LIFE 16 IPE MT 008

Optimising the implementation of the 2nd RBMP in the Malta River Basin District

The development of Malta's 2nd River Basin Management Plan (2nd RBMP) has confirmed the significant challenges which Malta faces in achieving the good status objectives of the Water Framework Directive. These challenges arise due to a number of specific social, environmental and economic issues associated with a highly populated Mediterranean small island state, and include:

- **water scarcity and drought conditions**, due to the islands' semi-arid Mediterranean climate;
- **high population density**, resulting in a high demand for water resources;
- **saline intrusion**, due to the islands' main groundwater bodies being in direct vertical and lateral contact with sea-water;
- **contamination**, arising from the high density of economic and agricultural activities on the islands' catchment areas; and
- **vulnerability of the coastal waters**, due to the important economic activities undertaken in the coastal zone.

The LIFE Integrated Project will support the implementation of the 2nd RBMP through the establishment of an integrated framework for the optimised management of all water resources in the Maltese islands, by addressing the following identified horizontal challenges which are key for ensuring the development of a comprehensive water management framework:

- **increased awareness** on the need to conserve and protect water resources and dependent terrestrial, aquatic and marine ecosystems;
- the need to **incentivise/facilitate the initial uptake of measures** through selected demonstration actions;
- **improved institutional approach** through the achievement of a high level of institutional and stakeholder dialogue/collaboration; and
- **reducing uncertainty** in water body status assessments through improved knowledge on water-related processes.

Hence, the Integrated Project will directly support the achievement of the environmental objectives of the EU's Water Framework Directive.

Furthermore, the actions under the Integrated Project will also contribute to the achievement of the objectives of other EU Directives such as the Drinking Water Directive, the Groundwater Directive, the Floods Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Habitats Directive and the Bathing Water Directive. The Integrated Project will provide coordinated support towards the comprehensive achievement of the objectives of these Directives with actions focusing on the optimisation of water demand (increasing awareness and efficiency in use), supporting the development of sustainable use conditions for a

diverse range of water resources (rainwater and groundwater), supporting increased efficiency in the national water cycle through supporting water reuse, and optimising the management and protection of surface and coastal water bodies.

The actions to be funded under the Integrated Project hence include actions aimed at increasing awareness, such as a water educational campaign, the development of a national water eco-label scheme and the development of water consumption app. The project also proposes actions demonstrating the application of sustainable urban drainage systems, managed aquifer recharge and valley management schemes aimed at facilitating future investment in these sectors. Other actions such as the development of groundwater numerical models, the monitoring of emerging contaminants of concern and the development of hydrographic models aim to increase the level of knowledge on hydrological systems and hence reduce uncertainties. Finally, actions establishing a multi-stakeholder platform and the establishing of improved water use monitoring tools aim to support the optimisation of Malta's water governance framework.

The LIFE Integrated Project is led by the Energy and Water Agency (EWA) within the Ministry for Energy and Water Management. To ensure the development of a comprehensive water management framework at the river basin level, the project also brings together the main water management stakeholders in the Maltese islands including the Environment and Resources Authority, the Water Services Corporation, the Ministry for Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, the Ministry for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects and the Ministry for Gozo. The Integrated Project also seeks to develop the capacity required at these institutions to be better equipped to address the challenges related to the implementation process of the 2nd RBMP.

The life-time of the Integrated Project spans eight years up to 2025, hence enabling the project to also support the development of Malta's 3rd River Basin Management Plan in 2021. The total value of the project amounts to €17 million, with a contribution from the EU through the LIFE Programme of €10.2 million. The actions of the project will, amongst others, seek to reach at least 50,000 households and support them to optimise their water use efficiency, develop 5 demonstration sites highlighting innovative water management technologies, support 85 water conservation measures or programmes in schools, restore 230,000m^2 of coastal wetlands and 15,000m^2 of valley systems.

The final deliverable of the project will be a blue-print for the optimisation of water management in Mediterranean islands, highlighting island-specific water management measures. The effective dissemination of the results of the project on a regional dimension will be ensued through the engagement of regional actors in the Mediterranean, thus also ensuring that the project reinforces existing initiatives to promote water management in the region.