

Draft resolution on promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems

Submitted by Australia

Action requested:

- The Standing Committee is invited to review and approve the attached Draft Resolution for consideration by the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Introduction

Information for Standing Committee

1. Blue carbon ecosystems – that is, coastal wetland systems that sequester carbon – play a crucial but often under-recognised role in the efforts of countries to manage climate change and its impacts and reduce carbon emissions. Recognition of the value of blue carbon ecosystems and their effective management also reinforces the relevance and value of wetlands and the Ramsar Convention to international efforts to manage global issues of significance including the reduction of carbon emissions and climate change. Recognising this, and following preliminary consultation with Contracting Parties at SC 53, Australia has agreed to develop, for the consideration of Parties, a draft resolution which acknowledges the value of blue carbon ecosystems, and proposes the development of practical measures over the next triennium to assist and provide guidance to Parties.
2. Australia has provided the draft resolution to the following Contracting Parties for comment: Korea, Japan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Indonesia, United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America, Oceania region Parties (New Zealand, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Palau, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa). Lew Young, Senior Regional Adviser for Asia-Oceania, requested that the draft resolution also be sent to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for comment. We were grateful to have received sound advice and useful guidance from Canada, the USA, the UAE, the UK and JICA. The draft resolution was subsequently updated to reflect these comments.
3. Following consultation with the chair of the STRP, and subsequent consultation with Contracting Parties, the draft resolution now identifies practical measures which have the long term goal of assisting Parties in implementing (where locally relevant) carbon sequestration methodologies, which would contribute, among other things, to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) reporting under UNFCCC.

Financial implications of implementation

Paragraph (number and key part of text)	Action	Cost (CHF)

Draft Resolution XIII.xx

Promoting conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems

1. RECALLING that the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in Resolution A/RES/71/257, noted the vital role that coastal blue carbon ecosystems, including mangroves, tidal marshes¹ and seagrasses², play in climate adaptation and mitigation through carbon sequestration, and the range of ecosystem services that they provide in terms of sustainable livelihoods, food security, biodiversity conservation and coastal protection, and encouraged States and relevant international institutions and organizations to work collaboratively to protect and restore these ecosystems;
2. NOTING that the Ramsar Convention represents a relevant policy framework for conserving and managing coastal wetlands, including coastal blue carbon ecosystems, and that the restoration of degraded wetlands, with priority to those relevant for climate change mitigation and adaptation, is included within Target 12 of the Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024;
3. RECALLING:
 - i) Resolution VIII.4 on Wetland issues in Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), that urged Contracting Parties to recognize that coastal wetlands and their values and functions, including their vital role in mitigating the impacts of climate change and sea-level rise, are recognized in their policies, planning and decision-making in the coastal zone;
 - ii) Resolution X.24 on Climate Change and Wetlands, that urged Contracting Parties to manage wetlands wisely to increase their resilience to climate change and take urgent action to reduce the degradation, promote restoration and improve management practice of wetland types that constitute significant greenhouse gas sinks;
 - iii) Resolution XI.14 on Climate Change and Wetlands: Implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, that urged Contracting Parties to maintain or improve the ecological

¹ This resolution uses “tidal marshes”, but UNEP Assessment Report (2009) and other scientific papers (e.g. Macleod et al., 2011) use “salt marshes”. Salt marshes are used in the balance of this draft resolution.

² Unvegetated mudflats and intertidal marshes are also important blue carbon ecosystem. Freshwater marshes and freshwater forested wetlands are important stores of carbon but fall outside the definition of blue carbon.

character of wetlands to promote the ability of wetlands to contribute to nature-based climate change adaptation; and,

- iv) Resolution XII.13 on Wetlands and disaster risk reduction which, welcomed initiatives that support the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands and encouraged engagement in such activities;
4. NOTING that 151 countries contain at least one coastal blue carbon ecosystem (seagrass, salt marshes or mangroves) and that 71 countries contain all three, and that many of these countries have included anthropogenic emissions and removals resulting from human impacts on coastal wetlands in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement³;
 5. RECOGNIZING:
 - i) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as an international environmental treaty that seeks to achieve stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system;
 - ii) the Paris Agreement as the agreement aiming to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change including by holding the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial level and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees C; and,
 - iii) the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as the international body for assessing the science related to climate change, providing policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation, and noting that some countries are currently testing the methodology in the *2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands*;
 - iv) noting the IPCC as the entity that has been empowered to develop internationally recognised carbon inventory guidelines acceptable for UNFCCC reporting.
 6. DEEPLY CONCERNED that about one-third of the area covered by mangroves, salt marsh and seagrass has already been lost over the past several decades⁴ and that current dredging and land reclamation practices are negatively impacting blue carbon ecosystems];

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

7. REAFFIRMS the importance of the Ramsar Convention in the conservation of all wetlands, including coastal blue carbon and associated ecosystems and maintenance of their ecological character;

³ Herr, D. and Landis, E. (2016). *Coastal blue carbon ecosystems. Opportunities for Nationally Determined Contributions. Policy Brief*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and Washington, DC, USA: TNC.

