



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS
CONVENTION SUR LES ZONES HUMIDES
CONVENCIÓN SOBRE LOS HUMEDALES

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

Press Release

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Gland, Switzerland, issued 31 January 2014.

Healthy wetlands are essential to feed growing global population

On Sunday 2 February, World Wetlands Day, the Convention on Wetlands calls for greater collaboration between the agriculture, water and wetlands sectors to ensure that healthy wetlands continue to provide clean water, food, and many other benefits to people and nature.

Across the world, 70% of all water withdrawn from wetlands, including aquifers, rivers and lakes, is used for agriculture. Wetlands support agriculture by providing water, transport and fertile soils but also by directly supplying food and other products such as thatch or biofuel. They also provide benefits to others further downstream such as helping to store water for drinking and for energy production and providing habitat for local and migrating animals.

Food production needs to increase by 60% to feed a growing global population that could exceed nine billion people by 2050. Agricultural water consumption is estimated to increase by 19%, with much of the increased demand being for irrigation in areas which are already water-scarce.

“Wetlands provide all the water we use in our daily lives, as well as the precious water needed to grow crops and produce food,” said Christopher Briggs, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. “They also reduce the impact of storms, floods and droughts, and clean polluted water. It is important to maintain wetlands and to manage them wisely to ensure that they continue to support agriculture.”

Agriculture’s growing demands for water and land are increasingly threatening the future of wetlands. The drainage and conversion of wetlands for cultivation or aquaculture are highly visible examples; equally harmful is the widespread use of pesticides and fertilizers which contribute to wetland pollution.

The degradation of these areas can have significant social impacts, in addition to environmental consequences. It is critical to involve local stakeholders in wetlands management and in decision-making. For example, national and international regulations might be difficult to enforce in local

situations in which the pressure on fertile land is high. In this context, incentivizing farmers to set aside part of their wetlands to ensure they remain healthy and continue providing their benefits and services could bring mutual benefits to the farmers and to the environment.

Wetland agriculture supports the livelihoods of many millions of people throughout the world. In many places it gives people an opportunity to escape from poverty. “The key requirement for sustainable development is to find an appropriate balance between the different uses of a wetland and the wide variety of benefits it provides” says Matthew McCartney of the International Water Management Institute.

Successful agricultural practices that support healthy wetlands include water efficient irrigation systems and drought-tolerant crops. Organic farming and other practices that reduce water pollution can also help maintain healthy wetlands.

In a broader context, capture fisheries in wetlands are a vital element of nutritional and food security in numerous communities throughout the developing world. “The diversity and value of wild fish, crustaceans, molluscs, amphibians and plants found in the world’s wetlands directly support the lives of over 60 million people in the developing world. Yet these resources are often threatened by national development decisions that are unaware of their value”, says Devin Bartley of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

“Experience and observations from many wetlands show that the most effective approaches are often local solutions implemented with local knowledge, within larger efforts,” said Christopher Briggs. “Only by sharing knowledge and solutions and collaborating across the agriculture, water and wetlands sectors we will be able to meet the challenge of feeding nine billion people in 2050.”

World Wetlands Day

World Wetlands Day is held on 2 February, marking the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, conservation organizations, and groups of citizens worldwide have organized activities to raise awareness of the importance and value of wetlands. Over 130 countries now celebrate this day all around the world. In 2014, the UN’s International Year of Family Farming, the Ramsar Convention has worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) to focus on agriculture and wetlands for World Wetlands Day with the slogan “Wetlands and Agriculture: Partners for Growth”.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for international cooperation and national action for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Almost 90% of UN member states are Ramsar “Contracting Parties”. By signing the Convention, the Parties

commit to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of International Importance and to plan for the "wise use", or sustainable use, of all of the wetlands in their territories. They also commit to cooperate internationally concerning transboundary wetlands and shared wetlands systems and species.

The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. It includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

IWMI is a non-profit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries: <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/> and is the lead institute in the CGIAR program on Water Land and Ecosystems <http://wle.cgiar.org/>

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

FAO is mandated to improve nutrition, increase agricultural productivity, raise the standard of living in rural populations and contribute to global economic growth. International Year of Family Farming website: <http://www.fao.org/family-farming-2014/en/>

Webinar

The Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel will host a webinar on 18 February 2014, on how to find the right balance when managing wetlands and agriculture. More: www.ramsar.org

For more information: www.ramsar.org

Facebook: [RamsarConventionOnWetlands](https://www.facebook.com/RamsarConventionOnWetlands); Twitter: [RamsarConv](https://twitter.com/RamsarConv)

Contact: Marina Monzeglio, Communications Officer, Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, +41 22 999 0331, monzeglio@ramsar.org