



WORLD WETLAND NETWORK

A global network of Civil Society Groups & NGOs working on wetland conservation

NGO Statement, Ramsar COP 13, Dubai, United Arab Emirates 21-29 October 2018

[NB: Due to the limited time allowed, World Wetland Network's Opening Statement to Ramsar COP13 was abbreviated. This is the full text developed in collaboration with 51 NGO delegates attending the Pre-COP Meeting held on Monday 22 October 2018 in Dubai.]

Conference Chair, Ramsar Secretary General, Contracting Parties, colleagues.

The World Wetland Network is grateful for this opportunity to address Ramsar COP 13. WWN is a global alliance of Non-Government and Civil Society Organisations, with long-term connection to local wetlands. Our members are a considerable force for conservation and wise use.

The Ramsar Global Wetland Outlook tells us that since 1970, loss of wetlands stands at 35%. Water pollution has worsened in almost every river in Latin America, Africa and Asia. A parallel global Citizen Science Survey by WWN, WWT and the Society of Wetland Scientists found more than one third of the remaining wetlands are deteriorating.

World Wetland Network remains concerned that the people hardest hit by this terrible record are disadvantaged populations, indigenous peoples, and local communities who depend on agriculture or coastal livelihoods. We know the full costs of wetland degradation. Financial costs. Human Costs. Loss of natural capital.

We understand the magnitude of the environmental crisis but what is the key driver? It's 35 years since the United Nations charged the Brundtland Commission with an urgent task: to resolve the conflict between globalized economic growth and the destruction of the ecosystems on which all life depends.

Decades have passed. The emphasis on prosperity through short-term and outmoded models of economic growth, is still at odds with our long-term survival as a species. Despite the costs, a stewardship ethic has eluded us.

NGOs worldwide have been raising the alert regarding wetland degradation caused by development projects with artificial construction impacting on natural flow of water. We urge the Parties to carefully consider the voice of civil advocates to implement existing resolutions and guidelines.

Our recent Citizen Science Global Wetland Survey found the statistically most important driver for positive wetland protection and wise use is engagement of Non-Government Organisations and local communities. We provide solutions and want to play our part in making the Ramsar Convention a success.

To this end, we call on the Contracting Parties to engage with Non-Government Organisations, indigenous people, and local communities at all levels, including Ramsar Site assessment and management, National Wetland Steering Committees and through active involvement at the COP.

We encourage the Contracting Parties to support full participation, transparency, capacity building, and learning among the different players in wetland protection. But to ensure this is effective, resources are needed. Small inputs at the local level will yield significant benefits for wetland wise use and conservation.

WWN's view on the documents before Ramsar COP13 are as follows:

Regarding Document 11.1 concerning the Secretary General's report, we note that whilst a high number of Contracting Parties have submitted their National Reports, some Parties are still not consulting NGOs in the compilation of the Reports. As a result, there are important factual gaps in some of the Reports, especially regarding the status of Ramsar Sites. We therefore call upon Parties to engage with NGOs in the compilation of future Reports.

Regarding Document 12 on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, we note from Figure 1 that the rate of designation of Ramsar Sites around the world appears to be slowing down and maybe even levelling off and would be grateful if the Secretariat can provide an explanation as to this trend? We are also concerned that 69% of the Ramsar Information Sheets from 146 (86%) Parties are out of date or missing, indicating that there is no information on the status of these Sites.

Draft Resolutions 1 and 2 deal with improving the effectiveness of the Ramsar Convention. World Wetland Network recommends exploring mechanisms that directly engage grass roots NGOs to complement the important contribution of the IOPs.

Furthermore, we are concerned that there has been a 16% increase in the number of Ramsar Sites that have been reported as being under threat and that it takes on average, eight years for Parties to address the threats at Sites where the threat has been confirmed. As a result, we call upon the Conference of Parties to investigate establishing a compliance mechanism for updating the information on Ramsar Sites and addressing threats to Ramsar Sites.

We support Draft Resolution 16's premise that effective integration of cultural values and local knowledge is vital. Civil society is committed to working with the Parties to implement low-tech solutions and holistic approaches for multiple benefits including climate adaptation and mitigation. In this regard, it is worthwhile to recognise the rice-paddy as a wetland that traditionally nurtured biodiversity on agricultural land.

Draft Resolution 18 on rapid assessments affirms the long-term value of a participatory approach. We would welcome accredited training to enable NGOs to undertake Rapid Assessments.

World Wetland Network is hosting a Youth Forum in the side events. We encourage the Contracting Parties and the Partner Organizations to meaningfully engage young people as key stakeholders in the Ramsar family. They are a powerful force to help prevent, stop and reverse the trend of wetland loss and degradation. To this end, we propose a youth-led review of youth engagement in the Ramsar Convention and other MEAs is conducted over the next three years, to inform preparation of a Youth Resolution for consideration at Ramsar COP14.

Congratulations to the Contracting Parties who have nominated Ramsar Wetland Cities to be accredited for the first time here in Dubai. This positive initiative highlights the way wetlands contribute to a sustainable urban future.

In less than three years, on World Wetlands Day 2021, the Ramsar Convention turns 50. What will be our legacy? There's no Planet B and we're out of time. Let's act boldly together at this meeting and beyond for conservation and wise use of wetlands.

Thank you
