



To

**National Ramsar Committee of the Republic of Macedonia
Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of the Republic of Macedonia
Government of the Republic of Macedonia**

Mr. Branko Micevski, President of the National Ramsar Committee

Mr. Aleksandar Nastov, National Ramsar coordinator

Mr. Sadulla Duraki, Minister of Environment and Physical Planning

Mr. Jani Makraduli, Deputy Minister of Environment and Physical Planning

Mr. Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia

On behalf of the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS), an international expert organization with over 3,000 members, we would like to emphasize the pressing need for Lake Ohrid and the full extent of Studenchishte Marsh¹ to be designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and to endorse the E.D.E.N./Ohrid SOS initiative to achieve this target. We believe it will be of significant social, environmental, and economic value to the Republic of Macedonia.

Adopted in 1971 and entering force in Macedonia from 1991, the Ramsar Convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides a framework for the wise use of wetlands and their resources, seeking to safeguard the economic, cultural, scientific and recreational benefits to humankind that are dependent upon these habitats. This has already been recognized in the Republic of Macedonia by designating Lake Dojran and Lake Prespa as Ramsar sites. However, as yet the designation remains outstanding for Lake Ohrid, although the listed measure 11.3.1. in the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning's Draft National Strategy for Biodiversity with Action Plan highlights the intention to designate the site during 2016/17.

Therefore, the designation of Lake Ohrid as a Wetland of International Importance will contribute to Goal 2 of the Ramsar 4th Strategic Plan 2016-2024² through increasing the network of sites, and especially transboundary sites (Target 6), and protecting sites which are under threat (Target 7). Furthermore, it is

¹ "Full extent" is hereby understood to be the entire 63.97-hectare area recommended as a Monument of Nature in *Integrated Study on the State of the Remains of Studenchishte Marsh and Measures for its Revitalization* (Spirovska et al, 2012) plus any additional area necessary for a) an appropriate buffer zone and b) wetland rehabilitation as per the conclusions of the *Choose Your Side International Round Table* hosted in Skopje (2017).

² <http://www.ramsar.org/document/the-fourth-ramsar-strategic-plan-2016-2024>



noted that under *Strategy 2.1 Ramsar Site designation* of your National Report to COP12 your intention is indicated to designate an additional Ramsar Site during the current triennium and we welcome this as a step towards the development of a coherent and comprehensive national network of Ramsar Sites as reaffirmed by all Contracting Parties in their adoption of the *Strategic Framework for Site Designation 2012* revision at COP11.

To qualify as a Wetland of International Importance, a wetland must fulfil at least one of nine specified Ramsar designation criteria. Current data indicate that Lake Ohrid and Studenchishte Marsh meet seven of the criteria, which both highlights their significant contribution to human and environmental wellbeing and emphasizes the necessity of their conservation for the Republic of Macedonia's healthy development in the long term.

Lake Ohrid already generates several millions of Euros for the Macedonian economy through fisheries and the provision of high quality water for recreation purposes. It is also an exceptional resource for scientific research, most notably evolution studies and climate reconstruction, fields of special interest at this moment in time. As one of the largest natural water filters in the Ohrid region; habitat for rare and endemic species; and a historical shelter and spawning ground for Lake Ohrid fish, Studenchishte Marsh not only supports these ecosystem services but also increases benefits to humankind by way of carbon storage within its 5,000-year-old peatlands and the various advantages accrued from the additional biodiversity it provides. It is also integral as a blueprint for reconstruction of other regional wetlands, which may become a key component of future strategies to reduce pollution, restore fisheries, mitigate eutrophication, and improve flood protection.

Nonetheless, the degradation of both Lake Ohrid and Studenchishte Marsh from a range of anthropogenic sources is well-documented in scientific literature, suggesting that a point may soon be reached at which they can no longer deliver these important services, even to the level experienced today. The negative effect on biodiversity, water quality and fisheries is already evident. If these trends are allowed to persist, efforts to re-establish the functions currently provided by the wetland habitats will be expensive, and, in many cases, unlikely to deliver the desired results.

The Ramsar Convention is therefore highly appropriate as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development for the Ohrid region, as, by designating Lake Ohrid and Studenchishte Marsh as a Ramsar Site, the Republic of Macedonia would establish a low-cost framework in which their various benefits could be rehabilitated, conserved and maximized for present and future generations. This is in line with best practice from around the world.

In consequence, the Society of Wetland Scientists reiterates its official endorsement of the E.D.E.N. and Ohrid SOS initiative to designate Lake Ohrid and Studenchishte Marsh under the Ramsar Convention and



offers its full encouragement and technical support to the Republic of Macedonia's Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning in efforts aimed at this objective. Indeed, we hope to be celebrating this Ramsar nomination at the 2018 SWS European Chapter Conference, which will be hosted in the Ohrid region from April 30 to May 5.

Yours sincerely,

Prof.dr. Arnold van der Valk, SWS President

Prof.dr. Jos Verhoeven, SWS Europe Chapter



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