



TWELFTH MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE RAMSAR CONVENTION: 2-9 JUNE 2015

The twelfth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP12) opened on Tuesday, 2 June 2015, in Punta del Este, Uruguay, under the theme "Wetlands for our Future." COP12 will assess progress in the Convention's implementation and consider, among other items: a proposed new framework for delivery of scientific and technical advice and guidance on the Convention; peatlands, climate change and wise use; a call to action to ensure and protect the water requirements of wetlands for the present and the future; wetlands and disaster risk reduction; and a new strategic plan. The COP was preceded by the 49th meeting of the Ramsar Standing Committee on 1 June, and regional meetings on 1-2 June.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (also known as the Ramsar Convention) was signed in Ramsar, Iran, on 2 February 1971, and came into force on 21 December 1975. The Convention provides a framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

CONVENTION OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE: Originally emphasizing the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily to provide a habitat for waterbirds, the Convention has subsequently broadened its scope to address all aspects of wetland conservation and wise use, thereby recognizing the importance of wetlands as ecosystems that contribute to both biodiversity conservation and human well-being. Wetlands cover an estimated 9% of the Earth's land surface, and contribute significantly to the global economy in terms of water supply, fisheries, agriculture, forestry and tourism. The Convention currently has 168 parties. A total of 2,208 wetland sites covering over 210 million hectares are included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Parties to the Convention commit themselves to: designate at least one site that meets the Ramsar Criteria for inclusion in the Ramsar List and ensure maintenance of the ecological character of each Ramsar site; include wetland conservation within national land-use planning in order to promote the wise use of all wetlands within their territory; establish nature reserves on wetlands and promote training in wetland research and management; and consult with other parties about Convention implementation, especially with regard to transboundary wetlands, shared water systems, shared species and development projects affecting wetlands.

Contracting parties meet every three years to assess progress in implementing the Convention and wetland conservation, share knowledge and experience on technical issues, and plan for the next triennium. In addition to the COP, the Convention's work is supported by a Standing Committee (SC), a Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), and the Ramsar Bureau, which carries out the functions of a Secretariat.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE COP: There have been eleven meetings of the COP since the Convention's entry into force: COP1 in Cagliari, Italy (November 1980); COP2 in Groningen, the Netherlands (May 1984); COP3 in Regina, Canada (May-June 1987); COP4 in Montreux, Switzerland (June-July 1990); COP5 in Kushiro, Japan (June 1993); COP6 in Brisbane, Australia (March 1996); COP7 in San José, Costa Rica (May 1999); COP8 in Valencia, Spain (November 2002); COP9 in Kampala, Uganda (November 2005); COP10 in Changwon, Republic of Korea (October-November 2008); and COP11 in Bucharest, Romania (June 2012).

COP8: COP8 focused on the role of wetlands in water provision, as well as their cultural and livelihoods aspects. Delegates adopted more than 40 resolutions addressing policy, technical, programme and budgetary matters, including: wetlands and agriculture; climate change; cultural issues; mangroves; water allocation and management; and the Report of the World Commission on Dams. Delegates also approved the Convention's Work Plan for 2003-2005 and its Strategic Plan for 2003-2008.

COP9: COP9 adopted 25 resolutions on a wide range of policy, programme and budgetary matters, including: additional scientific and technical guidance for the implementation of the Ramsar Wise Use Concept; engagement of the Convention in ongoing multilateral processes dealing with water; the Convention's role in natural disaster prevention, and climate change mitigation and adaptation; wetlands and poverty reduction; cultural values of wetlands; and the emergence of avian influenza. The COP also adopted the Convention's Work Plan for the 2006-2008 triennium, and reviewed its Strategic Plan 2003-2008. An informal Ministerial Dialogue adopted the Kampala Declaration, which emphasizes the role of the Convention in arresting continuing loss and degradation of wetland ecosystems.

COP10: COP10 adopted 32 resolutions, including on: wetlands and climate change; wetlands and biofuels; wetlands and extractive industries; wetlands and poverty eradication; wetlands and human health and wellbeing; enhancing biodiversity in rice paddies as wetland systems; and promoting



international cooperation on the conservation of waterbird flyways. The COP also adopted the Convention's Strategic Plan 2009-2015.

COP11: COP11, under the theme "Wetlands: Home and Destinations," adopted 22 resolutions, including on: institutional hosting of the Ramsar Secretariat; tourism, recreation and wetlands; climate change and wetlands; and agriculture-wetland interactions – rice paddy and pest control. The COP also adopted adjustments to the Strategic Plan 2009-2015 for the triennium 2013-2015.

INTERSESSIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

STANDING COMMITTEE: In 2012, COP11 elected new SC members to oversee Convention affairs until COP12. The SC has met five times since COP11. The first meeting, SC45, took place immediately following COP11 to, *inter alia*, confirm the procedures and timeline for the recruitment of the next Secretary General. SC46 (April 2013) endorsed the Revised Operational Guidelines 2013-2015 for the 15 regional initiatives; and adopted the Secretariat's work plan for 2013, allowing for flexibility pending its review by the incoming Secretary General, Christopher Briggs, who was selected in April 2013 and took office in August 2013. SC47 (March 2014) heard the Secretary General's presentation of the vision for the Convention; decided to confirm the process recommended by the Review Committee on the delivery of scientific and technical advice and support to the Convention; and requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft text for a resolution addressing the accommodation of Arabic into the Convention. SC48 (January 2015) debated and accepted draft resolutions and amendments to the rules of procedures to be submitted to the COP; and was informed of the confirmation of the United Arab Emirates' offer to host COP13 in Dubai. SC49 (June 2015) convened just prior to the opening of COP12 to finalize preparations.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL:

The STRP has met twice since COP11 (25 February - 1 March 2013 and 8-10 September 2014), and adopted terms of reference to clarify the roles of different categories of persons participating in the work of the Panel, as well as different types of STRP products. The STRP focused on high-priority tasks, including: the state of the world's wetlands and their services; a strategy for engaging Ramsar in the global water debate; wetlands and climate change, advice on the implication of decisions on REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of the forest carbon stocks in developing countries) by other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) to the Ramsar Convention; wetlands and ecosystem services; and wetlands and poverty eradication.

13TH SESSION OF THE OWG ON SDGS: The final meeting of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took place from 14-19 July 2014, at UN Headquarters in New York, to complete its mandate to develop a proposal for a set of SDGs to present to the UN General Assembly, as called for by the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The agreed targets are, *inter alia*, to: by 2030 implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate; by 2020 protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes; by 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination,

water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies; and support and strengthen the participation of local communities for improving water and sanitation management.

OPENING CEREMONY

Ramsar SC Chair Doina Catrinoiu, Romania, handed over the Ramsar flag on behalf of the COP11 Presidency to Eneida de León, Minister of Housing, Territorial Planning and Environment, Uruguay. Rodolfo Nin Novoa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uruguay, welcomed COP12 participants, highlighting that more than 12% of the host country's territory are wetlands. He underscored the importance of the resolutions to be adopted by COP12, in particular the strategic plan 2016-2021 in light of the decisions to be taken later in 2015 on the SDGs.

Susana Hernandez, Mayor of Maldonado, Uruguay, stressed that while wetlands were not valued in the past, their importance is nowadays widely recognized. She reported on a series of provincial initiatives, underscoring partnerships that allow cross-cutting work.

Doina Catrinoiu reported on the work undertaken during the intersessional period, including on sustainable development, sustainable management of wetlands, and climate change. She explained that the CO12 theme "Wetlands for our Future" points to the importance of wetlands contributing to the SDGs, and recommended sending a message to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference on the need for a low-carbon future.

Inger Andersen, Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), pointed to relentless pressure on wetlands that has led to recent estimates of dramatic wetland loss, resulting in impacts on biodiversity and human well-being. She emphasized the urgent need for change to achieve Aichi Target 14 (ecosystems restoration) and address the global water crisis, and for the Ramsar Convention to "act as the big sister" of MEAs and show the way in catalyzing change on a massive scale.

Jane Madgwick spoke on behalf of the five International Organization Partners of the Convention (IOPs): Wetlands International, WWF, IUCN, Birdlife International and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). She underscored the need to mainstream the wise use of wetlands into development planning to reduce the impacts of floods and drought, and the importance of peatlands for climate change mitigation and adaptation. She urged parties to further work on a set of indicators of wise use of wetlands under the Ramsar strategic plan, also as an input to ongoing discussions on SDGs indicators. She then highlighted draft resolutions on: peatlands and climate change, protection of the water requirements of wetlands, wetlands and disaster risk reduction, and Ramsar wetland city accreditation.

Christopher Briggs, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, stated that the variety of wetland types and the richness of the services they provide are not fully recognized or appropriately used. He highlighted that 40% of wetland habitats have been lost over the last 40 years, and 76% of all wetland species are threatened. He stated that there is a need for all stakeholders to work together through a strategic plan that addresses the drivers of wetland loss and builds towards the SDGs, recognizing that wetlands are the source of water and sustainable development, including for future generations.

Eneida de León reported on Uruguay's national policies over the last three decades to promote the conservation and sustainable management of wetlands, including the national system of protected areas, and coordinated efforts with neighboring countries to protect water resources.