⁴ Mcleod E. *et al.* (2011). *A blueprint for blue carbon: toward and improved understanding of the role of vegetated coastal habitats in sequestering CO₂*. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 2011; 9(10): 552–560, doi:10.1890/110004

8. ALSO AFFIRMS the significant value of coastal wetlands for climate mitigation and adaptation, and AFFIRMS its intention to pursue policies and projects to conserve and restore these ecosystems;
9. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention with coastal blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to identify and raise awareness of the benefits of these ecosystems and incentivise actions at a large scale within their countries, especially for sustainable development and climate change mitigation and adaptation;
10. ALSO ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with coastal blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to collect and analyse data, map these ecosystems, and make this information publicly accessible with a view to:
 - i) updating their wetland inventories;
 - ii) determining the range of ecosystem services that they support;
 - iii) informing the international awareness of the global extent of these ecosystems, potentially through the State of the World's Wetlands;
 - iv) estimating the carbon stocks stored in their coastal wetlands; and,
 - v) updating their national greenhouse gas and carbon stock inventories for wetlands;
11. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with coastal blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to apply ecosystem-based and integrated approaches in managing their ecosystems, consistent with "*Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)*" in Resolution VIII.4, in order to ensure recognition of their values, functions and services, including their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation;
12. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with coastal blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to promote participation, dialogue and collaboration in the management of these ecosystems from a range of stakeholders, including local communities, private sectors, national and local governments, NGOs and research institutes;
13. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to facilitate information sharing, among Ramsar Sites and other wetland sites with blue carbon ecosystems, on values and benefits of these ecosystems, including carbon sequestration and other services, and experiences in conservation, restoration and sustainable management of these ecosystems;
14. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with blue carbon ecosystems in their territories to apply the developed or updated guidance by the STRP as per paragraphs 18-iii and iv to prioritise coastal blue carbon ecosystems and develop and implement plans as a matter of urgency for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of these ecosystems;
15. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to work with relevant stakeholders to maintain and restore blue carbon ecosystems alongside coastal infrastructure and to avoid, minimise and mitigate impacts which detrimentally affect the carbon storage potential of these ecosystems and lead to significant greenhouse gas emissions.

16. REQUESTS the Ramsar Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to:
- i) survey Contracting Parties to determine their requirements in relation to managing coastal blue carbon ecosystems. Requirements could include: assessing ecosystem benefits and services, valuing carbon stores, conservation, restoration, sustainable management, capacity building needs, learning from others;
 - ii) [based on the outcomes of the survey in paragraph 16-i, facilitate national and Ramsar-region capacity building to:
 - a. enable Contracting Parties to create inventories of coastal blue carbon ecosystems across the Ramsar network, consistent with paragraph 10, and to quantify the human-induced greenhouse gas emissions from, and carbon sequestration to, their coastal wetlands consistent with the *2013 Supplement to the 2006 IPCC Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories: Wetlands* (“Wetlands Supplement”) and any future updates; and,
 - b. implement policies on conservation and sustainable use of the ecosystems;] [US: remove]
 - iii) where identified as a priority, facilitate the use of existing Ramsar regional communication networks, and other relevant blue carbon initiatives, such as the International Partnership for Blue Carbon, for:
 - a. sharing data, toolkits and information on values and benefits of coastal blue carbon ecosystems, including carbon sequestration and other services;
 - b. sharing information and experiences on the development of inventories of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration associated with coastal blue carbon ecosystems;
17. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to liaise with the IPCC as appropriate, including exploring the development of formal links, in relation to future updates to the Wetlands Supplement to ensure that any work produced by the STRP in relation to coastal blue carbon ecosystems is complementary and appropriately communicated and considered;
18. REQUESTS that the STRP, consistent with its ongoing work program and strategic priorities, consider continuing its work on climate change and wetlands, including coastal blue carbon ecosystems, as a high priority, consistent with the relevant IPCC guidelines, *inter alia*, by:
- i) undertaking a desktop study of coastal blue carbon ecosystems across the network of Ramsar Sites (noting that some countries have data that is more highly publicized or accessible than others), including:
 - a. assessing the spatial extent of coastal blue carbon ecosystems across the network of Ramsar Sites; and,
 - b. where practical, identification of coastal blue carbon ecosystems of greatest abundance and at most risk (including from vulnerability to climate change, conversion, infrastructure development, drainage, invasive species, fire. in each Ramsar region;

- ii) assessing methods for quantification of carbon stocks, human-induced carbon stock changes and net greenhouse gas emissions within coastal blue carbon ecosystems⁵, including:
 - a. collation and review of existing information on regional level parameters for modelling carbon stocks, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon dynamics in coastal blue carbon ecosystems, and identification of knowledge gaps; and,
 - b. collation and review of existing guidance and methods for carbon quantification, and identification of any need for supplementary guidance, in consultation with the IPCC;
 - iii) development of guidance for prioritising coastal blue carbon ecosystems for conservation and restoration that includes *inter alia*: climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits, the range of other potential ecosystem benefits and services and assessment of costs relative to benefits;
 - iv) reviewing and, as appropriate, updating existing guidance on the preparation of plans for conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems at Ramsar Sites. The review of existing guidance could include development of case studies with regional experts to illustrate how guidance has been applied;
19. INVITES interested Contracting Parties, Ramsar International Organization Partners (IOPs), and others, as appropriate, to support the work of the STRP identified in paragraph 18, including through the provision of financial resources and/or in kind technical support, capability development and information.

⁵ [Australia: This could include the carbon emissions from sediments associated with reclamation, conversion and dredging]