

4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat – the “Ramsar Convention”

**The Mission of the Ramsar Convention**

“Conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”

## Rationale

### Background

1. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan of the Ramsar Convention, the first of which was prepared in 1997<sup>1</sup>. The work of the Convention has since 1997 been organised around three pillars: the wise use of all wetlands through national plans, policies and legislation, management actions and public education; the designation and sustainable management of suitable wetlands for inclusion on the list of Wetlands of International Importance; and international cooperation on transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species and development projects that may affect wetlands.
2. The **wise use of wetlands** is the key concept orienting the work of the Ramsar Convention. “Wise use of wetlands” is defined as “the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development”. Wise use therefore has at its heart the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources, for the benefit of people and nature.

### Importance of Wetlands

3. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the “Ramsar Convention”) is the only ecosystem-focused convention. The Ramsar Sites network constitutes the largest network of internationally important areas in the world. This network of wetlands, comprising 2,186 sites covering 208.6 million hectares, constitutes the backbone of a global network of wetlands providing life-sustaining services to people and nature. The identification and the management of these wetlands, for conservation and sustainability, is a core purpose of the Convention, essential for the realisation of long-term benefits for biological diversity and people.
4. Wetlands are lakes and rivers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands and peat lands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, near-shore marine areas, mangroves and coral reefs, and human made sites such as fishponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and saltpans.
5. Wetlands deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water supply, water purification, climate regulation, flood regulation, coastal protection, biodiversity and useful fibres, recreational opportunities and tourism which contribute to sustainable livelihoods through economic activity linked to transportation, food, pollution control, fishing and hunting, leisure and the provision of ecological infrastructure.
6. Over 700 million people live without access to the basic services of clean water. Most of the water we collect and use comes from wetlands<sup>2</sup>. In addition to this, 2.5 billion people lack appropriate sanitation, impacting further on wetlands.

### Trends in Wetlands

7. At a global level, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment<sup>3</sup> found that inland and coastal wetland ecosystems were (in 2005) being lost at a rate faster than that of any other ecosystem, and the trend towards loss of wetlands resources has not been reversed since. The primary indirect drivers of degradation and loss are population growth and increasing economic development; the primary direct drivers of degradation and loss are infrastructure development, land conversion, water withdrawal, eutrophication and pollution, overharvesting and overexploitation, and invasive alien species.

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<sup>1</sup> 1997 – 2014: During which 3 Strategic Plans have been implemented: SP1 (1997 – 2002); SP2 (2003 – 2008); SP 3 (2009 – 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation, UNICEF, WHO, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005. **ECOSYSTEMS AND HUMAN WELL-BEING: WETLANDS AND WATER** Synthesis. World Resources Institute, Washington, DC.

8. While the world's population depends strongly for its well-being and livelihoods on wetlands services, half of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900. Wetlands are too often equated with wastelands and there is little awareness of the vital services that wetlands bring.
9. The loss of freshwater wetlands worldwide from 1997 to 2011 has been valued at US\$2.7 trillion per year, the loss of tidal marshes / mangroves has been valued at US\$7.2 trillion per year and the loss of coral reefs has been valued at US\$11.9 trillion<sup>4</sup>.
10. The Report "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Water and Wetlands"<sup>5</sup> notes that values of inland and coastal ecosystems services are typically higher than for other ecosystems, that the "nexus" between water, food and energy is one of the most fundamental relationships – and increasing challenges – for societies, that wetlands provide ecological infrastructure that can help to reach a range of policy objectives, that wetland loss can lead to significant loss of human well-being and have negative economic impacts on communities, countries and businesses, and that wetlands-related and water-related ecosystem services need to become an integral part of water management in order to make the transition to a resource-efficient, sustainable economy.
11. A study<sup>6</sup> soon to be released is expected to indicate that the trend is worsening, with 40% of wetlands having been lost in the last 40 years. Preliminary results show an average decline in area of 40% for both inland and marine/coastal wetlands between 1970 and 2008. In contrast to natural wetlands, the area of human-made wetlands tends to be increasing. These same results also show that the area of natural wetlands has declined across five Ramsar regions and by as much as 60 % in Europe and Asia.

#### **Review<sup>7</sup> of Progress in the Implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan**

12. The main conclusion of the review of implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan was that at an overall, global level, progress with the implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan can be characterised as a work in progress. It is noted that a number of core aspects of the Convention, such as identification of potential Ramsar Sites, inventories, preparation of management plans, monitoring of Site status and ecological character, and reporting under the Convention continue to require regular attention and action.
13. The other main finding is that there is an increasing sense of urgency amongst Contracting parties in the face of accelerating degradation and loss of wetlands and that responding to this requires enhanced engagement with drivers of loss and degradation in order to prevent, stop and reverse degradation through a mainstreaming of wetland values (goods, services and benefits) in public and private investments and management.

