



13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

“Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future”
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 21-29 October 2018

Resolution XIII.20

Promoting the conservation and wise use of intertidal¹ wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats

Mandate

1. RECALLING that the Conference of the Contracting Parties has repeatedly addressed, *inter alia* through Resolutions listed in Annex 1 of the present Resolution, the pressing need to better promote the conservation and wise use of coastal wetlands, in particular intertidal wetlands, which are areas of special importance to both biodiversity and a large global human population living in or reliant on these coastal ecosystems, yet are highly vulnerable;
2. NOTING that Target 6 of Ramsar’s Strategic Plan 2016-2024 seeks a significant increase in the area of the Ramsar Site network, and in particular the inclusion of under-represented types of wetlands; and FURTHER NOTING that both shellfish reefs and seagrass beds are under-represented wetlands;
3. AWARE that Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, of which Targets 5, 6, 11, 12, 14 and 15 are particularly relevant;
4. NOTING the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of which SDGs 2, 6, 13, 14 and 15 are especially relevant;
5. DEEPLY CONCERNED that, if urgent action is not taken to address the increased loss and degradation of intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats, the ability to meet the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and SDGs may be seriously impaired and species extinctions will be likely;
6. NOTING Resolution 12.25 of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) on *Promoting conservation of critical intertidal and other coastal habitats for migratory species*;

¹ Intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats include intertidal flats, seagrass beds, mangroves, bivalve (shellfish) reefs, and associated coastal (littoral) habitats ecologically linked to these areas, for example saltpans/salinas, fishponds, areas used for aquaculture and mariculture, sewage works, and other habitats used by coastal waterbirds for feeding and roosting, whether or not these coastal areas are subject to tides.

7. NOTING the Paris Agreement, adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and publicly available Nationally Determined Contributions towards achieving the long-term temperature goal of the Agreement, many of which cover anthropogenic emissions and removals caused by human impacts on coastal wetlands;
8. AWARE ALSO that nature-based solutions such as protection of coastal wetlands are important measures for climate-change adaptation and/or mitigation;
9. FURTHER NOTING Resolution 26 of the 2016 World Conservation Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on *Conservation of Intertidal Habitats and Migratory Waterbirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, especially the Yellow Sea, in a global context*²;
10. WELCOMING the recommended actions for coasts in the Declaration of the Global Flyway Summit held in Abu Dhabi in April 2018, including “a multi-stakeholder Global ‘Caring for Coasts’ Forum”;

Importance

11. RECOGNIZING that intertidal and other coastal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats are very significant socio-economically and culturally, providing multiple and important ecosystem services, benefitting not only local dependent communities but a wider society, in mitigating effects of climate change through sequestration of carbon, reducing excessive erosion by protecting the shoreline, and contributing also to reduce the risk of storm surges and sea level rise;
12. YET NOTING that, despite such international conservation attention and recognition and national conservation programmes, intertidal wetlands and other ecologically-associated habitats in most parts of the world remain subject to extreme and often complex interaction of pressures, including from navigation, development, pollution, and unsustainable uses (such as habitat-altering shrimp farms), as well as from shifting biotic communities/drivers, which removes or degrades the capacity of these habitats not only to support migratory and other species but also to maintain and sustain human communities dependent on the multiple ecosystem services, such as their capacity for carbon storage and sequestration (“blue carbon”, see Resolution XIII.14, and disaster risk reduction, Resolution XII.13); also NOTING that there has been “an alarming increase in the past decade in the frequency, duration and extent of degradation and loss of coastal habitats globally, resulting in reductions in quantity and quality of habitat for birds and other biodiversity, as well as impaired ecosystem service provision”, as outlined by the 27th International Ornithological Congress in August 2018;
13. CONSCIOUS that the conservation, wise use, restoration and rehabilitation of intertidal and other ecologically-associated coastal wetlands poses particular practical problems, including: that they can fall within the jurisdiction of multiple national and local government agencies; that many straddle either international or internal national borders; their location at the terminus of catchments, which can result in significant pollution inputs, as well as significant reduction and disruption to the water and sediment flows essential for ecosystem functioning, due to water regulation structures such as upstream dams and flood defences, with riverine inputs of sediment to deltas and other soft coastlines being of especially critical importance; dredging to deepen channels for navigation; the encroachment of invasive alien species; and significant human disturbance, resulting in intense development pressures derived from both

