Saga Statement

Asian Wetland Symposium
Saga, Japan
7 to 11 November 2017

Introduction

1. RECOGNIZING the 25 years of Asian Wetland Symposiums (AWS) held in Japan, Malaysia, India, Vietnam, China, and Cambodia, that have contributed to understanding wetlands in Asia, influencing national and international wetland policies and plans, and promoting conservation and wise use of wetlands. Additionally ACKNOWLEDGING the statements from the previous seven AWS and the publication of the history of the AWS in the period 1992-2017;
2. ACKNOWLEDGING the importance of AWS 2017 in Saga City, Japan from 7th to 11th November, with the theme "Wetlands for Sustainable Life", with the overall objective to review achievements, practices, progress, and challenges faced related to conservation of wetlands in Asia and consider what should be done to mainstream conservation and wise use of wetlands. The AWS hosted 470 participants from 27 countries and regions;
3. NOTING Saga City faces the Ariake Sea, Kyushu encompassing the tidal flats i.e. Arao-higata, Hizen Kashima-higata, Higashiyoka-higata, that have been designated as Ramsar Sites, where the water systems provide valuable ecosystem services and have been traditionally used by local people, leading to the adoption of the Saga Water Statement (Saga Mizu Sengen) in 2003;
4. RECOGNIZING the increasing severe impacts of disasters being accelerated by climate change, and the fact that Asia is the most disaster prone region in the world, and the damage caused by floods that occurred very recently in northern Kyushu in July 2017;
5. RECALLING the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant international treaties such as the Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
6. AWARE OF the keynote presentations, nine oral sessions and field visits to the Ariake Sea and important tidal flats including Ramsar Sites. Innovative sessions at the AWS included Ariake Sea Session, Youth Session, Mayor's Roundtable, Participatory Poster Sessions, which were highlighted as that accelerated proactive communication among different stakeholders and generations; and
7. RECOGNIZING the usefulness of interactive and participatory poster sessions not only to promote effective peer-learning that can overcome barriers among various generations, stakeholders, cultures and academic backgrounds, but also to support future actions on the ground.

We, the participants of this symposium, declare as follows;

1. Enhance Networking and Collaboration among wetland sites

We affirm the recommendation of the Mayor's Roundtable on the importance of cooperation and collaboration (local, national and international) between Ramsar Sites and other wetlands with common characteristics and context for effective conservation and wise use inspired by champions at each site, and informed by both good and poor practices.

2. Ensure a Holistic Approach to Conserve Coastal Wetland Ecosystems

We have learned from the history and ongoing research of Ariake Sea including the serious damages caused by large scale developments at other coastal sites across the region, we must take a holistic approach at landscape level. We also need to work at appropriate scales to conserve, restore coastal wetland ecosystems throughout Asia.

3. Implement Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR)

We recognize the importance of Eco-DRR actions on the ground by combining with traditional practices and scientific knowledge, quantifying its effectiveness through research, and pursue its incorporation into policies, legal frameworks or administrative measures at national and local levels.

4. Conserve and Revive Urban Wetlands

We recognize the important role of urban as well as peri-urban wetlands in providing ecosystem services and in sustaining and re-establishing the connection between humans and nature. Therefore we call for urban wetlands to be incorporated into urban land use planning and legal frameworks, CEPA for urban decision makers, private developers to be encouraged to adopt good practices so that they can be conserved and restored as healthy ecosystems.

5. Encourage Responsible Wetland Tourism

We highlight that conserving wetland ecosystems can serve as the foundation for successful implementation of responsible tourism (e.g. Suncheon Bay (R.O. Korea) and Chilika Lake (India)), which can be a model to achieve economic development and wetland conservation.

6. Enhance Local Production Initiatives in Wetlands

We learn from many best practices introduced by various participants, e.g. by appropriate branding such as Ramsar Logo, which demonstrate that sustainable agriculture, fishery or forestry could not only revitalize local communities by providing added-values to local economies, but also maintain and rehabilitate wetlands.

7. Ensure Youth Leadership in Wetland Conservation

We recognize the capacity of youth to exchange ideas between various stakeholders, build networks, and

actively participate in various wetland conservation actions. We expect youth leadership to enable the AWS to continue its vital contribution to effective wetlands management.

