



SOLAR SALT WORKS & THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF BIODIVERSITY

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

● COORDINATION AND SMART MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE ARE KEYS TO PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY

The conference concluded to the need for **better coordination between the different parties and regulators** involved: stakeholders, local, regional and European authorities should release the pressure weighing on solar saltworks and land use. **The future of solar salt works lies in joined-up governance.** Otherwise, we will be confronted with further disappearing and abandonment of salt marshes, which would be detrimental to coastal and inland ecosystems.

● RECOGNISING THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF NATURE

Public acceptance of the economic value of Nature would allow better **maintenance and optimisation** of salt works in order to further preserve biodiversity. Eco-tourism could be a solution to this matter, increasing public awareness of the status of salt works and their interactions with biodiversity. We must fight prejudices assuming that economic activity and environmental protection collide. **A new, recognised socio-economic equilibrium is the pre-condition for nature protection.**

● NEED TO ENSURE THE SUBSISTENCE OF SOLAR SALTWORKS

Addressing the problem of disappearance and abandonment of solar salt works would first require **monitoring the status of saltpans and wetlands** around the world, and in Europe. This would help better understanding challenges and urgencies related to wetlands and coastal zones. Such an overview is however missing for the time being.

● BACKGROUND

Biodiversity and sustainability have been at the heart of the “Climate Change” debate worldwide since the 1992 Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro). International Summits of the United Nations have come to recognise the global dimension of the issue and the need for all stakeholders to engage in preserving and promoting biodiversity and sustainability. That was also the aim of the Conference on “Biodiversity, Sustainability and Solar salt” that took place on May 23, 2012 in Seville, with a special focus on interactions between solar salt and biodiversity.

Regardless of their structure – salt works, wetlands, salinas – solar salt works are common characteristics of coastal areas worldwide. They depict a use of land similar to farming and are essential to the maintenance of sustainable, varied coastal ecosystems. Thus, this conference aspired to bring together the scientific community and decision-makers in order to promote an integrated approach of biodiversity within solar salt works.

Solar salt works consist of wetlands stretching over vast, wide-open basins, through which salt water circulates with increasing levels of salinity providing favourable habitats for a large number of halophile fauna and flora. Indeed, salt works answer to challenges related to the protection of various species and their natural habitats. However, biodiversity is not limited to the fauna and flora that thrives on and around salt works. Salt ponds have their own biological system composed of various microorganisms that play an important role in the quality and purity of salt crystals.

The main conclusion to this is that, far from destroying ecosystems, solar salt works turn out to be **constructed ecosystems** that through human intervention can be set at the same level as natural wetlands. Solar salt works are not only about producing salt but also and essentially about creating and operating an ecosystem, in which both economic and ecological values intertwine. This model of sustainable development would not exist without economic consideration. Still, solar salt works are often not regarded as ecosystems despite their contribution to biodiversity preservation and creation.

In addition, a current consensus is that the disappearance and/or abandonment of solar salt works – both coastal and on inland areas – is detrimental to biodiversity. It can even be dramatic in the case of inland salinas and reserves given that when the source of salt disappears, a very narrow yet diverse range of inland invertebrates, birds and vegetation disappears at the same time. Besides, the extensive nature of wetlands generally contributes to limiting the pressure from populations and other economic activities on land. In so doing, it helps to control coastal eutrophication. Yet one cannot but notice that disappearance and abandonment are becoming a common trend around the world.

What is needed is **public acceptance and realization of the economic value of Nature**. Solar salt works bear an intrinsic economic dimension of environmental protection. Therefore, a **new economic equilibrium is most probably a prerequisite to environmental preservation** and should be the driving idea for public regulation on coastal areas.