² IUCN WCC-2016-Res-026.

land and sea; BUT ALSO NOTING good examples, such as in the international Wadden Sea, where such impediments have been addressed successfully;

14. NOTING the inherent ecological connectivity of coastal areas at various scales, notably through their support of migratory species and their role as spawning areas for coastal fisheries; and ACKNOWLEDGING CMS Resolution 12.07 on *The Role of Ecological Networks in the Conservation of Migratory Species*; and NOTING ALSO the role of coastal wetlands in maintaining the balance of sediment dynamics;
15. RECOGNIZING the specific vulnerabilities of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as highlighted in the outcome document from the International Conference on Small Island Developing States (Apia, 2014), entitled *SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway*;

Losses, degradation and pressures

16. RECALLING Resolution VII.21 on *Enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands*; RECALLING ALSO the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) fifth assessment report on Coastal Systems and Low-Lying Areas;
17. AWARE that projected sea-level rises and other aspects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and acidifying waters are expected to result in significant further losses of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats; and NOTING that the IPCC special report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, released in 2018, reports that warming of 1.5°C or higher increases the risk associated with long-lasting or irreversible changes such as the loss of ecosystems;
18. AWARE ALSO that the ecological character of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats can be influenced by loss of ecological linkages to surrounding areas;

Solutions

19. CONSIDERING that the need remains for guidance and models of good practice and management that would assist Contracting Parties to pursue development strategies that protect wetlands;
20. RECALLING Recommendation 6.8 on *Strategic planning in coastal zones*;
21. WELCOMING the steps taken by China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, since the adoption of Resolution 28³ and Resolution 51⁴ of the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress, to conserve the coastal wetlands of the Yellow Sea, including through follow-up of outcomes of national workshops held in China in 2014, the Republic of Korea in 2016 and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2017, with transboundary workshops in 2016, 2017 and 2018; and WELCOMING the steps taken by the Yellow Sea nations towards UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination of their coastal wetlands, including working via a transboundary Yellow/West Sea Working Group;

³ IUCN WCC-2012-Res-028-EN. *Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and its threatened waterbirds, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea*

⁴ IUCN WCC-2012-Res-051-EN. *Improving conservation and sustainability of the Yellow Sea*

22. NOTING the vital need to conserve and to manage sustainably “working coastal wetlands”⁵ – those intertidal and ecologically associated coastal wetlands the sustainable use of which provides crucial socio-economic support to local communities – and that these managed areas can be of integral importance to the maintenance of the ecological character of intertidal wetland ecosystems, especially for waterbirds and other wetland biodiversity; and STRESSING the importance of an ecosystem-based approach;
23. CONSCIOUS that actions and investments, such as in transport and energy, have the potential for very damaging impacts on intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats; MINDFUL that efforts should be made to mitigate such impacts and wherever possible ensure that development activities where investments are targeted appropriately to contribute positively to conservation and wise use of the ecosystem; and AWARE that proactive positive engagement is critical at all scales;

Site designation

24. FURTHER NOTING that, while many Ramsar Sites contain intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats, global coverage of such sites is both highly incomplete and discontinuous, with relatively few such Ramsar Sites;
25. ENCOURAGING Contracting Parties to consider disaggregating wetland types in their future National Reports, so as to create a clearer picture of the numbers of the various types of wetlands designated as Ramsar Sites, and to include such wetland-specific analyses in future updates of the *Global Wetland Outlook* (GWO) to provide the Conference of the Contracting Parties with a high-level overview of relevant progress in the designation of Wetlands of International Importance;
26. NOTING the recent positive experiences of both transboundary and linked World Heritage Site (WHS) designation for intertidal wetlands, notably the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative linking the Wadden Sea WHS (Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands), and Banc d’Arguin WHS (Mauritania); and AWARE of the potential for similar initiatives for conserving and sustainable management of other major coastal wetlands in flyways;

