

Resolution to be discussed and adopted at the
World Heritage Watch International Civil Society Forum on World
Heritage on 22-23 June 2018

On the Preservation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region

Understanding that, despite certain positive steps such as cancelation of the A3 express road and ski-resort in National Park Galichica, the Outstanding Universal Value of the Ohrid region remains threatened from numerous sources such as pollution, overfishing, illegal and poorly planned construction, habitat loss, inappropriate solid waste disposal and wetland degradation;

Noting that the failure of the State Party fully to implement recommendations of the 2017 World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission Report, in particular Recommendation 6 for a moratorium on coastal and urban transformation until effective planning, juridical and control systems are in place, is leading to further lakeshore deterioration and continued illegal construction, markedly in the vicinities of Struga, Lagadin and Sveti Naum;

Incorporating the opinions of numerous sources including reports, journal papers, individual experts, and the regional fisheries concessionaire that endemic Ohrid trout (*Salmo letnica*) may not be far from extinction, while populations of other species such as belvica are at increasing risk;

Observing that, regardless of several years of warning such as a 2012 report by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)¹ and the 2017 Reactive Monitoring Mission Report, the sewerage system in the Ohrid region is “close to collapse” with “faecal matter and wastewater flowing directly into the River Drim and Lake Ohrid, representing an ecological catastrophe”, according to a public statement by Prof Dr. Jeton Shakiri², manager at Proaqua, the company responsible for waterworks in the UNESCO Ohrid region;

Concluding that the essential intention of Recommendation 17 from the 2017 Reactive Monitoring Mission Report for the closure of the Bukovo landfill will not be achieved if another landfill is opened within the Lake Ohrid watershed as currently planned and illegal waste dumping sites persist, most notably in the Struga area;

Reemphasizing the integral yet still underestimated importance of Studenchishte Marsh, the final remains of a previously extensive wetland on Lake Ohrid’s north-eastern shore, for its contribution to the World Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region in terms of habitat and biological diversity, and ecosystem services such as carbon storage, flood retention, water quality improvement and its potential to serve as a spawning/nesting/wintering site for fish and birds³; and

Drawing attention to the conclusions of both the 2017 IUCN World Heritage Outlook on the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region and the 2018 Society of Wetland Scientists’ Declaration on the Protection of the Lake Ohrid Ecosystem⁴ for site needs with regard to an upgrade in protection and rehabilitation for wetland habitats,

¹ Available at http://open_jicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12146684.pdf

² Reported by Ohrid News on 5 June 2018: <http://www.ohridnews.com/vesti/114873>

³ See Declaration on the Protection of the Lake Ohrid Ecosystem in note 3 below.

⁴ Passed unanimously by the Society of Wetland Scientists at its 13th Europe Chapter Meeting on 4 May 2018, the Declaration is available here: <http://www.sws.org/images/chapters/europe/Declaration.pdf>

Citizen Initiative Ohrid SOS strongly encourages the World Heritage Committee to demand that the State Party of Macedonia

1. On the basis of existing data, designates a minimum of 63.97⁵ hectares of Studenchishte Marsh to be inaugurated as a Natural Monument, and, together with Lake Ohrid, proclaimed as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention by the end of 2018⁶;
2. Establishes management and rehabilitation of Studenchishte Marsh and Lake Ohrid according to the aforementioned Society of Wetland Scientists' Declaration on the Protection of the Lake Ohrid Ecosystem;
3. Enacts a moratorium on all coastal and urban transformation within the UNESCO Ohrid region in line with the Recommendation 6 of the World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission Report, halts the process of legalisation for non-legal constructions since 3 March 2011⁷, ensures the removal of non-legal structures, and strictly enforces the protective 50m Green Belt Zone around the Lake Ohrid shore without exception;
4. Announces and enforces both a moratorium on fishing for Ohrid trout (*Salmo letnica*) and belvica accompanied by a ban on imports from the Republic of Albania and establishes permanent zero-take in-lake protected areas to cover important life-cycle stages for Lake Ohrid native species;
5. Takes immediate and complete steps to restore full functionality of the Ohrid region wastewater system and puts in place strict measures for transparent future monitoring of its condition, including strong punishments for wastewater leaks, overflows and other maintenance failures; and
6. Abandons plans for any new-build landfill in the Lake Ohrid watershed and instead develops a permanent solution to inappropriate legal and illegal waste dumping sites that has no possibility to negatively impact Ohrid region World Heritage.

We believe that, without comprehensive adherence to these six demands alongside full implementation of WHC Decision 41 COM 7B.34, the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region will continue to deteriorate, potentially to the point of no return.

⁵ The 63.97-hectare minimum is taken from *Spirovska, M. et al (2012) Integrated Study on the State of the Remains of Studenchishte Marsh and Measures for its Revitalisation*, Dekons-Ema Društvo za ekološki consulting, available in Macedonian via Municipality of Ohrid at http://www.ohrid.gov.mk/Ekologija/Proekti/Ekologija%20arhiva/Menka-Blato-13_02_2012%20%20lektorirano-final.pdf or in English by request via ohridsos@gmail.com.

⁶ Although the government of the Republic of Macedonia accepted an Ohrid SOS/EDEN initiative for both Ramsar designation and Natural Monument status at Studenchishte Marsh during its 60th session on 20 March 2018, no size guarantees have been made and progress appears to have stalled completely.

⁷ In 2011, new regulations were adopted to formalize legalization processes for existing constructions; hence this choice of date. 31 December 2018 is the deadline for such legalization.