

Joint IOP Statement at the 47th Ramsar Standing Committee

Delivered by Wetlands International on behalf of the 5 IOPs

As Ramsar International Organization Partners, we would first like to warmly welcome the Convention's new Secretary General, Mr. Christopher Briggs, and to assure him, the Secretariat and the Contracting Parties of our continuing, full support.

Wetlands are still degrading and being lost faster than any other habitat, especially where human populations are increasing and where pressures for water and economic development is greatest. But it is also true that wetlands are part of the solution to alleviate stress on water supplies as a basis for human well-being and development. It is disappointing therefore that while business leaders in Davos highlighted water risks as those meriting their highest concern, and there is growing momentum to give more emphasis to "access to water" in the post 2015 development agenda, there is precious little attention given to the fundamental need to restore the water system in the landscape – in which wetlands play a critical role. The Water and Wetlands TEEB report amongst others brings together valuable evidence in this respect. And there is increasing activity by civil society, governments and businesses to demonstrate wetland solutions. But we believe that a greater, concerted effort is needed by the Ramsar community to bring wetlands more clearly into the water and development agendas. The revision of the Strategic Plan for the Convention is a timely opportunity to signal the need and opportunity to the wider community and to invite joint action. We also call on Parties to develop appropriate national and local mechanisms to make wetlands a central part of strategic inter-sectoral planning: with plans reflecting the values of wetland natural capital, bringing to the fore the short- and long-term multiple benefits that wetlands deliver to society if used wisely. Engagement with national implementation strategies to meet the Aichi Targets is one of several such opportunities.

This year's theme on agriculture on World Wetlands Day was helpful to draw attention to the central role that wetlands play in the water and food nexus. Of course wetlands have been used and valued for agricultural purposes for centuries. But wetlands are increasingly at risk from the escalating demands for food production. The conversion or intensification of wetland use for agricultural purposes threatens to diminish other crucial ecosystem services that wetlands provide.

We therefore believe it is important for the Ramsar Convention to actively engage in seeking an appropriate balance between wetland wise use and the sustainable increase in agricultural productivity. IOP members – with their expertise and networks from these two sectors play an important role in brokering inter-sectoral partnerships and demonstrating how mutual benefits for wetlands and agriculture can be attained.

As both developed and developing countries struggle to prepare for and deal with the impacts of floods and droughts, it is vital to highlight how degradation of wetlands is often an underlying cause of disaster risk and climate change vulnerability. And, in terms of solutions, there is a need to demonstrate how healthy wetlands can help to reduce the impacts of natural hazards. In this context, the IOPs welcome the draft Resolution on Disaster Risk Reduction and encourage Parties to take steps to integrate natural ecosystem based solutions in policies and investments for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Wetlands International, drawing on IOP expertise and using its experience in the Partners for Resilience programme, will work with the Philippines government and the Secretariat to finalise the draft Resolution. Through working alongside humanitarian and development partners, Partners for Resilience has demonstrated in nine countries that sustaining and restoring wetlands is a necessary and cost-effective strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and climate change adaptation, with strong benefits for poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation. The IOPs also note that three major global policy agendas are currently being negotiated – the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, the post-2015 global framework on disaster risk reduction (HFA-2), and the post-2015 global climate change agreement. In this context, we encourage Parties to capitalise on this opportunity to signal the value of ecosystem-based approaches as part of a more holistic approach to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

The good management of Ramsar sites remains an important focus for the IOPs. In our statement at last year's Standing Committee meeting, we highlighted the importance of Ramsar Advisory Missions as a key tool of the Convention to assist and support Contracting Parties for wetlands where negative changes in ecological character occur. We note the increasing frequency of such reports as the number of Contracting Parties and of Wetlands of International Importance grows. Significantly, BirdLife International has recently launched a list of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in Danger – a list of 335 sites under threat from damaging development – much of which is

poorly planned and does not take environmental values into account. 55 of these sites are fully or partially designated as Ramsar sites and at least a further 70 are candidate Ramsar sites. Urgent actions are needed to prevent the further damage or loss of these sites. One such site is Lake Natron in Tanzania, the most important breeding site for Lesser Flamingos, which was the subject of a Ramsar Advisory Mission in 2008, but still faces the ongoing threat of soda ash mining. The IOPs are committed to help strengthen and implement the Missions, but stress that it is important for the Secretariat to ensure there is sufficient capacity and resources to enable these to take place effectively.

The once-in-a-decade IUCN World Parks Congress, to be held this November in Sydney, Australia, will offer a rare opportunity to assess and explore potential ways to further highlight the role of Ramsar sites and other wetland protected areas in the bigger landscape, for biodiversity as well as for human well-being. It will also be a moment to foster international cooperation for the conservation and management of wetlands shared by two or more countries. The IOPs would also like to encourage the host country Australia, to seize the opportunity of the Congress to designate the Great Barrier Reef as a Wetland of International Importance.

Finally, we return to the roles of IOPs in delivering the Strategic Plan for the Convention. Ramsar is unique among MEAs in having official NGO partners to support the achievement of the Convention's goals. As IOPs, we are keen to maximise the advantage of this arrangement according to our shared goals for wetlands. We can especially add value by connecting the science, policies and practices required to achieve real and lasting impact. In this context, we are pleased to see the IOP membership growing and would like to express our support to the application of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. We do also recognise that there is room for improving further the synergy between the IOPs as well as coordination with the Secretariat and Parties to achieve a greater impact. By combining our capacities we believe we can be even more effective. In this regard, the IOPs would like to encourage the Secretariat to take a proactive convening role and we are keen to discuss how this can best be achieved.

Thank you for your attention.