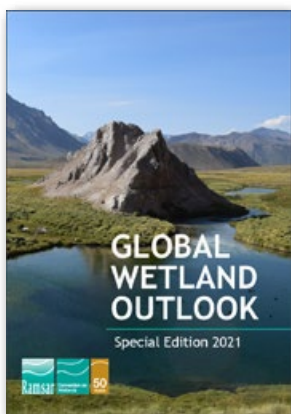


GLOBAL WETLAND OUTLOOK

Special Edition 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The *Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021* was prepared on the occasion of the Convention's 50th anniversary. Drawing on more than 30 major global and regional assessments and other recent scientific findings, it describes the pandemic and its implications; trends in wetlands since 2018; lessons for wetland wise use and protection; and how the Convention on Wetlands can be leveraged to address challenges facing wetlands.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we think about health and the environment, with more recognition of the importance of nature for health, including mental wellbeing. Ecosystem degradation and careless wildlife trade both increase the risks of pandemics, with up to three quarters of new diseases being zoonotic in origin. Meanwhile, water-borne diseases 'like infant diarrhoea' are increased by poor wetland management and cause millions of deaths every year.

People's health and livelihoods depend on well-managed wetlands. Control of emergent zoonotic diseases is increasingly seen as dependent on maintenance of well-managed, intact ecosystems and native biodiversity. Ecosystem approaches in wetlands can bring health benefits to all in line with One Health principles.

Deterioration of wetlands is widespread, but more wetlands are still reported as in 'good' rather than 'bad' ecological character. Biodiversity losses are linked to land-use change and still rising. Improvement in wetland ecological character is linked to extent of implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Convention.

Climate change is occurring faster than previously anticipated, with thresholds crossed and major changes inevitable. Wetlands are particularly impacted by sea-level rise, coral bleaching and changing hydrology, with Arctic and montane wetlands especially at risk. Changing weather increases risks of flooding and drought in many places.

Wetlands need to be part of delivering climate solutions. Recognition of the scale of benefits, and costs of their loss, is quite recent. Adequate water provision is fundamental, and wetlands are critical for water security. Undisturbed peatlands and coastal blue carbon ecosystems (salt marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, etc.) are powerful carbon sinks, but can be significant sources of greenhouse gases if degraded. Wetland actions need to increasingly be included in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), as well as in national adaptation and disaster risk reduction plans.

Impacts of agriculture on wetlands are becoming more apparent: Agriculture is a key driver of wetland degradation, but the future of sustainable food production is dependent on healthy wetlands and wise use. Over half of Wetlands of International Importance are damaged by agriculture. Transformation of agriculture is urgently needed to reverse these trends.

Enhanced integration and co-ordination are needed across the agriculture, urban development and wetland management sectors. Major changes are needed to reduce water use and pollution and to stop wetland conversion. Urban planning that incorporates wetlands delivers better health and well-being for city residents. The Convention on Wetlands has introduced a Wetland City Accreditation scheme to recognise cities taking exceptional steps to protect urban wetlands.

Broader stakeholder engagement brings diversified governance and management, and greater local ownership, but tensions remain.

Protection of human rights, including gender rights, needs to be a prerequisite of wetland conservation. Recognition of the scale of the environmental crisis is, however, also bringing new partners into wetland conservation and management.

A confluence of international policy can drive positive change. Failure to meet the Aichi Targets and slow progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), show that new approaches are needed. While some NDCs refer to wetlands, very few include specific actions or targets. The emerging Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework offers hope for confluence of actions towards sustainable development, biodiversity and climate change.

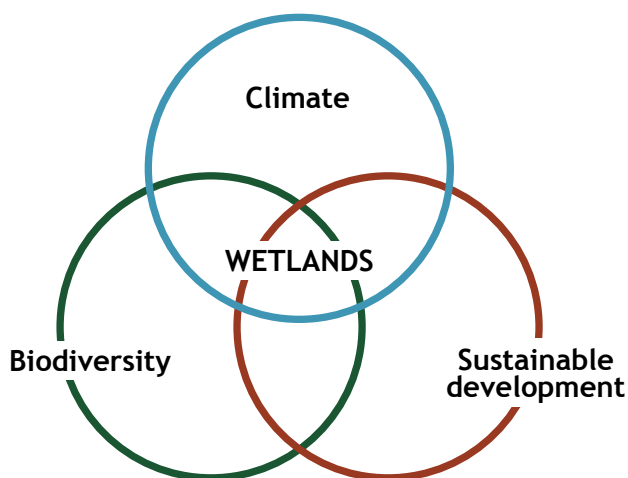
Wetlands are critical to delivering on global commitments relating to biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. ‘Nature-based solutions’, including multiple roles for wetlands, can help move beyond a narrow focus on human-built infrastructure.

Half a century after the Convention on Wetlands was adopted, its mission is more urgent than ever.

Continuing to benefit from the services wetlands provide while awarding them the protection they need requires global cooperation. The Convention plays a key role as a global forum for negotiation and consensus building on the management of wetlands. Wetlands of International Importance offer laboratories for achieving sustainable wetland management under different environmental conditions, pressures regimes and governance arrangements.

The Convention provides a means for catalysing wetland actions and tracking progress towards global targets relating to sustainable development, including as a co-custodian for SDG indicator 6.6.1, as well as relating to biodiversity and climate change. It provides a foundation for ambitious wetland restoration efforts during the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

There are many examples of success - good site management, improvement in species conservation status, progress with ecosystem restoration, and benefits in terms of water security, adaptation and mitigation outcomes. However, the world’s wetlands are still being lost at alarming rates. Implementation of the Convention needs to be strengthened to fully realize its potential.



The Convention on Wetlands

The Convention on Wetlands is a global inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The *Global Wetland Outlook* is published by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands in English, French and Spanish (the official languages of the Convention).

The *Global Wetland Outlook: Special Edition 2021* can be downloaded from: www.global-wetland-outlook.ramsar.org/

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