Restoration

27. RECALLING Resolution XII.13 on *Wetlands and disaster risk reduction*, and NOTING CBD Decision XII/19 on *Ecosystem conservation and restoration*;
28. ENCOURAGING Contracting Parties to ensure that conservation efforts, for example mangrove restoration, do not ultimately convert mudflats and intertidal wetlands, which themselves play an important role as breeding and staging grounds for waterbirds;
29. CONSIDERING that there remains a need for guidance on effective methods of restoration, such as a living-shorelines approach that fully re-establishes ecological functions of degraded or lost intertidal wetlands and other coastal wetlands, and for support for Parties to prioritize areas of their coast for ecosystem restoration, including in the light of sea level rise;

⁵ *Inter alia* including shellfisheries, polychaete harvesting, mariculture (for example for seaweed), aquaculture, fishponds, saltpans/salinas, and sewage works.

Acknowledgement of and engagement with other initiatives and conservation frameworks

30. NOTING the objectives of many other multilateral environmental agreements and international conservation initiatives, in the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands; and AWARE of the benefits of closer collaboration on this cross-cutting issue of mutual interest within multiple mandates;
31. NOTING the Arctic Council's Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative, established in 2015, which has the potential to support the efforts of Ramsar Contracting Parties towards the conservation of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats, which are vital to Arctic breeding waterbirds along the world's flyways;
32. NOTING WITH APPRECIATION the conservation work of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement and the partners of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network to conserve critical intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats for shorebirds throughout Africa and Eurasia, and the Americas, respectively;
33. NOTING the development of the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative Business Plan and the Pacific Americas Shorebird Conservation Strategy, which prioritize strategies and actions for the conservation of key intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats on the West Atlantic and East Pacific flyways;
34. WELCOMING the strategy for monitoring coastal waterbird populations and their habitats on the Arabian Peninsula, which was developed as an outcome of a regional workshop in the United Arab Emirates, hosted by Sharjah's Environment and Protected Areas Authority in association with Wetlands International and BirdLife International in September 2018, which aims to assist the conservation of migratory and resident waterbird populations and their habitats in the region, including through the development of a network of experts in waterbird monitoring; and

Profile and changing attitudes to coastal wetlands (public engagement)

35. NOTING that there can be very low levels of public appreciation of the values and services provided by intertidal and ecologically-associated wetlands; yet AWARE of many successful initiatives that have engaged civil society, and have built effective and strong support from civil society for the conservation, restoration and wise use of these habitats;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Coordination with other initiatives and conservation frameworks

36. REQUESTS the Secretariat, subject to the availability of resources, to explore actively with other relevant multilateral environmental agreements⁶, governments, the private sector, relevant international and national non-governmental organizations, experts and other stakeholders, the possibility to set up a multi-stakeholder global coastal forum, to facilitate the protection, management and restoration of coastal ecosystems by raising the profile of the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats within relevant programmes of work, sharing experience and knowledge on solutions related to the

⁶ Potentially including but not restricted to the CBD, the CMS family, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, and the Arctic Council's Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative.

conservation, management and restoration of these ecosystems, and encouraging stakeholders to support such initiatives;

37. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, subject to the availability of resources, and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP), consistent with its scope, mandate and priority thematic work areas for 2019-2021, in developing its proposed work plan for presentation at the 57th meeting of the Standing Committee, to consider actively participating in the coastal forum proposed in paragraph 36 of the present Resolution to promote the restoration of coastal wetlands and other relevant habitats;
38. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to consider the inclusion of their coastal ecosystems, including relevant Ramsar Sites, in their national policies and strategies for climate-change mitigation as well as promoting their role within ecosystem-based adaptation;
39. FURTHER ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to promote the role of their coastal ecosystems within ecosystem-based adaptation;