8. Deliver CEPA Programs that lead to Direct Conservation Actions

We acknowledge the importance of structured, targeted and long-term approach supported by sustainable finance and skilled staff to deliver CEPA program which leads to positive conservation outcomes on the ground. We need to replicate and disseminate those good practice across the region through existing structures and partnerships.

We urge all Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands, organizations, participants and concerned citizens to build upon the first 25 years of the AWS to ensure the AWS continues to fill its vital role into the future.

Lastly, thanking the Government of Japan, Saga Prefecture, Kumamoto Prefecture and Saga City, Kashima City, Arao City, Ramsar Regional Center-East Asia and all sponsors and supporters for their generosity and hospitality in successfully hosting the Asian Wetland Symposium in Saga, from 7th to 11th November 2017.

And that the organizers seek the support and assistance of the Government of Japan to convey this statement to the forthcoming Asian Regional Meeting on the Convention on Wetlands, the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention to be held in Dubai in October 2018.

Saga, 10 November 2017

Saga Statement (Annex)

The Saga Statement highlights the most significant messages extracted from all the sessions of the AWS 2017. This Annex illustrates the key discussion points and specific examples that are not included in the Saga Statement, but are considered to be particularly important.

Ariake Sea (including Field Visits)

1. Tidal flats ("Higata" in Japanese) nurture not only numerous living organisms but also a variety of culture that was born through wise use of wetlands. In order to pursue a truly sustainable society, we must make efforts to hand over both rich biodiversity and the culture derived from tidal flats to our future generations.
2. Three courses of field visits, namely the Saga Course, Kashima Course and Arao Course were organized in and around the three Ramsar Sites in Ariake Sea. In Saga Course, we recognized the potential of attractive eco-tourism program in Saga, where tourists can enjoy and learn about wetlands comprehensively, not only on the ecosystems of river and tidal flats, but also on wise use and cultural values of wetlands. In Kashima Course, we acknowledged that wetlands play an important role in purifying water, realizing the growth of Sake (Japanese rice wine) industry, which now serves as a main pillar of the local community's economy. In Arao course, we understood that we should not rely on a single income source from tourism alone; it is better to pursue multiple income sources for a more sustainable economy. Since Ariake Sea is blessed with rich wetland products such as crabs, fish and seaweeds, combining tourism with such wetland based industries would enable the region to promote sustainable economic development. Another important finding was that a traditional land reclamation method used in Japan for four hundred years may serve as a low cost and an environmentally-friendly technique, compared to the modern technology.

Wetlands and Disaster Risk Reduction / Climate Change

1. Recognizing the increasing impacts of disasters accelerated by climate change particularly in the Asian region, and confirming the wetland's huge potential for ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (Eco-DRR) and climate change mitigation and adaptation, we should further strengthen international partnerships to promote sharing of knowledge (including scientific, traditional, local knowledge and best/poor practices).
2. Recognizing the huge carbon stock of mangroves and sea grass beds (i.e. Blue Carbon), peatlands and soil, we should further promote research and effective countermeasures to reduce the carbon emissions from wetlands and watersheds. Check dams that may prevent soil erosion, and prevention of peatland fire through introduction of non-burning agriculture techniques were discussed as some of the countermeasures for climate change mitigation.
3. Recognizing the rapid change of the socio-economic and environmental status of each region, local self-governance should be strengthened to enable community-based adaptive management. In order to strengthen local self-governance, we should provide sufficient opportunities for the local, vulnerable communities to participate in decision making processes (e.g. develop village action plans) through effective facilitation.

Wetlands and Policy / Change / International Cooperation

1. Recognizing the fact that a significant number of wetlands in the Asia-Pacific is transboundary, we recommend that monitoring data should be shared through an international network, and such data should be effectively utilized in identifying the issues and in promoting collaborative actions for wetland conservation through regional and international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.
2. Learning from the experience of conserving Black-faced Spoonbills, usage of attractive and/or daily accessible tools (e.g. fashion goods and social networking services) is recommended to connect various stakeholders in different generations, which can form a basis of regional and international cooperation.

Wetlands and Use of Natural Resources / Agriculture / Fisheries / Food Security

1. Recognizing the increasing impacts of climate change on the livelihoods of vulnerable communities, we recommend to develop and disseminate climate-resilient sustainable agriculture/fisheries techniques (e.g. water saving agriculture) throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

2. The experience of the Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA) in Fiji is considered as a form of Satoumi. Community-driven wetland management based on traditional governance systems involving traditional knowledge, customary tenure and resource access, traditional decision making processes, traditional social networks are capable of enhancing pride, ownership, adaptive capacity, and collective community efforts in sustainably managing the wetlands.
3. Learning from the good practices in producing the White Stork's Rice, more efforts should be made to develop and extend techniques that can restore wildlife habitats in the landscapes of agriculture/fisheries (e.g. maintaining water for a longer period in rice paddies).

