONTRACT?

Giancarlo Gusmaroli (*Italian Centre for River Restoration*)

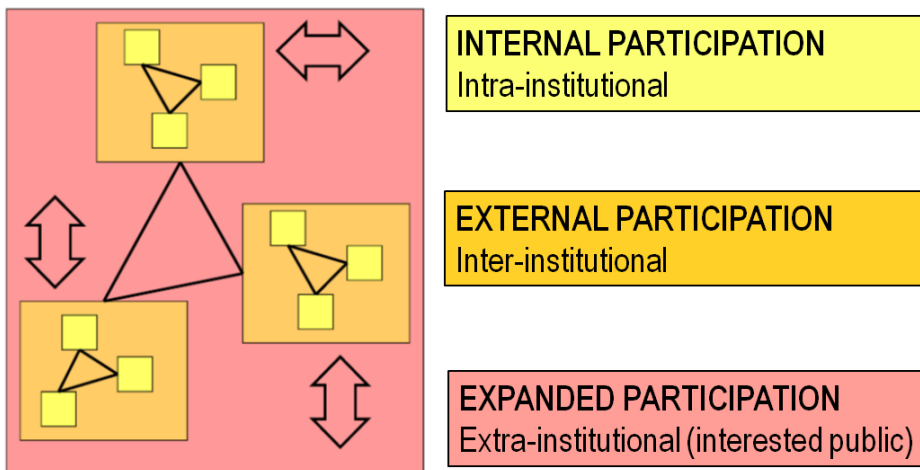


The Ramsar Convention (Iran, 1972) states that “wetlands are areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters”. Hence, as defined by the Convention, wetlands include a wide array of inland ecosystems (such as marshes, peatlands, floodplains, rivers and lakes) and coastal areas (such as saltmarshes, mangroves, intertidal mudflats and seagrass beds), but also marine areas no deeper than six meters (at low tide), as well as human-made wetlands such as reservoirs, rice paddies and wastewater treatment ponds.

All wetland typologies provide significant ecosystem services to human communities. But unfortunately the multiple interests that coexist around wetlands often conflict with one and other. Each specific objective (flood risk reduction, nature conservation, recreational use, productive exploitation, urban development, etc.) usually adopts management options that are not necessarily integrated or suited to the other management objectives. Unfortunately these conflicting interests create instances with sectoral policies or local approaches that have poor outcomes in terms of effectiveness and trade-offs. Furthermore this sectorial approach causes distinct actors – even belonging to the same sector - to pursue divergent paths, making wetland governance more and more difficult.

Both the European Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and several Daughter Directives (Habitat Directive, Floods Directive, etc.) require Member States to foster an integrated approach for the management of all water bodies, through a collaborative governance able to combine multi-objective,

multi-level and multi-stakeholder decision-making processes and to simultaneously pursue environmental enhancement, risk management and local development. In particular a participative approach to decisions making is promoted as a prerequisite for defining integrated, sustainable and viable strategies.



That said, Wetland Contracts can be defined as voluntary-based commitments undertaken by various public and private entities for the sustainable management of wetland systems. Specifically a Wetland Contract is a negotiated agreement between the parties that takes shape through inclusive and deliberative decision-making processes. With a Wetland Contract, a local community can identify responsibilities and implementation strategies for the governance and management of their wetlands.

These governance tools were originally in France in the early eighties and they are currently well established in Belgium and Italy, as well, with some isolated experiences in a few of other European countries. In the framework of the Interreg Med Programme 2014-2020, the WetNet project will test the Wetland Contract as a governance tool for the sustainable management of protected wetlands. Nine pilot areas have been identified in Italy, France, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain and a comprehensive guideline will be produced at the end of the project.

SECOND PROJECT AND STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING IN LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA)

The Second Steering Committee Meeting of the WETNET was held by ZRC SAZU last Jun 11-14th in Ljubljana (Slovenia) and was attended by 18 participants.

During the first day of the meeting the representatives from the Italian Centre for River Restoration (CIRF) and ZRC SAZU described the idea of capacity building on Wetland Contract implementation. They stressed the fact that the development of good relationships between relevant organizations and different stakeholders is considered as a pivotal factor for ensuring effective capacity building on 'Wetland Contract' implementation. The project partners also engaged in a role play activity regarding the aforementioned theme in order to facilitate the understanding of the issue.



◀ PHOTO 1
WETNET PARTNERS TEAM,
LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA)

The second day was dedicated to the project's Steering Committee meeting and the discussion of the Guidance Manual for Wetland Contract implementation. Representatives from CIRF and Veneto Region presented the situation related to the administration and work plan. Representatives from the Government of Aragon (Sarga) presented the work done in the project communication. The representatives from ZRC SAZU and CIRF presented the draft of the Manual for Wetland Contract implementation. The proposed manual clearly leads through the key phases from the first idea of the River Contracts to the final realization of the process.

On Wednesday June 14, the project partners visited the Slovenian pilot area in the Ljubljansko Barje Nature Park. Participants were interested to hear about the ways of safeguarding and managing the protected area in the gateway of the country's capital city – Ljubljana. The exhibition *My Ljubljana River* helped the participants understand the water processes that occur in the wetland. Mr. Janez Kastelic, director of the Nature Park, presented the work and the challenges of the Park management, especially related to the protection of the wetland and the relations to the seven municipalities within the protected area.

The next meeting took place in Malta from November 23-24 2017 and was organized by Gozo Regional Committee.



PHOTO 2 ▶
 TECHNICAL VISIT TO THE
 LJUBLJANSKO BARJE
 NATURE PARK (SLOVENIA)

In the next WETNET NEWSLETTER

PANACEA HORIZONTAL
PROJECT

THIRD STEERING COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 23-24TH (GOZO, MALTA)

RAMSAR CONVENTION