

# 1 Water Shortage

*The common benchmark for water scarcity is 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per person per year. In 2/3 of Mediterranean countries it falls below 500 m<sup>3</sup>.*

**F**reshwater is a vital source of life. In the Mediterranean, its scarcity together with the contamination of the existing resources has reached alarming levels.

Water shortage has become a priority issue not only for nations who experience severe shortage in terms of quantity and quality, but also for those nations who still have plenty. Demand for water consumption is rising and yet in the south of Europe and the Middle East precious groundwater resources are being wasted through inefficient irrigation. Drainage schemes, river engineering and dam construction continue to alter river and floodplain systems, resulting in loss of species and habitats. Of course the threats to freshwater ecosystems are not limited to coastal zones. Overgrazing, deforestation, construction of dams, mining and other factors influence the quality and quantity of water in mountain rivers, streams and lakes causing widespread degradation of these freshwater ecosystems.

## Wars of water

Beyond any consideration of the effect on water shortage on human health and on deeply degraded wetland habitats, the scarcity of water is already creating tension between some states within the region. The main reason is that the freshwater resources of some countries originate in neighbouring countries, leading to conflicts of rights regarding control and management of these resources. International disputes over water control have been raised in Turkey, Syria and Iraq to some extent, and in the Middle East.



WWF/Marco Pagliani

*Saluga & Gazal Nature Reserve near Aswan, upper Nile. This natural reserve protects the last indigenous riverine ecosystem in the Nile Valley.*

## If water runs dry

- **72%, 23%, 5%:** availability of renewable water resources respectively in Northern, Eastern and Southern Mediterranean Countries.
- **60%:** average increase in the percentage of water demand over the last 25 years.
- **84%:** total water used for irrigation in Southern Mediterranean Countries.
- **20 billion cubic metres:** yearly disposal of urban and industrial waste water in the Mediterranean Basin.
- **100%:** Egyptian dependence on water resources originating in other countries.
- **87%:** amount of water used in Libya through the exploitation of non-renewable resources of Saharan aquifers.
- By **2025** half of the Med countries will be using freshwater resources in excess of their regeneration rates (WWF).
- **97%** of the Middle East wetlands have been drained to support human activity.
- More than **50%:** wetlands already lost.

(Data source: Blue Plan)

# Where does the blame lie?

Some of the reasons for the depletion of water resources are simple to understand: population growth - particularly in the southern and eastern basin - and the spread of economic activity on an industrial scale have led to a dramatic increase in the demand for freshwater. Meanwhile, the rapid spread of urbanisation has changed the patterns of consumption, while the need to increase the area of productive land has caused greater demand for irrigation. Another "key" factor is deforestation. Forests act like vast sponges, retaining water and gradually releasing it into

freshwater ecosystems. Take the forest away, and that water is going to be wasted. Then, there are the effects of climate change. Weather patterns are becoming more erratic, with drought in some places matched by severe flooding in others. As a result, there is no water where it is needed and too much where it is not.

**Without any reduction of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions, annual rainfall is projected to decline by 10 to 40% over much of Africa and south-eastern Spain by 2100**  
(Data source: Greenpeace)

## Desert breaks through

Recent studies have revealed that desertification is affecting the Mediterranean region. The phenomenon affects the European Mediterranean Area, reported to be - after the tropical forests, one of the most fragile ecosystems of the globe. Desertification is caused by a combination of human exploitation (population pressure and land use) and the fragility of the resource system, that oversteps the natural ecological potential of the land. Its characteristics range from aridity, irregular but intense precipitation, frequent extreme events such as droughts, all of which combine to generate sensitivity to physical land degradation, erosion, salinization, and deterioration of soil structure and vegetation cover. The most serious impact of desertification on the environment and on the national economy is recorded in North African and eastern Mediterranean countries. In Tunisia and Spain alone the costs of desertification have been evaluated respectively as \$100 million and \$200 million a year.

## *The agriculture factor*

**82%: the percentage of freshwater taken by agriculture in southern Europe.** (Data source: WWF)

According to a WWF survey, farming practises encouraged by the UE Common Agricultural Policy have led to the over-exploitation of natural resources, the destruction of wildlife, and the contamination of freshwater and marine ecosystems by pesticide, phosphates, and nitrates. For example, nitrate

concentrations now exceed EU guidelines in more than 85% of agricultural land in Europe.

