



## A wave of activities for Ramsar Convention's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary

---

[01/02/11]

Media advisory

2011 is a special year for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and today is a special day – it's our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. On February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1971, 18 countries met in the Iranian city of Ramsar and created this intergovernmental treaty. Today we celebrate our 40 years, 160 member countries, and our 1,911 Ramsar Sites – Wetlands of International Importance – that cover over 186 million hectares, the largest global network of protected areas. A vast area for the sustainable use and enjoyment by all.

Since 1997, this day each year has been celebrated globally as World Wetlands Day (WWD) so this year we celebrate not just our 40<sup>th</sup> birthday but also WWD 2011 with the slogan "Forests for water and wetlands", recognising that 2011 has been declared the "International Year of Forests" by the United Nations.

### Working for Wetlands is working for Life

Ramsar defines wetlands as permanently or temporarily humid areas. They include lakes, rivers, ponds, marshes, swamps, peat bogs, beaches, reefs, mangrove forests ... and more. There is no doubt that wetlands are among the world's richest ecosystems, supporting all humankind in various ways – by providing freshwater, supporting fisheries including aquaculture, helping to regulate the water cycle, providing flood and storm protection, supporting some of the world's most stunning biodiversity, playing a significant role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, providing sustainable livelihoods to some of the world's poorest people, and offering a place to 'play' for those of us with leisure time. Wetlands are indeed more than just a muddy swamp – many economists looking at the ecosystem services they deliver put their value higher than for any other ecosystem. Yet wetlands continue to be destroyed to make way for inland and coastal developments and degraded through poor water allocation decisions, pollution, and excessive water extraction.

### Rising to the wetland challenge

There are many challenges for those of us working for wetlands to stop their loss and degradation but an overarching challenge is this: in 1971, when the Ramsar Convention was signed, the world population stood at 4,380 million. Forty years later, it is 6,895 million - and a further billion people will be added by 2024, just 13 years from now. The ever-increasing demand for food, water for agriculture, space for urban development and so on, are of real concern, so there is no time to be lost in dealing with how we are managing our wetlands now.

The Convention has many tools to encourage sustainable management of wetlands, but equally important are the tools that manage at an ecologically more 'coherent' scale, at the river basin level.



Those tools help in dealing with the global reality that many wetlands and their river basins cross national boundaries and require transboundary initiatives for effective management.

Another challenge for all environmental treaties is working across sectors. For Ramsar implementers, working with the water sector, which manages water rather than the wetlands that carry the water, requires raising the officials' awareness of the need to take full account of the suite of ecosystem services that wetlands deliver. Integrated water management initiatives can be counter-productive if wetlands and their ecosystem services are left out of them.

Most of all, the Convention's member countries need to harness the political will within their countries to raise the level of importance for sustaining the health of the wetlands that supply such essential services to all people whether rich or poor.

### **A time to celebrate**

Communicators tell us that people respond better to positive messages than to doom and gloom, although the latter is an understandable response from those of us alarmed by the loss and degradation of wetlands. Join us in a year of positive celebration by using this as an opportunity to publicize both the natural beauty and the practical utility of your wetlands. The Ramsar Secretariat has prepared materials we think you will find helpful in your celebrations, and each month we will be elaborating one of our 12 key messages about wetlands and the Convention to inspire you to action at international, national or local level.

To find out more about the 40<sup>th</sup> activities, go to [www.ramsar.org/40-Anniversary](http://www.ramsar.org/40-Anniversary). Additional information on World Wetlands Day is available here: [www.ramsar.org/WWD](http://www.ramsar.org/WWD).



## **The Ramsar Convention**

*The Ramsar Convention is a global intergovernmental treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. Signed in the Iranian town of Ramsar in 1971, the Convention established the basis for the management and sustainable use of wetlands. To date, it remains the only environmental agreement in the world devoted to a particular ecosystem.*

*Under this treaty, the member States, also known as “Contracting Parties”, undertake to protect and sustainably use all the wetlands on their territory by implementing the necessary local measures as well as through national and international cooperation. As part of their commitment, the countries actively collaborate to maintain the ecological characteristics of wetlands, including through the inclusion of wetland conservation in their national land-use and management plans.*

*Today, the Ramsar Convention maintains close relations with five governmental and non-governmental organizations (BirdLife International, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Wetlands International and WWF International), as well as numerous other global, regional and national environmental organizations. It has also entered into agreements with most other global environmental conventions and is the lead partner for the implementation of activities of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in relation to wetlands. The Convention also has strong partnerships with the business sector, including with the Danone/Evian Group and the Star Alliance through its Biosphere Connections partnership.*

**For more information or to set up interviews, please contact:**

Oana Penea, Communications Officer, +41 22 999 03 31; [penea@ramsar.org](mailto:penea@ramsar.org)