#### **Priority concerns<sup>8</sup> for the Convention in the next six years**

##### **Addressing degradation and loss of wetlands**

14. **Preventing, stopping and reversing the loss and degradation of wetlands:** The impacts on wetlands of extractive industries, of migration and urbanisation, of changing land use and economic activities are growing. Addressing and engaging the drivers behind these pressures on wetlands is a condition for limiting, adapting to, and mitigating their impacts. Realization of this

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<sup>4</sup> R. Costanza et al., Changes in the Global value of ecosystem services, *Global Environmental Change* 26 (2014) 152 - 158

<sup>5</sup> The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Water and Wetlands, IIEP; Ramsar, 2013

<sup>6</sup> Report "Progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets: An Assessment of Biodiversity Trends, Policy Scenarios and Key Actions" available at <https://www.cbd.int/gbo4advance> but will be officially launched at CBD COP 6 – 17 October.

<sup>7</sup> A review of the implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan has been completed and is available at [http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-strategicplansc47/main/ramsar/1-31-605\\_4000\\_0\\_](http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-strategicplansc47/main/ramsar/1-31-605_4000_0_).

<sup>8</sup> Particular challenges and conditions are described for each region in the COP 11 Regional Overviews and summarized in Annex 2, and in the responses to the Questionnaires to Contracting Parties and partners (see [http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-strategicplansc47/main/ramsar/1-31-605\\_4000\\_0\\_](http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-strategicplansc47/main/ramsar/1-31-605_4000_0_)

fact and its consideration in planning and decision making requires that wetland resources and wetland ecosystem benefits are measured, valued and understood widely within societies.

15. **Climate change and wetlands:** Understanding the critical importance of wetlands for mitigating the effects of climate change and adaptation to climate change in particular for its impacts on small island states<sup>9</sup><sup>10</sup>.
16. **Enhancing Cooperation:** Coordinating / participating in cooperation platforms<sup>11</sup> (site level, city, river basin, national levels) bringing together site and other managers, key private and public stakeholders, to promote mainstreaming of wetland values (goods, services and benefits) within water and biodiversity management and public and private investments.

#### **A robust Ramsar Site network**

17. **Implementing the Convention:** Improving compliance with Ramsar provisions concerning Ramsar Site updates, inventories of Wetlands of International Importance, maintenance of ecological character and reporting under the Montreux Record, management and the preparation of management plans for the wise use of wetlands of international importance, and implementation of the Convention on the ground through the presence of staff and appropriate infrastructure.
18. **Identifying and designating the most important wetlands as Ramsar Sites** to ensure their protection for the future and the inclusion of under-represented wetland types in the Ramsar Site network.
19. **Wise use of Wetlands:** A Ramsar Site network that is providing local, basin-level, and national and global benefits, is well and actively managed to ensure that the ecological functions are maintained.
20. **Synergies:** Enhancing efforts to streamline procedures and processes and to facilitate data sharing amongst parties responsible for – or cooperating in – the implementation of this and other MEAs and related agreements. Through cooperation increase the identification of synergies with collaborating MEAs and agreements. Increase the visibility of the Convention.

#### **Wetland values**

21. **Information on wetlands' services and benefits:** The values of the services and benefits offered by wetlands are still not well understood outside of specialised circles and are not taken account of in planning of public and private investments and initiatives that impact on the ecological character of wetlands. The non-recognition of the values of wetlands – for poverty alleviation as well as in the provision of ecosystem services – is seen as a major factor in both their decline and in the modesty of wetland restoration efforts.
22. **Analysing wetland services and benefits:** Analysing and expressing wetland services and benefits at river basin level, taking into account the connection between wetlands and upstream and downstream parts of the basin, considering all environment, economic and social aspects of these services, as well as considerations linked to infrastructure and culture.
23. **Communicating wetland services and benefits.** Mainstreaming wetland values and enhancing the visibility of the Convention through reaching out with effective communications to decision makers and the wider public for enhanced understanding of the contribution of wetland values (goods, services and benefits) to livelihoods, jobs and economic development.

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<sup>9</sup> The impacts of climate change induced sea-level rise, changes in hydrology and temperature of water bodies, coral bleaching in turn reduce the capacity of wetlands to mitigate the impacts of climate change, especially in small island states.

<sup>10</sup> Briefing note from the STEP and Secretariat to Contracting parties, UNFCCC Climate Change Meeting, Copenhagen, 7-18 December 2009; STRP Briefing Note No. 5: Evaluating the Risk to Ramsar Sites from climate change and sea level rise

<sup>11</sup> National Wetland Committees; biodiversity, water, regional bodies ...

