

**Arab Republic of Egypt**  
**Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs**  
**Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency**  
**Nature Conservation Sector**

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 وزارة الدولة لشئون البيئة  
 جهاز شئون البيئة  
الإدارة المركزية لحماية الطبيعة

March 17, 2005

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To: *UNESCO World Heritage Center*

**Wadi Al-Hitan (Egypt): nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List**

Dear Messrs./Madames

Mr. David Sheppard sent a letter dated January 10, 2005, to the Egyptian National Committee for UNESCO. This letter raised several questions growing out of discussions of the December 2004 IUCN World Heritage Panel concerning our Wadi Al-Hitan nomination. Here we attempt to clarify the two specific areas of uncertainty identified by the panel: (1) the relation of Wadi Hitan and Gebel Qatrani as separate sites in a possible serial nomination; and (2) plans and commitment of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency [EEAA] and partners for the next five years.

First, concerning the question of functional relationship of the Wadi Al-Hitan nominated site and the adjacent area of Gebel Qatrani, these sites have similarities but also important differences. The two sites are similar in that both are well known for their fossil record, and both are in the desert northwest and north of Fayum oasis. However, there are also important differences:

- (1) Wadi Hitan is purely a paleontological site like World Heritage paleontological sites already established in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany, Kenya, Switzerland, and United Kingdom. Gebel Qatrani on the other hand is a mixed Natural/Cultural site including rich cultural elements in addition to its paleontological value. These include the oldest paved road in the world, ancient basalt quarries, multi-historical records of humans, natural resources, and land use through a long period of time (Prehistoric, Dynastic, Graeco-Roman, and present-day).
- (2) Wadi Hitan and Gebel Qatrani are different in terms of their geology, depositional environment, and vertebrate fossil record:
  - a. Wadi Hitan is well stratified and marine, and it includes many large articulated fossil whale skeletons resting in situ where they can be observed weathering from surrounding strata—the fossils are plentiful, obvious, and relatively complete. Hence they provide a satisfying stand-alone educational experience complementing the scientific importance of

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the Site. Some context aids interpretation of course, but anyone can see for him- or herself the fossil skeletons entombed in the strata where they were buried.

- b. By contrast, Gebel Qatrani is a poorly stratified, fluvial, and continental rather than marine, and most of the fossils here are small, rare, and generally fragmented and disarticulated. From the beginning of scientific study in the early 1900s, the fossils have been removed to museums as they were discovered. Hence the site, while well known scientifically, is much more difficult to imagine developing as satisfying educational experience going beyond what can be learned from museums and textbooks. Gebel Qatrani is an important site paleontologically, but a much more difficult one to develop into a meaningful World Heritage paleontological site.
- (3) Wadi Hitan is far ahead of Gebel Qatrani in terms of its planning, management, and infrastructure.
- a. Responsibility for management and operation of the Wadi Al-Hitan site is directly under the Wadi El Rayan Protected Area [WRPA] Management Unit supported by the Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Program [EIECP] and the technical assistance of IUCN. This will last until at least 2007. The current WRPA Management Plan was developed and endorsed by all stakeholders for the larger Wadi El Rayan Protected Area, which includes Wadi Hitan as a core zone. At Gebel Qatrani, on the other hand, responsibility for management is under a separate Qarun Protected Area, which is by comparison poorly funded, staffed, and equipped.
- b. Funds have been requested from the Egyptian National Commission for UNESCO to enable preparation of a management plan for Gebel Qatrani, but such a management plan, when completed, still will not ensure that resources are available for its implementation.

In conclusion, it does not seem advisable to delay consideration of Wadi Hitan as a World Heritage site now in the hope that Gebel Qatrani will be developed to the same level in the future. Such a delay risks dissipation of the momentum generated by a considerable national and international effort focused to date on Wadi Hitan. It seems to us to be a better strategy to move forward with Wadi Hitan now, and then link it to Gebel Qatrani at a later date when and if the latter site has been developed to a comparable stage.

