

Draft resolution on agriculture in wetlands

Submitted by the Czech Republic

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to review the attached draft resolution for consideration at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Draft Resolution XIII.xx

Agriculture in Wetlands

1. CONCERNED that up to 80% of wetlands have been lost in many areas of the world since 1700 (Davidson 2014), and that the key driver in the loss and degradation of wetlands, as indicated by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), has been the conversion and drainage of land for agriculture production, groundwater depletion and abstraction of water for crop irrigation, as well as the use of agrochemicals, fertilizers and pesticides;
2. FURTHER CONCERNED that many wetland areas that were for centuries used for sustainable agricultural production have been drained in the past 150 years, either intentionally by drainage, with a sharp increase in drainage since the 1960s, or indirectly by groundwater depletion;
3. AWARE that in Resolution VIII.34 (2002), the Ramsar Convention has recognized that wetlands can play important roles in relation to agriculture, such as abating the effects of storm and flood events, thus helping to protect both habitation and agricultural land, and NOTED the high dependence of local communities on wetland resources, particularly in developing countries and notably in terms of small-scale subsistence agriculture, domestic water supply, and other uses that may contribute directly to poverty alleviation;
4. FURTHER AWARE that the Resolutions X.31 (2008) and XI.15 (2012) stress the importance of sustainable rice paddy cultivation for local and global livelihoods;
5. RECALLING the recognition by the Rio+20 Conference in paragraph 111 of the Outcome Document (Brazil, 2012) of the need to promote more sustainable agriculture and to maintain natural ecological processes that support food production systems;
6. RECALLING the 2015-Paris Pact on water and adaptation to climate change in the basins of rivers, lakes and aquifers, which calls for enhancing the services of water-related ecosystems in adaptation to climate change through inter alia protection and restoration of wetlands and coastlines, reforestation and other Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM);

7. REALIZING that wetlands are often intricately connected to groundwater - either by the wetland replenishing groundwater or groundwater feeding the wetland, or a combination of the two depending on time and space – human and climatic impact on one system will affect the other;
8. REALIZING that the progressive lack of water in the landscape and scarce natural vegetation cover have caused an increase in temperature fluctuations in terms of both their frequency and amplitude, and that, in many places of the world, the summer maximum temperatures are getting too high and water shortages too severe for comfortable living both of humans and livestock as well as for an optimum yield in crops;
9. FURTHER REALIZING that severe shortages but also surpluses of water occur more and more frequently in many parts of the world and that the increasing frequency of persistent droughts (Resolution VIII.35, 2002) as well as extreme weather events, such as thunderstorms/hailstorms and also late frosts, lead to high losses of agricultural production and thus threaten food security and efforts to eradicate poverty;
10. CONCERNED that the expanding agriculture, which put little consideration for local soil and climatic conditions, and land surface configuration, has an adverse impact on landscape and species diversity (including wetland biodiversity), leads to severe soil erosion and leaching of nutrients, and consequently to the loss of soil fertility for agriculture and also of wetland values and functions;
11. ALSO CONCERNED that climate change and accelerated desertification will have major impacts on water availability and distribution (Resolution X.24, 2008), affecting wetland functions and values as well as agricultural production;
12. FURTHER CONCERNED that the continuing drainage of wetlands, and especially of peatlands, for agricultural production, forestry and natural resource exploitation further accelerates climate change (Resolution XII.11, 2015);
13. AWARE that wetlands provide ample resources that can be used for human and animal nutrition, as building materials and for energy production;
14. FURTHER AWARE of high primary and secondary production of some wetlands and of their important role in nutrient and water retention as well as contribution to the mitigation of climate change (Resolution X.24, 2008);
15. ACKNOWLEDGING that many examples from all over the world show that agriculture and forestry have been conducted successfully while preserving wetlands and that many wetlands worldwide still remain important sources for fisheries, crop production and animal husbandry;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

16. CALLS UPON Contracting Parties to, instead of draining wetlands for agriculture, use any opportunity to develop sustainable agriculture in wetlands to stop further land drainage and properly manage aquifers, enhancing water retention time in the landscape, re-creating local atmospheric water cycles and contributing to climate change mitigation and alleviation of adverse impacts of droughts as well as reducing peak water discharges coupled with high nutrient and organic matter runoff;

17. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to identify and support traditional uses of wetlands and their biodiversity, ensuring sustainable and wise use of wetlands for fisheries, sustainable forms of crop cultivation, sustainable reed harvesting, wetland grazing or mowing, berry picking, and floodplain forestry, as well as to search and promote novel uses of wetlands such as the use of integrated buffer zones and constructed wetlands for the treatment of agricultural runoff or use of degraded peatlands for sphagnum-moss cultivation and other kinds of sustainable crop and animal farming;
18. REQUESTS Contracting Parties to advocate for co-management of wetlands, other surface water resources and groundwater resources. Wetland protection and management cannot be done in isolation and require active land use, surface and groundwater management. Land drainage, managed groundwater replenishment and abstraction, and surface and groundwater quality protection are key to wetland protection and restoration. Each integrated system needs to be well understood in order to devise best management and adaptation strategies.
19. URGES Contracting Parties to strengthen the role of communication, education, participation, and awareness (CEPA) to enhance community understanding that wetlands and agriculture can co-exist and even benefit from each other, notably:
 - a) that agriculture in certain wetlands can benefit from their high primary and secondary productivity;
 - b) that wisely used wetlands can continuously provide many beneficial products, such as biomass, building materials, food and fodder;
 - c) that re-wetting the landscape by supporting and enhancing the natural retaining of floods and runoff in wetlands and groundwater, not uniquely but also for agriculture, will result in re-creating local atmospheric water cycles, increasing groundwater buffer storage, reducing temperature amplitudes, increasing air humidity and reducing the frequency of spring frost events, and if done on the landscape scale, it will diminish air convection, the resulting long-distance atmospheric transport of pollutants as well as the likelihoods of thunderstorms;
 - d) that wise use of wetlands provides options for receiving multiple benefits, such as diverse production, water retention in the landscape, and prevention of floods, stable groundwater storage, reduced runoff of nutrients, preservation of biodiversity, and carbon storage as long as the water table is sufficiently high for a large part of the season;
 - e) that thanks to their multiple benefits wetlands can support human well-being;
20. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to work with research institutions, farmers and other stakeholders to identify and promote sustainable farming practices in wetlands; seek to support basic and applied research and demonstration projects, and to examine the potential for traditional and novel wetland products and production systems in wetlands;
21. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to review subsidies and government instruments in support of agricultural practices and assess their effect on wetlands and their sustainability, including the integrity of wetlands and long-term impact upon the sustainability of local livelihoods;
22. REQUESTS the STRP (including its International Organization Partners), in collaboration with Contracting Parties, to compile and review information on the positive and negative impacts of

agricultural practices on wetlands in terms of their biodiversity and ecosystem services, and to document best practice examples of wetland use for agricultural production that preserves wetland integrity and is sustainable in the long-term and in the context of climate change;

23. REQUESTS the STRP to support the implementation of this Resolution by providing data and overview on the extent of intact, damaged and destroyed wetlands since 1970s and to provide guidance for identifying wetlands suitable for restoration to provide ecosystem services, including the provisioning ones, for the benefit of people and nature;
24. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat, in collaboration with the Contracting Parties, to address appropriate decision and policy makers and advice on withdrawing subsidies that endanger wetlands.