Urban Wetlands / Wetland City / Natural Infrastructure

All the key messages from this session were included in the Saga Statement.

Wetlands and Youth

1. We, the youth, should make further efforts in conducting a wide variety of attractive activities such as singing, dancing, cooking, drawing, making exhibits in festivals etc. particularly in public institutions including schools, community centers, hospitals, nursing homes, etc. in order to promote CEPA among people with low environmental awareness.
2. We, the youth recognize the necessity to brush up our knowledge and skills in order to make more contributions in the future. We would like to make further efforts not only to obtain scientific knowledge but also to train our communication / presentation / facilitation skills from professionals through actively participating in volunteer activities or internships related to wetland conservation.

Wetlands and Sustainable Tourism

1. Based on the past experiences, we learned that local communities with abundant knowledge on local natural resources have a potential to play a significant role in alleviating the negative impacts of tourisms on natural ecosystems. Involvement of local communities should therefore be further promoted in order to pursue responsible tourism.
2. Recalling the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, we recommend to provide tourists with on-the-site experience at wetland sites (e.g. enjoying food directly harvested from wetlands), so that the connection between tourists and wetlands will become stronger, and the tourists' motivation toward wetland conservation and wise use will be enhanced.
3. Entry fees, Crab Banks (increasing crab population and utilize the crabs as tourism resources) and utilization of payment for ecosystem services are considered as good practices to simultaneously realize wetland conservation and income generation through sustainable tourism. In addition, appropriate regulatory control and environmental monitoring should also be conducted to ensure responsible tourism.
4. Recognizing the fact that the correct definition of "sustainable tourism" under the World Tourism Organization is not being utilized properly, more efforts should be made to disseminate the proper definition.

Wetlands and Culture

1. Cultures do not derive from unused and forgotten wetlands. Since wetland cultures need many years to develop, having wetland culture is a synonym that wetland has been wisely used.
2. Among the major ecosystem services (functions for provision, control and culture), it should be noted that provision function including supply of food, water, housing, clothes are all deeply connected with culture.
3. Wetlands have site-specific, symbolic values for local people. These values have potential to serve as the most powerful driving force for wetland conservation from a bottom-up approach.
4. Not only nature with limitation of seasonality, but also culture is an indispensable part of sustainable tourism to invite more visitors.
5. To clarify the characteristics of Asian wetland cultures, comparison with those of other regions would be beneficial in the next step.

Wetlands and CEPA / Education for Sustainable Development

1. Wetland centers are places where people and wildlife interact and when any activity related to communication, capacity building, education, participation, and awareness (CEPA) occurs that contribute to wetland conservation. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands recognizes wetland centers as key places for

learning about the conservation and wise use of wetlands through CEPA interventions, and as catalysts for activities that support the implementation of the Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 (Ramsar COP12 Resolution XII.9). Wetland centers are important vehicles that convey messages and encourage behavior change and actions for wetland advocates and stakeholders.

2. Wetland centers can maximize their impact by joining a network of wetland centers. Through the network, expertise, resources, experience and best practices are shared among the members of the network. Wetland centers can be linked at the sub-national, national and international levels. Wetland Link International (WLI) is a global network of wetland centers that supports the development of new and enhancement of existing wetland centers. WLI - Asia facilitates the coordination among members in Asia. The Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia (RRC-EA) currently acts as the Secretariat of WLI-Asia.

Wetlands and Biodiversity / Restoration / Reintroduction

1. Confirming the research outcomes that indicate a higher productivity in sites with higher biodiversity, we recognize that maintaining ecosystem services derived from biodiversity can serve as the foundation for improved agriculture and fisheries practices in the long run.
2. Learning from the experiences of Nakaumi Lake, movements by local communities can play a key role in preventing negative impacts from development projects, and promoting designation of wetlands as Ramsar Sites. However, due to lack of coordination among stakeholders, community-based management alone is not sufficient to prevent wetland degradation. Comprehensive strategy combining political, economic, social and technological approach would be necessary to conserve wetlands in the long term.