

Side event CFCC 0082: Towards an assessment of climate change and its impacts in the Mediterranean Basin

Accredited by Our Common Future under Climatic Change, Paris, 9th July 2015, 16h30-19h, Lab METIS, meeting room DARCY.

The objective of this informal meeting was to discuss the interest and the possibility to create a group of scientific experts on climatic change in the Mediterranean Basin, impacts, mitigation and adaptation issues. The proposed name of this group is, for the time being, “Mediterranean Experts for Climate Change (MedECC)”.

A side event at the Conference “Our Common Future under Climate Change” (CFCC) in Paris, France, July 7-10, 2015, was convened in order to reach out to interested scientists present at the conference and to discuss the possibility of establishing an expert network. Given the substantial interest expressed by more than 50 individuals, we will now establish a mailing list and electronic exchange with the wider community. If sufficient interest is found during the second half of 2015, we intend to call for a larger meeting for which broad geographic and multidisciplinary participation would be a key objective.

After a presentation of the motivation of this initiative and some objectives proposed by the conveners, an open discussion took place, in order to establish the interest of the participants for such an initiative and also about the role of such a group in relation to existing networks.

The main motivation for a Mediterranean expert network arises because the Mediterranean countries are connected by a common sea, a shared and long history and the emergence of similar environmental problems. Besides the regional consequences of climate change (heat waves, acidification etc), concerns manifest themselves by significant ecosystem degradation driven by urbanization, pollution, unsustainable use of the land and the sea, and other factors. Despite these linkages, and despite substantial environmental research and monitoring in several Mediterranean countries, assessments of environmental change, such as those of the IPCC, typically are made separately for parts of the Mediterranean, and no coherent scientific assessment of conditions and future conditions exists.

The shared objective by the experts present is to initiate an open international scientific expert network aiming to work towards a mechanism of ongoing support for policy makers and the general public on the basis of available scientific information and ongoing research. The network must cover the main geographical subregions of the Mediterranean basin (all countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, their land and sea territories), and the major scientific disciplines concerned. These include the physics and chemistry of the atmosphere and the ocean, all aspects of natural and human systems potentially impacted by the changing environment, and the economic and social solutions in the form of adaptation and mitigation. While no attempt is intended to mimic established international science-policy interfaces such as IPCC or IPBES, the thematic and structural characteristics of their assessments is seen as a good model. Similarly, it is crucial that membership in the network is for scientific experts with appropriate personal academic credentials, independent of their institutional affiliation.

All participants were enthusiastic to create such a network, which is seen to possibly build a bridge between existing research structures, such as MEDCLIVAR, MISTRALS, CIESM and the end users (policy makers, general public). The goal is not to carry out new research but instead to synthesise the latest state-of-the art published research and to render it accessible for people. While many participants of the initial meeting have their expertise in climate or ecosystem science, it was agreed that participation of social sciences experts is urgently required.

The meeting also discussed the connection between the new network and existing networks – redundancies obviously need to be avoided. Among the networks mentioned in the meeting was Med-Cordex coordinated by MISTRALS/HYMEX which may provide regional climate scenarios (a list of networks should be developed).

Regional institutes in fields relevant to our network, such as the “Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici” (CMCC) in Italy and the Cyprus Institute have a long experience of networking about climate change. Other initiatives exist at the sub-regional scale, e.g. the “Grup d’Experts en Canvi Climàtic de Catalunya” (GECCC, Catalonia), or the “Groupe des Experts sur le Changement Climatique” (GREC-PACA, Provence, France) (a list of such institutes and initiatives should be developed).

While the network will insist on its independence from stakeholders, it will obviously seek ways to closely interact with all public and private institutions concerned by climate and other environmental issues, including the United Nations Environment Programme Mediterranean Action Plan for the Barcelona Convention (UNEP MAP), Plan Bleu, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and its Climate Change Expert Group (UfMCCEG), World Bank CMI and others (the list of stakeholders and partners needs further development).

A point of discussion during the meeting was the definition of the “Mediterranean region” of concern. A practical definition to be used initially would be the full list of countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, including also Portugal.

Participants also raised the question whether the thematic concern of the group should be limited to issues related to climate change, or whether also other environmental concerns should be treated by the network. Pending further discussions, the group decided that the thematic scope would include all aspects of climate change and biodiversity conservation, embracing the domains of the IPCC and also IPBES.

It was suggested that the network should aim at setting up environmental databases for the Mediterranean region. An outcome of the following discussion was that this would reach beyond the available resources. Instead, the network should focus on the assessment and synthesis of change and associated risks as covered by existing research.

Planned near-term activities

During the meeting, a list of addresses was collected from interested scientists. This list will be consolidated and used as a primary means of electronic communication. This report will be finalised by the conveners and then distributed to all interested parties asking them to provide some basic information about their scientific background and about their interest to contribute to a Mediterranean environmental assessment.

Members will also be asked to invite other experts to join, aiming at establishing a list of partners that cover all relevant scientific domains and also all subregions of the Mediterranean region as defined above. At a later stage, the community will have to decide about a governance structure including a multidisciplinary and multinational steering committee, and consider more formalized aspects of cooperation. In parallel, a first set of tangible objectives will be developed, including one or several assessment reports about the Mediterranean environment. Financial support for networking and assessment will be sought from multiple sources, aiming at a lean and simple structure, based primarily on voluntary contributions.

During 2016, the founding members will seek opportunities to organize a dedicated meeting, or also meetings embedded in other conferences. An opportunity for this could arise during the 2016 MedCLIVAR conference, or also the conference MedCOP22 to be held in Morocco during 2016.

Conclusion

The MedECC initiative was positively received by approximately 50 participants present during the meeting, plus a number of individuals who could not personally attend the meeting. The name of the group is still open to suggestions.

Meeting moderators: Wolfgang Cramer (France), Joël Guiot (France)

Other founding members: Jean-Pierre Gattuso (France), Manfred Lange (Cyprus), Piero Lionello (Italy), Ricardo Trigo (Portugal), Riccardo Valentini (Italy), Elena Xoplaki (Greece / Germany)