

## **WORKSHOP “Protected Areas in Europe: the next 50 years”**

### **Opening speech on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea**

Good morning to everyone.

It is a real pleasure for me to be here today in representation of the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea. And I want to congratulate the Council of Europe for having organized this event and thank the host, the Regional Park of Migliarino, San Rossore and Massaciuccoli, as well as the other partners and sponsors, Tuscany Region and Europarc and Federparchi.

In particular, I’m bringing the greetings from my Director General, Mrs. Maria Carmela Giarratano, unable to attend this meeting because forced to be in Milan where tomorrow, in occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity, in the Expo 2015, there will be an important high level meeting, at the presence, among others, of the Italian Ministry of Environment and the European Commissioner for fisheries and environment.

The event of tomorrow will bring the attention on the interlinkage between sustainable feeding and biodiversity and it will be held in the Biodiversity Park, a large area in which, for the entire period of Expo, six months, Italian protected areas will show food related to their territory and typical products of sustainable agriculture and fishery as well.

No surprise that protected areas have been chosen to represent, at its best, the biodiversity in Milan Expo 2015.

Protected areas play a central role in biodiversity strategy, both at global and local level. And they are crucial in the relationship with citizens. When we communicate biodiversity, people often don’t understand what we mean. But they immediately understand when we talk of protected areas.

The last fourth Global Biodiversity Outlook shows, as you may know, more shadows than lights in biodiversity trends. The overall picture is not good but among the few signals for optimism there is the situation of protected areas, at least in terms of coverage of land.

Anniversaries are always occasion to make a balance of the past. The balance of last decades on protected areas is positive and we may recognize the results were achieved also thanks to initiative like EDPA.

But anniversaries are occasion to discuss future outlooks as well.

I take this opportunity to offer some considerations on main policies at global level and at national level, and some information on our Ministerial activities as well.

The full achievement of the Aichi Target 11, as I said, is on course to be met in terms of mere coverage of land areas, but we need to go beyond that.

We need to strengthen our efforts toward marine protected areas, toward connectivity and ecological representativeness of protected areas and toward effectiveness and equitability of management of protected areas.

We need, more over, to pursue integration of protected areas with other goals and targets of biodiversity strategy and mainstreaming biodiversity in other sectors.

At this aim, our priorities, in terms of policies, are four:

- Linkage between protected areas and other strategic issues
- Ecosystem services approach
- Green economy
- Synergies between natural and cultural capital

Linkage with strategic issues. Starting from considering protected areas as a network, it is extremely important that conservation activities carried out on the ground are framed in largest thematic issues. I want just to recall two of these issues for which we think the role of protected areas is essential: contrast to invasive alien species and flyways for migratory birds.

Ecosystem services provided in protected areas: food, health, climate, risk reduction, culture, etc. Focusing on that, means to stress the importance of biodiversity in facing the global challenges at local level. Protected areas should become showcases of green infrastructures and other nature-based solutions to address risk reduction and fighting climate change.

Assessment and valuing of natural capital is a necessary and fundamental part of this policy. The Italian Ministry is developing several activities on that. I will nominate three:

- Scaling up of private funding through the mechanism of Payments for Ecosystem Services;
- Assessment of natural capital: an activity started two years ago in national parks that currently is enlarging its scope;
- Environmental accounting connected to improving of management efficiency: a project that is now involving all Italian marine protected areas.

Protected areas are privileged places to develop green economy. Recent studies conducted on behalf of the Italian Ministry show the positive correlation between protected areas and creation and developing of innovative business based on

natural capital. To support this process in the touristic sector, the Ministry is promoting the adoption by parks of the European Charter of Sustainable Tourism.

Before concluding, I would spend some more words on the last priority I introduced, the acknowledgement of the linkage between natural and cultural capital, that is a key linkage particularly strong in European biodiversity and protected areas.

Human influence on European ecosystems has been constant and widespread throughout history. Natural and Cultural Capital are in dynamic synergies that are often positive. To maintain this positive link between Cultural and Natural Capital we need to take into account the cultural dimensions of influences on ecosystems.

The park in which we are is a living example of this connection.

This vision has been promoted at European Union level by the Charter of Rome, a guidance document approved by Nature Directors of EU during the Italian semester of presidency of EU Council and endorsed also by Ministers.

It could be interesting to discuss this vision also within the Council of Europe, particularly with a view to EDPA. We could imagine to pursue synergies between EDPA, the Bern Convention and the Florence Convention on landscape, to associate the nature conservation with protection of landscape.

Several concepts under Florence convention actually offer interesting and useful instruments for involvement of local communities, essential also for nature conservation. I think that concepts like “citizen participation”, “perception”, “cultural place identity” taken from landscape convention, put in relation with natural values, could strengthen the leading role of protected areas in the process of sustainable development.

In conclusion, improving management systems, strengthening representativeness and ecological coherence of network, promoting integration and mainstreaming with other sectors, are the new challenges that protected areas have to face.

In addressing these challenges, Diploma areas actually have got all capacities to remain a benchmark of protected areas system at European and global level for the next 50 years.

Let me conclude this intervention, paying a tribute to the Council of Europe and to Bern Convention for their continued commitment on environmental issues. National and global policies and means of implementation would be useless or ineffective without a large partnership to deliver them. Efforts from International governmental and non-governmental organizations and private sector as well, are essential to achieve our common goals.

Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a fruitful meeting.