



WLC18- 0100B

## Introduction

Lake Ohrid, one of the oldest lakes in the world, shared between N. Macedonia and Albania displays more biodiversity by surface area than any other inland water body. The Macedonian side of the Ohrid region attained UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS) status for its natural (criterion vii) and cultural (criteria i, iii, and iv) attributes in 1979 and 1980, respectively. Site boundaries extended to Albania in 2019.



## Aim

The objective of the present study is to review the World Heritage Committee (WHC) Decisions and recommendations over the last two decades as well as the conservation shortfalls of the site.

## Conclusions

Given the existence of multiple expert advisory body opinions, copious peer-reviewed material and civil sector reports, WHC's choice to avoid placing Ohrid region on the list of WHS in Danger (twice, in 2019 and 2021), can only be conceived as a result of political considerations and/or incompetence.

# The UNESCO World Heritage Committee and Ohrid region destruction: a saga of deception

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## Results



**Wastewater** system not maintained and not fully operational (2019-left and 2020-right)

### Threats

- Urbanization - Massive legal and illegal construction
- Planned railway and road development
- Tourism industry
- Overfishing
- Unsuitable agricultural practices
- Off-road vehicles in national parks
- Wastewater inflows
- Hydropower dams
- Solid waste non-management
- Heavy metals Fires/Erosion/Logging
- Climate change
- Boat traffic



**Overfishing.** Endemic Ohrid trout (*Salmo letnica*) trapped in a net (2021). The endemic fish as a delicacy (right)

### Consequences

- Pollution (gradient north to south)
- Bird & fish population downfall
- Local extinctions and probable absolute extinctions
- Min. 40 threatened endemic species
- Eutrophication
- Accelerated habitat loss and deterioration
- Beach closures & reduced fishing catch
- Photic zone shrinking since 1920s
- 80%+ wetlands lost since WW2



**Massive construction**, both legal and illegal, despite RMM recommendation 6

### Scientific evidence

- Lake Ohrid has aged by thousands of years due to eutrophication (Avramoski *et al.*, 2003)
- Eutrophication pressures will combine with global warming to create in-lake dead zones by end of century (Matzinger *et al.*, 2006)
- The combination of threats may be leading to a "creeping biodiversity crisis" in the Ohrid region (Kostoski *et al.*, 2010)
- Untreated wastewater is entering Lake Ohrid up to 100 times per year (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2012)



**Dumpsites** at multiple locations despite 2017 RMM recommendation 16 (2020)



**Studenchtishte marsh** is the last remaining wetland along the lake's shore. In 2020, Zones of Strict Protection and Active Management reduced to just 34% of the yet-to-be designated Studenchtishte Marsh protected area, down from 57% suggested in 2012.



Plan for a 400-boat **marina** with parking for 1,000 vehicles (2019)

### Selected relevant UNESCO actions - timeline

1998	2016	2017	2019	2019	2020	2021
<b>UNESCO/ICOMOS/IUCN Monitoring mission</b>  "Now, the enormous increase in constructions and settlement activities has seriously altered the original balance in the region. Economic and demographic developments pose threats to the values of the site".	<b>Decision: 40 COM 7B.68</b> WHC requests the State Party to: - submit a report on the state of conservation of the property and on the steps taken to implement the recommendations, with a view to considering, the possible inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. - invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission	<b>WH Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission</b> "Main threats to the integrity of the property: uncoordinated urban development, increasing population, inadequate treatment of wastewater and solid waste, and tourism pressure. The highly endemic biodiversity and natural beauty of the Lake are particularly vulnerable to changes in water quality, and there is alarming evidence of a growth in nutrients threatening the oligotrophic ecology of the Lake".  ↓ <b>19 recommendations to avoid WH in Danger listing</b>	<b>Joint ICOMOS/IUCN Advisory mission</b> "Urgent need to protect the water quality of the Lake and maintain its oligotrophic ecological function; to tackle tourism and associated legal and illegal development and the impacts of development on habitats and species throughout the property, including on the lake shores".	<b>43<sup>rd</sup> Session of WHC in Baku</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advisory bodies ICOMOS and IUCN both recommend Ohrid Region to be danger listed</li><li>• Draft WHC Decision suggests placing Ohrid Region on List of World Heritage in Danger</li><li>• Draft decision not adopted</li></ul> ↓ <b>Ohrid Region IS NOT placed on the list of WH sites in danger</b>	<b>WH Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission</b> "The progress made has not been commensurate with the scope and extent of the many threats facing the OUV of the property, nor does it capture the urgency of the situation. It is therefore strongly recommended that the Committee inscribe the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger".	<b>44<sup>th</sup> Session of WHC in Fuzhou</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Draft WHC Decision suggests placing Ohrid Region on List of World Heritage in Danger</li><li>• Draft decision not adopted</li><li>• Requests the States Parties to submit a report to the World Heritage Centre, by <b>1 Feb 2022</b></li></ul> ↓ <b>Ohrid Region IS NOT placed on the list of WH sites in danger</b>

**References** (1) Albrecht, C. & Wilke, T. (2008) Hydrobiologia 615: 103. (2) Matzinger, A. et al (2007). Limnology, Oceanography 52 (1). (3) Kostoski, G. et al (2010). Biogeosciences, 7, 3999-4015. (4) Schneider, SC et al (2014). Limnologica, 44, 2014, 90-97. (5) UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, IUCN (1998) State of Conservation for the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region. World Heritage Centre, Paris, France. (6) UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Examination of nominations and minor modifications to the boundaries of nature, mixed and cultural properties to the World Heritage List - Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region. Decision 32 COM 8B.49. (7) UNESCO World Heritage Centre. State of Conservation. Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region (Albania, North Macedonia).