Farming in the Mediterranean varies greatly. At one extreme, there are highly industrial systems which rely on external inputs and capital equipment and which function in a largely artificial environment. As demand for irrigation water increases, the over extraction of groundwater, already a problem in the most arid areas, will likely worsen. This in turn can lead to salinisation which ultimately renders the land unusable, thus jeopardizing the sustainable use of this natural resource.

# 2 Population pressure

*In 1990, 82 million people lived on the Mediterranean coast.  
In 2025 there will be 150 million.*

Demographic growth and urbanization with all their pollutive side-effects are major causes of concern for the whole Mediterranean region. This pressure will come in an area with very few resources with which to tackle environmental problems, with a low average income, a steadily increasing population, and an unstable political environment. Trends in urbanisation, energy consumption, agriculture, waste disposal and industry show disturbing intensification of environmental degradation and pollution of the coastal areas, despite significant advances in legislation at the level of the European Union, the Barcelona Convention and legislation throughout the region. Excessive concentration of development and unplanned urbanization along the coast have overwhelmed the capacity to control municipal sewage or solid waste generation and disposal. Convenient industrial siting near coastal areas occurs with inadequate controls on industrial wastewater and hazardous discharges; tourist establishments on sandy beaches and other coastal areas do not consider the ecological functions of marine and coastal resources, such as sand dunes, posidonia beds, river estuaries or coastal lagoons. In the southern Mediterranean, demographic pressure is causing the degradation and disappearance of natural forest areas due to clearing for cropland, overgrazing and demand for fuelwood. The production of energy and the transportation of goods and services have



*Olympeian ruins, Athens, Greece. Ever-growing urbanisation continues to jeopardize the environmental and cultural heritage of the Mediterranean region.*

a serious impact on the Mediterranean region. The burning of fossil fuels also contributes to the rise of greenhouse gases and the associated risks of climate change. The transportation sector has an impact on the environment of sea and land. In the sea, the main environmental hazards are routine oil releases and the illegal disposal of waste. On land, road building is associated with considerable destruction of rural areas and disturbance of flora and fauna: roads lead to growth of urbanization and cause erosion and landslides in mountainous areas.

- 7 Mediterranean countries, Italy, France, Spain, Turkey, Egypt, Algeria and Greece are among the fifty countries with the highest industrial emission of carbon dioxide in the world. (Data source: Living Planet Report, 1999)
- According to UNEP, by the year 2025 land use by roads will increase by 25%.

## *The tourism factor*

According to experts, the main conservation issue facing the Mediterranean coast over the next 20 years is tourism. Over 100 million tourists flock to Mediterranean beaches every year and this number is expected to double by 2025. In order to cater for this booming business, natural habitats have been replaced by modern resorts; breeding and nesting sites (notably of the endangered loggerhead sea turtles) have been destroyed to accommodate tourist facilities and the extra pollution generated is often dumped untreated into the sea, threatening the entire eco-equilibrium of the region.

The main consequences of tourism on the environment can be summarised as two main effects: excessive use of resources (land, water, energy, etc) and pollution (solid waste, noise, air emissions). Companies involved in the tourist industry have responded to concern about the environmental and the social impact of tourism by introducing self-regulatory measures. Most of them have started to recognise that environmental policies are not only beneficial to business but essential to its long term economic survival. But another threat is putting the world's tourist industry at risk: global warming, which threatens to raise the temperature in Mediterranean resorts to unbearable levels and turn Alpine ski slopes to mush.

### **Dying of heat**

According to a report released by WWF's Climate Change Campaign, droughts, rising seas, flash floods, forest fires and diseases could turn profitable tourist destinations into holiday horror stories. More frequent periods of extreme heat will cause discomfort in many eastern Mediterranean resorts, where the number of days above 40° C is expected to increase. While beach

resorts may still be bearable, cities such as Athens could become decidedly uncomfortable. Smog will continue to be a big problem, not only in Greece but elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.