### **Use of the Strategic Plan**

24. The 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021 calls for actions to be undertaken by the Contracting Parties, supported by the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) and by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat, and in coordination with International Organization Partners (IOPs) and partner intergovernmental organisations and MEAs.
25. It is understood that the Contracting Parties differ substantially in their situations and in their ability to implement the Convention. Each Party will wish to establish its own priorities within the Strategic Plan, develop its own work plan for implementing them, and consider its own use of its own resources. When reporting each Party will wish to explain its results in implementing the Strategic Plan.
26. As they tailor the Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021 to their own needs and capacities, Contracting Parties will also recall that, though this new plan helps them by articulating a shorter and more focused list of priority actions agreed by the COP, there are many other goals and actions that the Parties have committed themselves to working towards in the previous Resolutions and guidelines adopted by the COP. Parties should feel free to continue to work towards those additional commitments whenever appropriate and feasible
27. Contracting Parties will wish to coordinate and integrate their efforts aimed at implementing the Convention with measures which they take to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant strategies and policies.

### **International cooperation**

28. Sustainable Development Goals are currently under discussion. It is anticipated that the Ramsar Site network will have a direct relevance for any Sustainable Development Goals that emerge which are related to water quality and supply, food and water security, adaptation to climate change, energy supply, healthy living, biodiversity and sustainable use of ecosystems, sustainable human settlements, poverty eradication, innovation and the development of appropriate infrastructure.
29. The Ramsar Sites network, and the effective management of the 208.6 million ha. of Ramsar sites and more widely of the world's wetlands would constitute a major contribution to the work of other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including those related to water and / or biodiversity such as the Aichi Targets of the CBD and the Targets currently being developed by the Convention on Migratory Species, or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
30. The Ramsar Convention has put in place a series of arrangements for international cooperation in order to link Ramsar with global debates and processes related to sustainable development, water, and biodiversity.
  - The Ramsar Convention is in charge of the Inland Waters Biodiversity programme of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
  - The Ramsar Convention has granted IOP status to five leading organisations (Birdlife International, International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Wetlands International, and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)) which are actively contributing in all the regions and on a regular basis to the further development of policies and tools of the Convention and their application on the ground, particularly by assisting Contracting Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention.
  - The Ramsar Convention participates in the Biodiversity Liaison Group (BLG) bringing together the heads of the Secretariats of six biodiversity-related conventions (the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species and Wild Animals (CMS); the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; the Convention Concerning the Protection of the

World Cultural and Natural Heritage (WHC); the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)).

- MOUs signed with the World Bank, the UN World Tourism Organization (WTO), the Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Secretariat of CMS, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Ramsar International Organization Partners; the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA); the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER), the Society of Wetland Scientists, Ducks Unlimited (USA); the Stetson University College of Law (Florida, USA); the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity.

## **A Vision for the 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan**

“Prevent, stop and reverse the degradation and loss of wetlands and use them wisely”

## **Goals and Targets 2016 – 2021**

The Goals have been reformulated for the 4<sup>th</sup> Strategic Plan. These Goals reflect the four programmatic priorities for the 2016 – 2021 period for Contracting Parties and the Ramsar constituency<sup>12</sup>. In addition the Secretariat’s communications and partnership activities, that enable the Convention to be better branded, enjoy greater name recognition and garner significant additional funding through the Secretariat’s Partnership Unit, will be enhanced.

### **Goal 1: Addressing the drivers of wetland loss and degradation**

There is a sense of urgency due to the alarming rates of loss of wetlands and the intensification of threats to supply and quality of water observed in recent decades. The Ramsar constituency needs to engage more effectively with the drivers of change in order to mitigate threats, influence trends and restore wetlands. There is a need for more relevant and science-based information on wetland values and services performed in the water cycle, for flood control, climate change mitigation and adaptation, carbon sequestration and the provision of other goods, ecosystem services and social and cultural benefits.

- Target 1: Rate of wetland loss and degradation is reduced by 50% by 2021
- Target 2: By 2021, 80% of Contracting Parties report integration of wetlands into national / local policy / strategies and plans relating to water
- Target 3: By 2021, 80% of Contracting Parties report integration of wetlands into other sector<sup>13</sup> policies and plans
- Target 4: By 2021, water efficiency in agricultural production improved leading to a 50% increase in water productivity
- Target 5: By 2021, 50% of Contracting Parties reporting introduction of investment and insurance-related incentives within the agricultural, water, and mining sectors to promote the restoration of wetlands and the maintenance of their ecological character
- Target 6: 80% of Contracting Parties have completed an inventory of invasive alien species and have prepared and implemented management responses by 2021
- Target 7: By 2021, influencing the investment of \$1 billion to support wetland restoration and wise use

### **Goal 2: Effective conservation and management of the Ramsar Sites network**

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<sup>12</sup> Ramsar Constituency after Contracting Parties: National Focal Points, Administrative Authorities; Site and other Managers; STRP; Secretariat; IOPs; MEAs

<sup>13</sup> Relevant sectors include: poverty eradication and economic development, water resources management, agriculture, infrastructure, navigation, urban development

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Ramsar Sites constitute the largest network of internationally important areas in the world. This network constitutes the backbone of a global network of wetlands providing life-sustaining services to people and nature. The identification, assessment and wise use management of these wetlands is a core purpose of the Convention, essential for the realisation of long-term benefits for people and nature.

