

Day 1, Agenda item
3/15/17
Delivered verbally
by Jane
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IOP speech at Ramsar Standing Committee 53

Delivered by Jane Madgwick, CEO of Wetlands International, on behalf of the 6 IOPs

We thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee, on this its 53rd meeting. We greatly appreciate the hard work of the Secretariat in preparing the meetings and in this regard, on behalf of the IOPs, I would especially like to offer warm thanks and appreciation to Mireille Katz, who is attending her last Ramsar Standing Committee before retiring, after 33 years of service to the Convention Secretariat.

We also warmly welcome Martha as the new Secretary General, together with the new Secretariat staff. In her short time in post we have noted her enthusiasm to revitalize engagement with the IOPs, which we believe can further improve the implementation and impact of the Convention. We look forward to capturing this momentum in the anticipated joint Framework for Cooperation, and to energetically engage in collaborative action. We anticipate that this will help to bring a stronger profile for wetlands in the global agenda, enhanced synergy, communications and funding. For example, to raise wetlands higher on the global agenda where they belong, we see the need for a forward looking, hard-hitting report that will highlight the risks and consequences of business as usual for wetlands and society in the future, in much the same way as the Stern report has helped to put climate change on the global agenda. A key focus of our collaboration will be to work with countries to improve the mainstreaming of wetlands into implementation of food, water and climate security strategies by influencing public and private sector policies and finance, linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement.

There were many notable developments in the past year which have helped to connect wetlands to those global agendas.

The focus of World Wetlands Day on Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) was well received multiple events around the world. It helped to reinforce the importance of ecosystem-based approaches to DRR that was highlighted in the

Sendai Framework as well as the SDGs and Paris Agreement. As part of this, a high-level round table on the role of wetlands in DRR was held in Geneva with the Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, UNISDR, the International Federation of the Red Cross, The Philippines and Japan, as well as the CEOs of Wetlands International and IUCN. The key conclusions of the dialogue were carried through to the Global Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction that has just ended in Cancun, Mexico - where the importance of integrated water resource management and investing in wetlands as natural infrastructure to combat rising water risks, was underlined in many sessions and in the final outcome statements. The Secretariat also combined forces with IOPs in side-events in the CBD COP last December in Cancun and in Bonn recently for the UNFCCC SBSTA, highlighting the need to boost wetland initiatives for biodiversity conservation and to enhance overall resilience to climate change.

The recently launched “Water Shocks” report by Wetlands International connects issues of African wetlands to mainstream political concerns in Europe. It explains how shrinkage of the seasonal floodplain systems in the Sahel, largely due to poor water management, is undermining human well-being and compelling people to migrate, including to Europe. The report has been welcomed by African regional fora and the European Union and endorsed by leading humanitarian organisations. It raises awareness of the vital role of wetlands as a basis for sustainable development in this fragile region and the heavy risks of allowing their continuing decline which is felt across continents. Dialogues like this, that connect different sectoral agendas, open up significant new opportunities for re-thinking water management and supporting wetland rehabilitation, as part of strategies and investments that aim to tackle poverty and climate change adaptation.

We are now into the second half of the current planning triennium and it is an important moment to reflect on what has so far been achieved and refine our focus and energy towards reaching our goals.

I would like to mention a few breakthroughs:

2016 was a turning point for peatlands in terms of gaining government and private sector commitment to large scale rehabilitation of drained peatlands in countries such as Russia and Indonesia and in the establishment of a consortium for exchange of lessons learned and best practices in peatland management. Cooperation between Parties, the Secretariat and IOPs since the COP in Uruguay has also helped to establish renewed momentum to resource a Global Peatland Initiative. The STRP has also supported this with the development of guidance for designating important peatlands and case studies.

We also recognize that prospects for improved management of the 15.26 Mha of wetlands in India have improved since the Supreme Court directed the Indian government to halt conversion of wetlands and to frame a policy for their protection. This will lead to strengthened policy and regulatory framework for wetlands.