Other detrimental consequences could include further water supply restrictions and forest fires.

In addition, climate change is expected to increase the risk of illness, leading to a falling-off of tourism.

A rising tide of malaria and cholera could spread through the Mediterranean basin in the near future, putting at risk previously unaffected areas.

Ironically, the tourism industry is not just a potential victim of global warming, it also contributes to the causes of climate change. Air travel is reported as the fastest growing source of greenhouse emissions and therefore increases the risk of continued global warming.

### **A booming business**

- **100 million:** number of tourists who visited the Mediterranean coast in 1999.
- **200 million:** expected number of visitors by 2025.
- **70 litres:** daily consumption of water per resident.
- **800 litres:** daily consumption of water per tourist.
- **40°:** peak temperatures expected to rise by the middle of 21st century.
- **+40°:** the temperature associated with heat stress and associated mortality.

(Data source: WWF News n° 95/95, University of East Anglia)

*Almost 85% of Mediterranean forests have already disappeared.*

From the remaining still extensive oldgrowth temperate forests of Turkey and the Balkans in the North down to the very fragmented and small relic forest patches in the Middle East and Northern Africa, many habitats and species are in danger. It is estimated that only 17 per cent of the region's original forest cover still exists. Many of the remaining forests are relics, and very few valuable Mediterranean forests have been protected. No single Mediterranean country has a representative system of protected areas.

The major threats to forests are fragmentation, road construction, tourism, atmospheric pollution, climate change, unnatural forest fires, overgrazing, hunting, extraction and mining of mineral resources, drainage, water regulation and even war. War has both a direct and an indirect impact on nature as well as on human populations. Bombs and arson set off forest fires, and political instability encourages logging of protected areas. In general, a substantial amount of deforestation in the Mediterranean region is due to fire. An estimated total of 1 % of the regional forest cover is reported to be engulfed by flames every year, resulting in widescale atmospheric pollution. Fires are often set off intentionally in response to conflicts over land, which are mostly related to construction and tourism. Sometimes, fire is used as a means of protest against political decisions or conservation plans. Whatever physical form the threats to the forests existence take the long history of widespread forest devastation and exploitation is leading to critical levels of deforestation, erosion and risks of desertification. Timber collection for



WWF-Canon/Penslope Matsoika

*Mount Taygetos-Greece. Forest totally destroyed by fire. An estimated total of one per cent of the regional forest cover is engulfed by forest fires each year.*

## Unnatural hazards

- **60,000** the average number of forest fires in the Mediterranean region every year.
  - **450,000** hectares of woodland burnt. More than 1/3 of this total takes place in France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.
  - **2/3** of the fires occur in the summer. They are responsible for 2/3 of the total area burnt. Natural fires make up **8%** in Spain, and less than **0,1%** in Italy.
  - **95%** of the forest fires are started by people.
  - **23%** of fires are due to negligence. E.g. the lack of understanding about the risks of dropping cigarette ends, or starting campfires.
  - **32%** of fires are due to arson.
  - **40%** of fires have an unknown cause.
- In 1990, there were only **2** days without fires in the whole of the EU. On a global level, forest burning contributes to at least **20%** of the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere.

(Data source:WWF Forest for life campaign, 1999)

## The sting in the tail

building and fuel, clear cutting for grazing and agriculture, fires, and the abandonment of mountain land have all taken their toll on the region's forests. Most of today's human activities continue to reduce forest resources, especially at lower altitudes. Tourism in coastal areas puts pressure on forests which are either cleared for development or deliberately burnt: fires are also caused by unregulated waste disposal in or near forests, and the general depopulation of rural areas allows fires to develop unchecked.

Portugal, Spain and Turkey have all suffered from widespread afforestation projects with either indigenous and exotic species, such as eucalyptus, which have replaced indigenous trees, causing problems of erosion.

Agricultural expansion in lowland areas replaces both coniferous and mixed forests in the Maghreb, Turkey, Syria and Cyprus. Forests also suffer from natural diseases and pests, made specially vulnerable during long periods of drought. Evidence of long range atmospheric transport of pollutants affecting forests and their soil has been noted in Italy and Greece.