To achieve this, Contracting Parties with the support of other stakeholders will comply further with the Ramsar provisions and improve implementation of the Convention through the presence of staff on the ground and appropriate infrastructure and management and restoration activities. Performance needs to improve, with an emphasis on reinforcing performance on existing wetlands rather than designating additional Sites, so that the full benefits of wisely managed wetlands are realised.

- Target 8: 90% of Ramsar sites are updated on the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) by 2021
- Target 9: By 2021, 80% of sites in the Ramsar Sites network have management plans under implementation
- Target 10: By 2021, 80% of Ramsar sites are effectively managed without loss of ecological character
- Target 11: By 2021, the Ramsar Site network reaches a total of 2,500 Sites and 250 million hectares, taking account of under-represented types of wetlands
- Target 12: By 2021, resolution of status of Sites that are at risk of loss of ecological character within one calendar year of when they are notified as being at risk.
- Target 13: By 2021, RSIS offers comprehensive information on the Ramsar Site network and provides reference to other relevant information and data, is accessible and available to Contracting Parties, other Conventions and interested stakeholders

**Goal 3: Wise use of all wetlands through partnerships**

The wise and sustainable use of wetlands and their resources will ultimately involve a range of actors well beyond those responsible for the management and maintenance of Ramsar Sites and important wetlands. Engagement with partners will provide opportunities for the Ramsar constituency to involve other public and private actors in the wise use and management of wetlands, to influence sectors impacting on wetlands and identify and demonstrate win-win cases with other sectors. Cooperation platforms can be used to assess data, analyse trends and identify good practices, develop management and investment plans, identify training and capacity development needs, and develop mutually beneficial solutions to administrative and managerial responsibilities.

- Target 14: By 2021, 80% of Contracting Parties have adopted wetland policies that promote wise use principles and integrated water resources management
- Target 15: By 2021, a dynamic balance between water extraction and water flows that maintains ecological character of wetlands is in place in major river basins
- Target 16: By 2021, wetland governance platforms including relevant actors at river basin level are in place in 50% of river basins
- Target 17: By 2021, services and benefits of wetlands for poverty eradication and livelihoods are widely demonstrated and documented
- Target 18: By 2021, the values of wetlands for disaster risk reduction are clearly understood, leading to the repair and restoration of 50 million hectares of mangroves
- Target 19: By 2021, 50 million hectares of peatlands are protected and/or restored in recognition of their carbon capture and land retention ability

- Target 20: By 2021, the values of wetlands for leisure and recreation is appreciated by a broad spectrum of wetlands enthusiasts leading to greater investment in wetland management, policies and conservation
- Target 21: By 2021, the values of wetlands to water users is recognized in changed behaviour with respect to wetlands, and the setting up of payment for ecosystem services and other systems to secure continuity of quantity and quality of water
- Target 22: By 2021, the ability of wetlands to purify and de-toxify contaminated waters is respected by the water treatment and sanitation industry, leading to increased use of artificial wetlands and the maintenance of natural wetlands
- Target 23: By 2021, additional funding flows to support wetland conservation, management and restoration are secured, notably through access to the \$500 million GEF
- Target 24: By 2021, industry associations apply guidelines and practices for wise use of water and wetlands within the supply chain

**Goal 4: Raised awareness and involvement in wetlands**

Generating communications tools in the appropriate forms to reach the various concerned groups, which are able to influence the trends and threats, including high-levels decision makers from public and private sectors and relevant actors at site, river basin / catchment, city, sub-national, national and global levels.

- Target 25: By 2021, comprehensive guidance, based on science and best practices (for the conservation, management, restoration and river basin level integration of wetlands) is available to policy makers and practitioners in an appropriate format and language
- Target 26: By 2021, 80% of Contracting Parties report that major sectors impacting on wetlands acknowledge wetland services and ecological infrastructure in plans and investments
- Target 27: By 2021, 80% of Contracting Parties report enhanced participation of the public in wetland conservation, management, restoration and monitoring

**Monitoring and evaluation**

It is recalled that Decision SC41-25 indicated that assessments of the Strategic Plan should be included in the National Reports format. It is further recalled that Resolution XI.3 mandates that actions undertaken and achievements under the Strategic Plan at global and national levels should be reported through, respectively regional and global synthesis reports prepared by the Secretariat, and Contracting Parties' National Reports and Regional Initiative reports.