Second, concerning the challenges that EEAA faces for implementing management of the nominated Wadi Al-Hitan site in the next five years, we would like to clarify the following:

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- (1) Extending the buffer zone of the nominated Site to the Bahariya highway and across the desert to the south to increase the scope for management of vehicular traffic offers some potential for greater control of vehicular traffic, but at a cost of proportionally increasing the area to be patrolled. It is envisioned that there will be a control gate on the north side of the Wadi Al-Hitan area, but this will be easier to maintain if it is relatively close to the other manned sites, and it seems impractical to establish and maintain a gate as far away as the Bahariya highway. On the south side of Wadi Al-Hitan there is no traffic and no need for a new gate. According to plans being implemented now, there will be a permanent outpost in Wadi Al-Hitan that will be staffed by local community guards, and these guards will monitor the Wadi Al-Hitan site.
- (2) Design and implementation of a management program for vehicular traffic, and provision of management and interpretation infrastructure within the nominated site is part of the management plan being developed at the moment as outlined in EIECP project document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002; see Annex 1 here about activities regarding "The Wadi Hitan area of the WRPA is effectively managed as a World Heritage site").
- (3) A robust program of site monitoring related to the fossil interests and other values of the nominated Wadi Al-Hitan site is already being implemented (Annex II here: "Paleontology Monitoring Program").
- (4) Financial and human resources are in hand to secure the management of the Wadi Al-Hitan site for the medium-term. At the end of January 2005 the second phase of the Wadi Al-Rayan/Wadi Al-Hitan project of the EIECP was funded by grant from the Italian Government in the amount of \$1.111 million plus a debt-swap fund of \$457 thousand and an in-kind contribution from the Egyptian Government. These funds are in addition to the normal budget for Wadi Al-Rayan/Wadi Al-Hitan provided by EEAA (providing ca. \$100 thousand per year for salary, and operational and development costs). In terms of human resources, there are at present 37 people employed in Wadi Rayan, including the Director, eight Rangers/Environmental Affairs Researchers holding university degrees, 10 community guards recruited from the surrounding areas, and support staff. In the present project additional rangers and community guards will be recruited. There will be six local community guards with camels recruited for the Wadi Al-Hitan site in addition to the normal staff. It is worth mentioning here too that the project will receive technical assistance from IUCN (contract signed March 7, 2005, with UNDP as a partner agency with EIECP). There is also an official cooperation and twinning agreement signed on April 23, 2004, between Wadi El-Rayan Protected Area and the National Park of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga in Italy, which promises a long-term training opportunity for Egyptian staff and other specific

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financial and technical assistance from Italy. There has been wide corporate support for development of Wadi Al-Hitan within Egypt and this will assuredly continue and expand.

- (5) Sustainable tourism programs to benefit the Wadi Al-Hitan site and local communities are being developed at the local, regional, and international levels:
- The principal program is outlined in EIECP project document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002; see Annex III here about activities regarding "The Ecotourism Sector linked to the Protected Area is Developed and Diversified").
  - In addition, we have an Italian Cooperation-NGO project for \$2 million titled "Ecotourism for Sustainable Development in the Fayoum Oasis, Egypt" developed with the Fayoum Tourist Authority that started in January, 2005.
  - Another project has been approved by Italy but not yet started concerning a feasibility study "Tourism Development in Egypt: Promotion and Implementation of New Territorial Tourist Districts in Regional and Local Areas," which will focus in Fayoum. This will be implemented through the Tourist Development Authority of the Ministry of Tourism in Egypt.
  - Wadi Al-Hitan is featured in several EIECP publications including the widely distributed *Fayoum and Wadi El-Rayan* Egypt Pocket Guide authored by Alberto Silioti and published by American University of Press.
  - The archaeological site of Medinet Madi in western Fayoum is being developed by EIECP in parallel with Wadi Al-Rayan and Wadi Al-Hitan, and the two sites are expected to benefit each other as outlined in EIECP project document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002; see Annex IV here about activities regarding "The Recreation and Educational Functions of Wadi Al-Rayan and Medinet Madi are Integrated").
  - A Ministry of Agriculture program of sustainable development funded by Italian debt-swap is focused on socioeconomic development within the Wadi Rayan protected area. This program includes tour guide training and promotion, development of handicraft production, and organic farming for sale to Wadi Rayan/Wadi Hitan visitors and others.
  - A three-way, four-year agreement has been implemented between EEAA, the Egyptian Geological Survey and Mining Authority, and the University of Michigan (U.S.A.) to further develop, study, and publicize the scientific resources of Wadi Al-Hitan. Excavation of a complete 18-meter long *Basilosaurus* whale skeleton is in progress that will enable functional interpretation of how the animal swam and lived. The skeleton will be molded and cast in the U.S. and Canada for exhibition in Cairo and elsewhere. The new excavation, ongoing scientific development of Wadi

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Al-Hitan, and anticipated exhibition of the first complete *Basilosaurus* skeletal mount in Egypt and elsewhere are expected to generate considerable publicity, contributing to visitation and sustainable tourism for the benefit of the Wadi Al-Hitan site and local communities.

