The **fight against plastic pollution** is **crucial for wetlands** and for the services they provide us

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The global production of plastic has surged since the mid-20th century. The annual production of two million metric tons in 1950 has now escalated to 348 million metric tons as of 2017, with projections indicating that plastic production capacity will double by 2040.[1]

The rise in plastics use has triggered a corresponding increase in plastic pollution. Only an estimated 9% of the plastics ever produced has been recycled, and 12% has been incinerated.[2] The rest is either still in use or has been disposed of. Much of it is mismanaged and makes its way into streams and rivers and other wetlands, and over time much of it reaches the oceans.

"Stocks of plastics accumulating in aquatic environments, such as streams, rivers, lakes, seas, and ocean, is projected to more than triple from 140 million tonnes in 2019 to 493 Mt in 2060."[3]

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1 See https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2020/10/breakingtheplasticwave_distilledreport.pdf.
2 See https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/topics/in-depth/plastics.
3 See https://www.oecd.org/environment/global-plastics-outlook-aa1edf33-en.htm.

Many wetlands and the species which depend on them are severely affected by plastic pollution. Wetlands act not only as conduits for plastic waste but it also settles in them over long periods, degrading to form harmful microplastics. Plants and animals are affected in a vast range of ways. For example, more than 800 marine and coastal species have been identified as affected through ingestion, entanglement, and other dangers[4]

Many migratory species are already threatened by habitat degradation and loss, and some are particularly vulnerable to plastic pollution in rivers and other wetlands.


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Addressing the crisis

Wetlands are vital for human survival. They are cradles of biological diversity on which countless species of plants and animals depend for survival. Wetlands are indispensable for the countless benefits that they provide humanity; yet study after study demonstrates that wetland area and quality continue to decline in most regions of the world.

Thus addressing the crisis of plastic pollution in our most productive and sensitive ecosystems is essential, not just for the ecosystems themselves and the natural life that they support, but for our own health and socio-economic wellbeing. In fact, a recent study found microplastics in human blood, evidence of the complexity of the plastics problem.[5]

The crisis will only be effectively addressed by a comprehensive approach. It is not enough to attempt to clean up the wetlands and oceans; integrated solutions are needed throughout the plastic life-cycle.

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution

In 2022, the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) adopted Resolution 5/14[6] to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution.

The Resolution requested the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to convene an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop the instrument, which is to be based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic, including its production, design and disposal.

In November 2023, the third session of the INC (INC-3) will meet in Nairobi, Kenya, to begin discussing the zero-draft text presented by the Chair of INC, with the goal of finalizing the agreement before the end of 2024.

4 See https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-83-en.pdf.
5 See https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/mar/24/microplastics-found-in-human-blood-for-first-time.
6 See https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3999257?ln=en.