



Ramsar and Wetland NGOs

A Report of the World Wetland Network for Ramsar CoP12

In 2014 the World Wetland Network (WWN) conducted a survey of WWN's members and the broader wetland conservation community. The purpose of the survey was to explore the relationship nongovernmental organisations (NGO) and civil society organisations have with Ramsar and delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals.

WWN is an international network of NGOs and civil society organisations, many of whom are focused on one or two wetlands in their local area. These organisations reflect their local cultures and communities and represent a considerable force for improving delivery of Ramsar wetland conservation goals. Many of these organisations have focused on specific wetlands for decades. NGOs often create a longer-term and more continuous link for Ramsar than Government Representatives.

The WWN survey was open for seven weeks in English, Spanish and French. 190 responses were received from 52 countries. This is a significant response from a finite group of issue-focused NGOs.

The survey overwhelmingly showed that NGOs are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. The creation and continued existence of WWN is testament to this. WWN and the broader NGO community understand that human and financial resources for wetland conservation are scarce and that greater collaboration is important.

Developing a greater understanding of the role, the commitment and the potential of wetland NGOs is an important first step.

The WWN survey findings are offered in this review so that Ramsar Parties can consider the deployment of all resources - governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental - to ensure the greatest gain for wetlands, wildlife and people.

The respondent comments and survey findings focused on similar themes:

- the relationship with the Ramsar Secretariat is generally good, although many NGOs rely on WWN for access. Harnessing WWN's role is important.
- the relationships with National Focal Points are generally less positive. There is little contact with National Focal Points between each Ramsar Conference of the Parties and a belief was often expressed that governments did not respect the value of NGOs. Establishing a more robust mechanism for greater involvement and active communication between NGOs and National Focal Points would be welcomed.
- supporting and enabling volunteers and staff to be engaged in wetland conservation requires resources, but these resources lead to better programs and outcomes for Ramsar sites.
- Ramsar's Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness (CEPA) programme activities require greater advocacy and technical / financial support. Many NGOs have skills that could be more actively used in this process.
- some governments appear to actively discourage efforts to achieve strategic Ramsar site designations. Important wetlands are eligible for Ramsar listing but nominations are stalled by bureaucracies or government policy. A means for civil society to highlight these potential nominations would be welcomed.

A sentiment was also expressed that some governments did not actively use Ramsar as a tool to protect wetlands, with observations of government inactivity, reduced financial resources and reduced involvement of public officials. In some cases more needs to be done to enforce site protection.

WWN Recommendations for Ramsar Parties

Wetland NGOs around the world are committed to Ramsar and want to do more. The NGO community would welcome the opportunity to explore how increasing NGO contributions can be embraced by Ramsar Parties, National Focal Points and the Ramsar Secretariat. Based on the broad findings of this first survey, the WWN committee offers the following recommendations for Ramsar consideration:

- a) Recognize that NGOs often create a longer-term and more continuous link for Ramsar than Government Representatives.
- b) Develop more structured guidance for Ramsar Parties, and National Focal Points, on how to engage civil society, possibly as part of a CEPA programme.
- c) Explore options to expand on the International Organisation Partners status to include more NGOs and civil society organisations in the decision-making process for Ramsar at international, regional and country levels.
- d) Explore options for inviting NGO and civil society input into reporting on the state of wetlands, as well as having input to the Ramsar wetland nomination process and the Montreux Record.
- e) Prioritize funding and support for NGOs and civil society organisations that are working on Ramsar listed wetlands.

WWN would welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with Ramsar Parties and the Ramsar Secretariat.

