

REWETTING WETLANDS IN PORTUGAL

**Policy insights from Paúl de Goux for
linking wetland restoration with carbon
finance and climate policy**



CONTEXT AND CURRENT POLICY LANDSCAPE

Portugal has established several policies and funding mechanisms supporting wetland restoration, including the National Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the River Rehabilitation Strategy and EU programmes such as LIFE. Despite

these frameworks, implementation remains uneven due to competing land uses, limited technical capacity and fragmented governance.

Although new protected areas and restoration projects demon-

strate progress, funding and enforcement remain insufficient. River rehabilitation has often prioritised hydraulic objectives over ecological outcomes, while weak monitoring limits learning and accountability.

WHY IS RESTORATION HARD TO SCALE?

Barriers to effective wetland restoration

Conflicting land-uses

Infrastructure, real estate and renewable energy expansion compete with wetland conservation priorities

Limited ecological expertise

Lack of technical capacity among authorities leads to poorly designed implementation

Insufficient and misallocated funding

Funding is not systematically directed towards high-priority restoration and may support damaging projects

Weak policy specificity

National strategies lack binding targets and concrete measures for wetlands

Inadequate monitoring

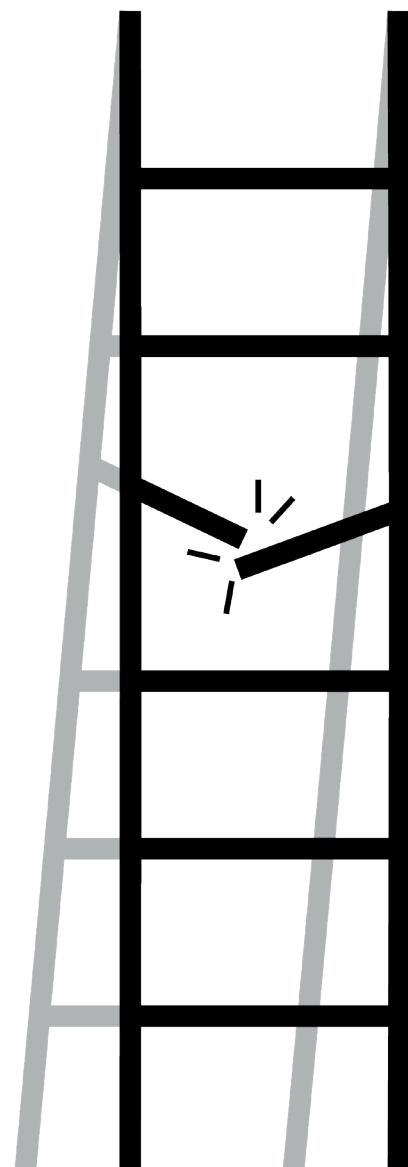
Limited monitoring reduces accountability and learning

Shortage of restoration materials

Limited availability of locally-adapted plant materials constrain ecological restoration

Governance and coordination gaps

Fragmented responsibilities hinder effective implementation

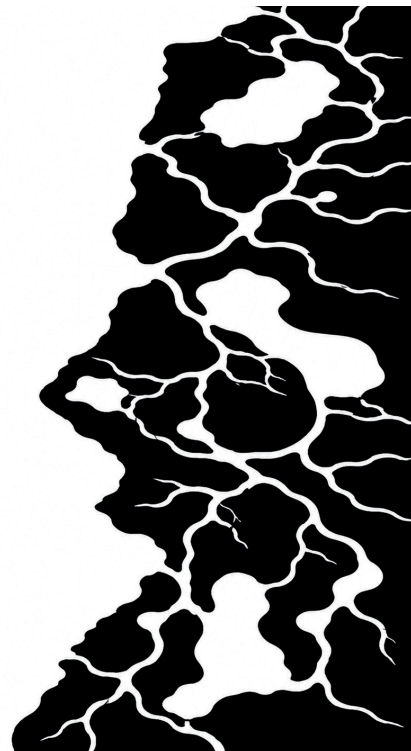


PRIORITY POLICY MEASURES

Establish a national framework for ecological rewetting and carbon-based wetland restoration

Position wetland rewetting as both a biodiversity and climate action priority by integrating hydrological restoration, ecological standards and carbon accounting. A national framework should:

- Restore natural water regimes.
- Strengthen ecological restoration standards.
- Develop methodologies for wetland carbon accounting.
- Enable carbon credit schemes for wetlands.
- Integrate restoration into biodiversity and river basin planning.



EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE

Restoration of the Paúl de Gouxa inland wetland

Paúl de Gouxa is a rare Mediterranean inland wetland combining peatland, swamp forest and reed habitats. Restoration efforts supported by EU funding have improved ecosystem conditions and tested innovative financing mechanisms based on restoration credits.

Biodiversity impacts

- Increased diversity of mammals, birds and insects.
- Demonstrates ecological recovery.
- Benefits from restoring natural hydrology.

Climate impacts

- Degraded peatlands can become significant greenhouse gas sources.
- Rewetting is expected to enhance carbon storage and reduce emissions.
- Long-term monitoring is needed to quantify impacts.



WHAT DOES THIS CASE SHOW?

Hydrological restoration is essential for wetland recovery and climate mitigation. Pilot restoration credit schemes demonstrate that carbon finance can provide new incentives for landowners and support larger-scale restoration.

The Portuguese experience highlights the potential of connecting biodiversity restoration with climate policy and innovative financing mechanisms.

POLICY PROPOSALS

Establish a **national framework** for wetland rewetting that combines ecological restoration standards, carbon accounting and financing mechanisms.

- Make wetland restoration a key component of biodiversity and climate policies.
- Develop national methodologies for wetland carbon accounting.
- Integrate wetlands into carbon markets through targeted credit schemes.
- Prioritise ecosystem functioning over purely hydraulic interventions.
- Embed rewetting within river basin management and nature restoration planning.

HOW TO SCALE AND ACCELERATE?

- Strengthen national and EU funding for high-impact restoration.
- Improve coordination and technical capacity across authorities.
- Establish long-term monitoring systems.
- Expand pilot restoration credit schemes and replicate successful approaches.





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