

THE CAMARGUE'S FORMER SALTWORKS NBS PROJECT

An open sky laboratory for Nature-based Solutions

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The Rhône river delta - also called the Camargue – is located on the Mediterranean coast of southern France, west of Marseille. It covers 140,000 hectares, comprising agricultural lands and an outstanding diversity of wetland and coastal ecosystems. Economic activities include tourism, cattle breeding and cultivation, salt production, commercial hunting and fishing, whereas large-scale industry and shipping activities are developed in the delta outskirts. With a majority of its sandy coastline already affected by erosion, this low-lying territory is severely exposed to the effects of climate change, especially sea-level rise.

Reclaimed and transformed for industrial salt production from the 1950s, the Camargue's former saltworks site (5300 hectares) was purchased by Conservatoire du littoral between 2008 and 2012 and is now jointly managed by Parc naturel régional de Camargue, Tour du Valat research institute and Société nationale de protection de la nature NGO. The former NbS salt works project currently underway is helping to adapt the Rhône Delta to sea-level rise by implementing an accommodation space strategy (in resilient and functional

wetlands) to cope with sea floods through. The buffer-zone creation and ecosystem restoration includes hydrological reconnections with surrounding wetlands ecosystems, and a scientific monitoring of the evolution of the coast and the state of the ecosystem. This project restores coastline mobility by favoring the reinforcement of an inland protection dike rather than the maintenance of infrastructures on the coastline. This contributes to reducing grey infrastructures investments and maintenance costs related to disaster risk management in the Camargue. Results of ecological monitoring show encouraging trends including an improved ecological status of coastal lagoon ecosystems, the restoration of a fish migration path between the sea and the inland lagoons and the on-going restoration of hundred of hectares of Mediterranean *halophilous* scrubs and annual *Salicornia* saltmarshes.