We anticipate to celebrate, later this week, the designation of 5 new Ramsar Sites designated by Madagascar with WWF support and covering a total area of over 500.000 hectares. And we note the important work of WWT in Madagascar to improve the management and community livelihoods around Lake Sofia linked with the introduction of the almost extinct Madagascar pochard. We applaud their ambition to develop a country-wide programme to enhance wetland biodiversity.

Whilst these are encouraging outcomes, we feel it is important to reflect on and further strengthen what we have achieved in developing Ramsar sites to date. Many Ramsar sites are currently in danger due to major infrastructure proposals, particularly in Catamarca in Argentina and Gediz Delta in Turkey, where flamingo and other waterbird populations are currently being threatened. We see that the rapid harbour development is encroaching on coastal mudflats worldwide - areas designated as Ramsar Sites because they are vital for migratory waterbird populations – and we call on Parties to be vigilant in protecting these, for example at Moreton Bay in Queensland, Australia. We call in general upon the Ramsar community to work harder together to ensure that the ecological character of Ramsar sites are maintained. And we encourage the planned review and analysis of Ramsar Advisory Missions anticipating that this will lead to concrete

suggestions on how to strengthen and make ever more efficient one of the key instruments of the Convention.

mech **The IOPs greatly appreciate the work of the STRP** over the past year and continue to support this. The work on developing the new State of the World's Wetlands report and engagement with and influence of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is noteworthy. Additionally, in response to Resolution XII.5, we welcome the effort made to refocus STRP outputs towards targeted Policy Briefs, which can more effectively bring the STRP's advice and insights into policy and practice. We urge the Secretariat to create a feedback ~~format~~ *mech* to enable STRP to further reflect on the usefulness of this new approach. We also welcome the progress made in developing guidance on Earth Observation as a "best practice" tool for inventorying, mapping and monitoring wetlands, including Ramsar Sites, and note the relevance of this to SDG indicator (6.6.1) on wetland extent.

Looking ahead, we have confidence in the ability of the Parties to achieve the goals set out in the 4th Strategic Plan, but seek a resumption of work to support the implementation of the Plan, including the development of improved indicators in response to the Contracting Parties' request in COP12 Resolution XII.2. This decision instructs the Standing Committee, as a high priority, to refine the potential indicators and present the proposal to COP13 for approval, a task which has not been progressed yet.

Looking forward to 2018, we welcome the theme of 'Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future' for the upcoming COP in Dubai. In this context, Parties may be interested to hear of the work of WWT in Dubai to design a new wetland visitor and education centre at the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary. And related to this very important and timely urban theme, we urge the Standing Committee to accelerate the implementation of COP12 Resolution 10 on Wetland City Accreditation. It seems now urgent for the Secretariat to launch the Call for Applications especially as a large number of cities have already expressed their interest to apply.

We also see COP13 also as a great opportunity to bring attention to the valuable but largely overlooked wetlands of the Middle East. Many of these wetlands are coming under severe pressure from new socio-economic development, as efforts to diversify economies in the region gather pace.

Finally, we reflect on the current uncertain and sometimes troubling political times in which we are working. It can sometimes feel as though the world is moving away from multilateral and cooperative solutions in favour of unilateralism and self-interest. The Ramsar Convention was one of the earliest examples of environmental multi-lateralism and this DNA binds wide networks of people and governments together in implementing solutions. As the challenges to wetlands increase, the Convention needs to demonstrate solidarity amongst Parties and show that by working as a global community to resolve the complex issues of wetlands, its' work is inclusive, impactful and sustainable. To achieve the purpose for which the Convention was established, we suggest that it is urgent for the entire Ramsar community to put back wetland conservation at the centre of the Convention's work and to avoid being too distracted or diverted by an increasing number of bureaucratic and procedural matters.

to be more outward looking

Thank you