While it is self-evident that infrastructure construction such as road building and tourist developments are depleting the few remaining large forest areas of Europe, few people know that these constructions are often funded by EU Structural Funds.

### *Forests in trouble*

WWF has identified the 300 most important and representative forest areas that lack adequate protection in the Mediterranean region. These are the top 10 "hot spots":

Croatia:	Velebit
France:	Taravu, Corsica
Greece:	Taygetos
Italy:	Gennargentu
Lebanon:	Harisa
Morocco:	Bou Iblane
Portugal:	Monchique
Spain:	Gudar
Tunisia:	Kroumerie
Turkey:	Western Kure

### Forests losses in figures

- Only **5%** of the Mediterranean coastal vegetation is protected.
- **19%** of the protected areas in North Africa conform to IUCN criteria.
- **20%** of the Mediterranean Flora are threatened by extinction (IUCN).
- During the **15** years of civil war which ravaged Lebanon, the famous cedar forests were almost totally destroyed.
- The European Mediterranean countries alone, the area of land with high erosion risk totals **229,000 km<sup>2</sup>** (about the surface of Greece and Portugal together). The largest area under erosion risk is found in Spain. The cost of direct impact of erosion on the environment is estimated at **280** million EURO per year. The cost of forest restoration, improvement of water retention and soil protection is estimated at about **3,000** million EURO.

WWF has two targets: the establishment of an ecologically representative network of protected areas incorporating at least 10% of each of the world forest types by the end of the year 2005; the independent certification of at least 25 million hectares of managed forest by June 2001 with special emphasis on the major timber producing countries.

# 4 Sea pollution

*635,000 tonnes: the quantity of crude oil spilled by vessels in the Mediterranean sea every year. This is 17 times the amount that the Exxon Valdez spewed out in Alaska.*

The Mediterranean marine and coastal environment is under pressure from a wide range of sources. One quarter of the pollution is created at sea by activities such as dredging, drilling for oil and minerals, and shipping (see box).

Three-quarters of the pollution is estimated to originate from land-based sources, such as industry and urban waste, causing contamination of seafood and eutrophication of enclosed bays.

Raw sewage and fertilizers both contain nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which create a massive explosion of toxic algae.

Algae-poisoned seafood is responsible for many human illnesses, including neurological disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and gastrointestinal problems.

Industrial processes release harmful chemicals (chlorine compounds are particularly dangerous) which end up in the sea, poisoning marine animals and plants.

These toxic chemicals accumulate in food chains, through bioaccumulation. Big fish eat thousands of small ones resulting in a concentration of poisons in larger fish.

These fish may in turn be eaten by other fish or by mammals, and the poison gets passed on.

Agricultural pesticides seep through the soil and into rivers which then wash them out to sea. Pesticides like Tributyltin (TBT) used to prevent boats from becoming encrusted with shellfish, are highly toxic.

In 1970, TBT caused French oysters to develop deformed shells and become sterile.



WWF/Paolo Guglielmi

*The Haven disaster: An oil tanker caught fire and sank off the Italian Ligurian coast in April 1991, spilling 40,000-50,000 tonnes of oil into the sea. The wreck still releases contaminants.*

## Oil spills

- **200,000** ships cross the Mediterranean annually. The majority of these are simply in transit.
- Greece, Cyprus and Malta account for over **70%** of the gross registered tonnage (UNEP, 1996).
- At least **20%** of the world's oil tankers cross the Mediterranean every year.
- **6%** of the oil loaded comes from atmospheric deposition.
- **17%** comes from land-based industries.
- **25%** comes from land-based municipal.
- **52%** comes from shipping.
- **35%** of global oil transfers occur in the Mediterranean sea.
- Less than **1/3** of the oil discharged at sea is spilt accidentally.
- **2/3** of the oil is deliberately pumped out by oil tankers cleaning their tanks before taking on new cargoes.

(Data source: European Environment Agency)

Contaminants also enter the sea from atmospheric deposition and through water exchange, primarily with the Atlantic Ocean and Black Sea. As the Mediterranean is almost entirely landlocked, its waters have a very low renewal rate which explains why they are so sensitive to pollution. Because of the high evaporation rates, they are not even fully replenished by rainfall and river flows.