We hope it is now clear from this summary that EEAA plans for Wadi Hitan are mature, and also that EEAA and its partners are fully committed to ongoing sustainable development of Wadi Hitan.

*Sincerely*

*Dr. Moustafa Fouda*  
*Director, Nature Conservation Sector*

Cc: IUCN Headquarters

## Annex I

EIECP Project Document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002) Activities by Output

### **Output 6: Wadi Hitan Area of the WRPA is Effectively Managed as a World Heritage site**

#### Activities

- 6.1 Support the NCS-led initiative for the designation of Wadi Hitan as a world heritage site (UNESCO) and develop a detailed site-specific conservation plan for the area.
- 6.2 Provide specialised training in the fields of geology and palaeontology to PAMU staff appointed for the development and conservation of the Wadi Hitan site and as curators of the open-air museum.
- 6.3 Initiate the recruitment and training of 6 community guards originating from villages in the vicinity of Wadi Hitan. Candidates should have long-term work experience under difficult desert conditions and demonstrated abilities in the handling of camels.
- 6.4 Establish a permanent outpost in a strategic location overlooking the Wadi Hitan site based on a simple design, which draws on the long-standing experience of the Wadi El Rayan Coptic monastery.
- 6.5 Ensure the procurement of the following items: (i) 2 off-road motorbikes (e.g. Honda 250cc, trial bikes) for patrolling purposes; (ii) N.6 camels for transport and logistics; (iii) a VHF base unit with relay station and 4 walkie-talkie units.
- 6.6 Facilitate visitor access to the Wadi Hitan site by demarcating a new track from the main gate and establishing an effective guiding / security service to be offered on request to visitors.
- 6.7 Establish a new ticketing system, which differentiates between nationals and foreigners and levies an additional fee for visiting the open-air museum in Wadi Hitan.
- 6.8 Design an open-air museum in the core area of the Wadi Hitan site (over a 1-2 km radius), featuring state of the art interpretation facilities and displays on the unique geology and palaeontology of the area. Vehicular access to the open-air museum will be restricted.

6.9 In collaboration with AAPG initiate a fund-raising initiative targeting the private sector (particularly the multinational petroleum companies) and other potential partners to finance the realisation of the open-air museum according to the highest international standards.

6.10 Establish and maintain a permanent camping site with basic visitor facilities. Camping may be allowed also away from allocated areas but a special permit will need to be arranged with the PAMU.

6.11 Facilitate the development of specialised ecotourism services by licensing private sector initiatives, according to the best practice guidelines developed by the project (see activity 3.1), in the following areas: (i) guided trekking tours; (ii) camel rides either in Wadi Hitan or along the ancient caravan trails approaching the Fayoum depression through Ufa and Kasr Qarun (iii) a Bedouin-style eco-lodge offering the "deep desert experience" (based on the preliminary proposal contained in the investment plan developed during the first phase of the WRPA project).

6.12 Develop a business plan for the Wadi Hitan site covering a period of 3-5 years. Detailed budgetary requirements will be defined in terms of investments and operating costs and potential sources of revenue quantified based on a system of fees and other income generating and fund raising activities including the leveraging of funds from government agencies, donor-sponsored projects and the private sector.

6.13 Design and implement a finely-targeted outreach programme to build the image of Wadi Hitan as a unique conservation area and highlighting its significance as a world heritage site (UNESCO). Effective tools based on the press, electronic and web-based media will be designed to disseminate information to a wide national and international audience.

6.14 Establish the legal framework for the creation of a permanent fund to support the long-term and sustainable management of the Wadi Hitan site. A stable institutional mechanism such as a Management Board will provide an umbrella for all key stakeholders and ensure the necessary conditions of pluralism, credibility and transparency, which are crucial prerequisites for the effective management of such a Conservation Fund.

## Annex II

EEAA Wadi Rayan Protected Area *Operating Plan* (2003-2004)

### Paleontology Monitoring Program

#### II.2. Paleontology Monitoring Program

##### **Methodology**

##### **A. Photo Monitoring**

Each fossil site has been mapped, photographed and numbered. The routine patrolling is executed in the fossil area twice per week (during the weekend, when normally the area is visited by the tourists), and once per month the condition of each fossil site is verified through the comparison with the photo. Once every three months the condition of each fossil site is checked and the broken parts of the skeletons are repaired.

