

Summary of the Reports produced under Action A8

Master Plans and Technical Guidelines Deliverable

a. Catchment Summary Reports

The first important output of the Masterplans deliverable was the creation of Catchment Summary reports. These group together all the existing knowledge regarding each catchment or catchment group, 12 in total, including desktop and field research carried out by Parks Malta, outcomes of direct meetings, public events and our stakeholder survey questions

b. Master Plans

A key deliverable of Action A8 under the LIFE 16 IPE MT 008 Project involved the formulation of Master Plans and Technical Guidelines for 16 major water catchments in Malta and Gozo. Twelve Master Plans were produced, with three plans addressing more than one catchment, where the catchments are adjacent.

The Master Plans provide a written and approved document which has been formulated following several rounds of public consultation.

The reports contain a description of the water catchment, the problems and issues related to the catchments, and opportunities for the management of the catchment to address the issues.

Issues common to all catchments include the spread of alien and invasive species, damage from off-roading activities, littering and lack of accessibility. Some catchments include more site-specific issues, such as the presence of illegal structures, water catchment features in disrepair, missing signage with regards to cultural features or public access, and rubble walls in disrepair to name a few.

In the three merged reports the opportunity was taken to tackle issues that were common to all three catchments, such as the creation of a walking trail crossing the Żembaq and Dalam catchments. For all the horizontal issues, the plans allow Parks Malta to handle these holistically, the key example being the setting up of a green warden system that would cover the entire area of the catchments.

The catchment-based approach in itself provides the most efficient and effective method of environmental restoration of freshwater habitats, with works starting upstream moving downstream making sure that connectivity is restored, and the spread of invasive species is halted from moving with the flow of water.

The masterplans have also identified opportunities where management strategies can be implemented through existing stakeholders and infrastructure (such as NGOs, Local Councils, and other interest groups) and/or can be maintained by such. This will ensure the efficacy and longevity of such measures, many of which need long-term monitoring and maintenance.

As an example, the pressures and issues that have been identified to be currently affecting the Mistra valley include littering and fly-tipping, siltation behind the dam, illegal off-roading activities, extensive areas dominated by stands of *Arundo donax*, leisure activities alongside the beach (camping and caravans) encroachment of the watercourse, and the presence of

large swathes of arable land which is not being worked.

They provide a commitment to, and guidance for, the management and conservation of the catchments; and present the vision and strategic direction for the catchments until 2050, including detail how the catchments will be managed to achieve the agreed management objectives. These objectives are specific to each catchment and were derived through research and public consultation.

The vision for the Mistra valley reads:

'The Mistra Catchment has a sustainable and diverse water environment that benefits people and the natural environment of the area. The Catchment is in good ecological condition with a well-maintained landscape and high resilience to climate change.'

Finally, these reports outline measurable outcomes for the catchments in the short-term (5-years), medium-term (15-years) and long-term (30-years). These plans lay out the work required for the restoration and enhancement of ecosystems and their services within the catchments. Each action is presented with a location and extent, timeframe, responsible entity/ies and monitoring strategy.

Taking Mistra again as an example, in the short term, the actions identified for the catchment focus on the gradual eradication of invasive alien species and their replacement with native species, the enabling of afforestation projects, and general clean-ups of targeted areas.

In Years 2 – 4, the setting up of a national network of green wardens is identified as a high priority action. Establishing a National Countryside Code is also identified as a medium priority action (for Year 2). These actions will promote good behaviour, facilitate surveillance of the valley, and be a deterrent to anti-social behaviour, including littering and dumping.

Afforestation projects will be implemented over the medium to longer term, as issues involving land ownership, the setting up of potential partnerships, and planting regimes are likely to be resolved gradually.

Siltation of the dam has been identified as an issue by stakeholders, and by Parks Malta, although access by machinery to the dam is considered to be challenging and will likely disturb and negatively affect existing habitats. At this stage, therefore, the Master Plan does not recommend dredging of the area behind the dam. Following the implementation of the actions in the Master Plan, a long-term objective would address whether it is justifiable to dredge the dam, in terms of providing more water to the agricultural areas within the catchment

c. Technical Guidelines

The technical guidelines reports describe, for each action, the proposed intervention, operations and works and provide sufficient information to plan and implement the intervention. These include information on the resources necessary (human, infrastructural, financial); the likely stakeholders, permits required and estimated timeframes of each activity. The reports also provide template working methods for individual and common activities. These reports will be heavily relied upon by project managers tasked with the implementation of restoration measures within the catchments managed by Parks Malta to ensure efficient, safe, economically-viable and environmentally conscious practices are adhered to.