REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
Ministry of Environmental Protection
and Green Transition

CONCEPT NOTE

Natural Retentions and Their Role in Flood Defence

Venue: Mediterranean Pavilion, COP31, Antalya, Türkiye
Date: 18th November 2026
Time: 10:00–11:00 (local time)
Format: State Secretary opening remarks, Interactive panel discussion (60 minutes)

1. Event Description

The Mediterranean basin, as a climate hotspot warming 20% faster than the global average, faces dual extremes – frequent droughts and devastating flash floods. Since classical "grey" hydrotechnical infrastructure is no longer sufficient, nature-based solutions (NbS) are increasingly proposed as a response. Under changed climatic conditions, we must give space back to water and restore degraded freshwater ecosystems to strengthen ecosystem services, adaptive potential and resilience to climate change. Integrated water management at the catchment level is imperative, combining existing hydrotechnical infrastructure with the conservation and restoration of natural retention capacities of rivers, floodplains, wetlands and other ecosystems.

Water retention in the catchment through natural retentions, restoration of floodplains and the "landscape-sponge" concept provides dual benefits: it mitigates flood waves and stores water for dry periods. Croatia has been successfully developing this model of natural flood defence since the 1960s, and with its rich field experience and practice can provide a good example for other Mediterranean countries.

2. Key Message

Sharing experiences and effective practices is essential to strengthening the capacity of Mediterranean countries to adapt to increasing flood and drought risks through nature-based solutions and integrated catchment management.

Croatia's long-standing experience with natural retentions, together with practical examples from other Mediterranean countries, will demonstrate how restoring natural retention capacities, combining grey and green infrastructure, and integrating flood and drought management can contribute to greater resilience of people and ecosystems.

3. Objectives

- Present Croatia's approach to natural retentions as part of flood defence and climate adaptation systems.
- Showcase the dual benefits of water retention for flood mitigation and drought preparedness.
- Highlight the importance of integrating nature-based solutions with existing hydrotechnical infrastructure.

- Exchange experiences and good practices from Croatia and other Mediterranean countries.
- Discuss common challenges and practical approaches to integrated flood and drought management under changing climatic conditions.
- Identify lessons that countries can adapt to their own national circumstances, including spatial planning of retention areas.

4. Proposed Agenda

Duration	Activity
5 min	**Opening remarks** - Mrs. Tanja Radić Lakoš, State Secretary for Environmental Protection and Green Transition of the Republic of Croatia
10 min	**Presentation: Croatian experience – natural retentions as part of the flood defence system and climate adaptation** - Mr. Goran Milaković, Croatian Waters
30 min	**Panel discussion** Four panellists: • Danko Biondić, PhD, Croatian Waters • Marija Sabolić, Institute for Environmental Protection and Nature (MZOZT) • two representatives from Mediterranean countries or relevant regional institutions (e.g. WWF and another) - TBD - TBD Moderator: Mrs. Iva Prgomet Ernst
10 min	Questions and discussion with the audience
5 min	**Closing remarks** Summary of key lessons and conclusions from the discussion

5. Target Audience

Policymakers and decision-makers, experts in water management, climate adaptation, nature protection and spatial planning; representatives of Mediterranean countries, international and regional organisations; scientific community and civil society organisations.

6. Expected Outcomes

The event will provide an opportunity to:

- Present Croatia's practical experience with natural retentions for flood defence and climate adaptation.
- Exchange knowledge and good practices with other Mediterranean countries.

- Identify common challenges and approaches that can inform national policies and operational practices.
- Highlight the contribution of nature-based solutions and integrated catchment management to resilience against climate extremes.
- Strengthen awareness of the need to protect and designate natural retention areas in spatial plans.