The requirements for the photo monitoring, conducted once per month, are the following:

*Personnel:* 2 rangers, 1 community guard and 1 driver

*Equipment:* 4X4 car, digital camera, GPS, data sheets, pencil, compass, the file of the fossil photos.

##### **B. Fossils Sites Description and Repairing**

The procedure that is being used to repair the fossils is the following:

- Removing the sand from the fossils
- Looking for all the skeleton's components
- Cleaning the fossil constituents
- Mending the broken parts of the skeleton
- Brushing the fossil components with a hardener substance (polyvinyl acetate).
- Arranging the different parts of the skeleton in the right position and detecting the missing ones.

*Personnel:* 1 researcher (geologist), 1 researcher trained on fossil repair methodology, 2 community guards

*Equipment:* 1 palette, 2 brushes, polyvinyl acetate, glue Vinavil

*Frequency:* every three months and when needed



## **Annex III**

EIECP Project Document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002) Activities by Output

### **Output 3: Ecotourism Sector linked to the Protected Area is Developed and Diversified**

#### Activities

3.1 Develop and publish best practice guidelines for the development and diversification of ecotourism facilities and services in the WRPA, based on the Ecotourism Investment Plan developed during the first phase of the project.

3.2 Design and conduct training programmes to sensitise tourism operators, potential investors and other concerned parties about desert conservation and environmentally sound, sustainable desert tourism.

3.3 In close co-ordination with Governorate authorities and the security forces, design and implement an improved visitor security system for the WRPA, while phasing out the present escort-based system, incompatible with the development of genuine ecotourism facilities and services.

3.4 Assist in the formulation and negotiation of new licenses according to best practice guidelines (see 3.1) and the investment plan developed during the first phase of the project, while engaging potential investors in contributing to visitor management and protection and the maintenance and improvement of visitor facilities.

3.5 Monitor the establishment of new ecotourism facilities ensuring full compliance with guidelines set out in the licenses and related FIAs.

3.6 Facilitate the involvement of the local communities through (i) technical and financial support to private sector initiatives, (ii) training for interpretation and guiding services and (iii) involving community members in the management and improvement of existing facilities and services.

3.7 In close collaboration with Tourism Development Authority (TDA), contribute to ongoing ecotourism initiatives in the Fayoum governorate, by examining the possibility of jointly supporting the establishment of an eco-centre in the periphery of the WRPA (e.g. Tunis), as a simple facility, run by a local NGO supported by Italian NGO-CISS, offering several ecotourism modules (e.g. crafts, rural life, cycling tours, etc.), which may be linked to ecotourism facilities and services available in the WRPA.

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## Annex IV

EIFCP Project Document *Wadi el Rayan Protected Area* (2002) Activities by Output

### **Output 5: Recreation and Educational Functions of Wadi Al-Rayan and Medinet Madi are Integrated**

#### Activities

5.1 In collaboration with the private sector, TDA and other key stakeholders (e.g. SCA and the Medinet Madi management team), design and implement a finely-targeted marketing strategy to promote the two sites as ecotourism destinations at local, national and international levels.

5.2 Demarcate and establish a suitably signposted track, physically linking the main visitor area of the WRPA with the Medinet Madi archaeological site.

5.3 Design and realise complementary exhibits and open air displays in the WRPA eco-centre and the *antiquarium* to be established by the Medinet Madi project, integrating information on the history, archaeology and biodiversity of the Fayoum region and the Western desert of Egypt.

5.4 Design and implement field-based environmental education activities and services targeting students and the general public, based on a holistic interpretation of the natural and cultural history of the region and highlighting the dynamic relationship between man and the natural environment.

5.5 Conduct customised training programmes and on the job training targeting rangers, guides etc. in order to improve interpretation and guiding skills supporting the effective operation of jointly designed visitor services.

5.6 Define an operational framework for the long-term collaboration between the management teams of the two sites by supporting the formal establishment and functioning of a coordinating committee.

5.7 Jointly initiate a process of bio-regional planning for the Wadi El Rayan - Medinet Madi areas based on formal consultations with local communities, Governorate authorities and other key stakeholders, and linked with the cultural heritage district.

**Note.** This output will be achieved by closely coordinating the activities with the project *Institutional support to SCA for environmental monitoring and management of cultural*