## Unsustainable fisheries and pollution

- **500:** the number of fish species found in the Mediterranean.
- **100:** the number of species commercially exploited. The annual catch is between 1 and 2 million tonnes.
- **83%** of all the Blue Fin Tuna & Swordfish caught in the Med are undersized.
- **80%** of the sewage pumped into the Mediterranean is discharged raw. Untreated sewage is a particular health hazard for young children, causing stomach problems, respiratory diseases, ear, eye and skin infections.
- **40** the number of contaminants from atmosphere and rivers, including heavy metals, radionuclides and nutrients. They include the “Dirty Dozen”, the notorious **12** Persistent Organic Pollutants, reported to induce cancerogenous, teratogenous, immunodepressant and endocrine disruption processes in both animal and human beings.
- **65%** of the world’s mercury resources are located in the Mediterranean basin.
- **120** days: the time necessary for a sanitary towel to decompose.
- from **80** up to **150** years: the water renewal rate in the Mediterranean.

(Data source: European Environment Agency)

## When plastic kills

Plastic pollution is a growing problem. On a global level, fishermen discard about 150,000 tonnes of plastic net each year and countless plastic containers are tossed overboard from ships of all kinds. Plastic is thought to kill around a million seabirds and 100,000 marine mammals such as whales, seals, and dolphins every year.

## The top 10 polluted areas

Elevated concentrations of mercury, cadmium, zinc and lead in sediments are found in various “hot spots”, areas within the Mediterranean basin where a high release of pollutants has been verified. In 1997, during the 10th Barcelona Convention in Tunis, 119 “hot spots” were identified. The 10 top renowned areas are: Iskenderun Bay (Turkey); Izmir Bay (Turkey); Thermaikos Gulf (Greece); Patraikos Gulf (Greece); the Po Delta (Italy); Rhone Delta (France); the Ebro Delta (Spain); the Bay of Tunis (Tunis); the Nile Delta (Egypt); Haifa Bay (Israel).



WWF/Dimitri Karavelas

*The Sea turtle (Caretta caretta) is one of the most endangered species in the Mediterranean. Destruction of nesting sites, unintentional killing and human consumption are the main threats.*

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## Press on line

**ENVIRONMENT NEWS SERVICE:**

<http://ens.lycos.com/> Bills itself as the oldest and largest worldwide Environment service.

**ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS NETWORK:**

<http://www.enn.com/>  
Broad international coverage with a leaning toward coverage of species.

A subscription gives you the right to search the archives. (Web media)

**YAHOO ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS SERVICE:**

<http://biz.yahoo.com/news/environmental.html>  
Highly diverse. (Media collection)

**CNN NATURE:** <http://www.cnn.com/NATURE>

**WWF PRESS RELEASES:**

<http://www.panda.org/news/newsroom.cfm>

**THE EARTH TIMES:**

<http://www.earthtimes.org>

On-line environment newspaper with sections on Africa, Asia, the Americas and Global Leaders.

**PLANET ARK:** <http://www.planetark.org>

From Reuters wire service emphasizes international environmental news, especially South East Asia, Australia and Europe.

## Legislation

*Legislation has been very slow in keeping up with the complexity of development in all the Mediterranean countries. Several intergovernmental and international bodies, conventions and treaties have, however, formulated policies and treaties designed to protect the Mediterranean environment. The foremost amongst these are:*

**THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME MEDITERRANEAN PLAN (UNEP-MAP)**

**BARCELONA CONVENTION,** signed by 20 Mediterranean States in 1976 and completely revised in 1995 and 1996 to reflect current thinking on sustainable development, biodiversity, protected areas management, habitat and species protection, integrated management of freshwater resources, land-based sources of pollution.

**UN CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA**

**THE GENERAL FISHERIES COUNCIL FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN (GFCM)** sponsored by the FAO.

**INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE ATLANTIC TUNA (ICCAT)**

deals with swordfish and tuna which are commercially exploited.

**MEDITERRANEAN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (METAP)** funded by the World Bank, UNDP, The European Union and the European Investment Bank.