Site designation

40. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, in support of Target 6 of Ramsar's Strategic Plan 2016-2024, to urgently designate intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats of international importance, especially but not exclusively in coastal regions that are suffering high ongoing rates of loss, paying particular attention to those sites that are part of critical site networks of migratory species;
41. INVITES Contracting Parties that are range States of the East Asian/Australasian flyway and the West Asian/East African flyway to enhance efforts and collaboration to improve population size estimates for waterbirds in these flyways and to enable the identification and designation of intertidal wetlands of international importance along these flyways;
42. REQUESTS the Secretariat and the STRP, consistent with its scope, mandate and priority thematic work areas for 2019-2021 in developing its proposed work plan, to summarize the extent of new intertidal wetland Ramsar Site designations for succeeding meetings of the Conference of the Contracting Parties, as far as possible placing this in historical contexts, and to report this information in future updates of the Global Wetland Outlook;
43. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties with qualifying intertidal sites to consider them for nomination as Ramsar Sites, including transboundary sites, as a means to potentially form ecologically connected site networks with other key sites; coastal sites in each flyway with the highest ecosystem service value, including importance for supporting migratory waterbirds, protected via the Ramsar Convention (including exchange of experience between sites);
44. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to ensure that intertidal Ramsar Site boundaries include the entire ecosystem of importance to migratory waterbirds and other dependent species, including inland roost and feeding sites; and INVITES Parties to review and extend boundaries of relevant Sites as appropriate;

Management

45. REQUESTS the STRP, subject to the availability of resources and consistent with its scope, mandate and priority thematic work areas for 2019-2021, in developing its proposed work plan,

to consider coordinating with the scientific subsidiary bodies of other multilateral environmental agreements, under the proposed coastal forum, to develop guidance on the conservation, wise use and management of sustainable “working coastal habitats”, such as by elaborating strategies and models for economic development that maintain the ecological character and functionality of such habitats to the benefit of local communities and migratory species for the consideration of Contracting Parties;

Other solutions

46. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to fully recognize the international importance of their intertidal and associated coastal wetlands for biodiversity and ecosystem services and reconsider mudflat conversion at priority sites for biodiversity as a precautionary approach until full assessments are undertaken that assure the maintenance of ecological services in these sites;
47. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other range states of the Arabian Peninsula, and surrounding areas, possibly extended later to include other areas of relevance on the West Asian/East African flyway, which is known to be the part of the range of the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement where bird population declines are most severe, to support and participate in an assessment of the state of the region’s coastal wetlands, taking into consideration the experience gained by IUCN’s 2012 situation analysis of the Yellow Sea and East Asian/Australasian flyway which stimulated policy initiatives at various scales;
48. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to ensure that they follow, to the greatest extent practicable, the Convention’s *Integrated Framework and guidelines for avoiding, mitigating and compensating for wetland losses* (Resolution XI.9) when considering development impacting on intertidal and other coastal wetlands;
49. ALSO ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties, in support of Target 6 of Ramsar’s Strategic Plan 2016-2024, to address and reverse perverse incentives to convert intertidal wetlands and ecologically associated habitats, and to implement sustainable coastal wetland-friendly measures, such as “living shorelines” for climate adaptation, coastal defense and risk reduction;
50. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and INVITES non-Contracting Party States to ensure that coastal sediment and water needs from riverine inputs are maintained through the appropriate regulation of outflows from dams or other water regulation structures through the implementation of the Convention’s guidance on environmental flows; RECALLING Resolutions VIII.1 *Guidelines for the allocation and management of water for maintaining the ecological functions of wetlands* and X.19 *Wetlands and river basin management consolidated scientific and technical guidance*;
51. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to make publicly available information about their practical experiences with coastal conservation interventions;
52. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to employ coastal and marine spatial planning tools, as appropriate, to better manage conflicts in multi-use coastal areas and to promote conservation objectives in the intertidal and coastal zones and other sectoral development programmes;

Restoration

53. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties in areas where coastal erosion and/or sea level rises are resulting in losses of their intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats, to implement programmes of managed retreat of coastal defences, thereby both restoring intertidal habitats and creating more sustainable coastal defences and hence contributing to disaster risk reduction;

Changing attitudes to coastal wetlands

54. ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties to consider, as appropriate, the development of programmes and initiatives including, for example, festivals associated with the arrival of migratory species, ecotourism initiatives including those linked to gastronomic appreciation of sustainably-sourced seafood, and encouragement of responsible public access to tidal flats that communicate the importance of intertidal wetlands and associated habitats to the public, policy-makers and other stakeholders (including relevant sectors of the business community);
55. ENCOURAGES interested Contracting Parties and other stakeholders to create a network of experts in waterbird and wetland monitoring in the Arabian Peninsula that could be called on by all countries in the region to help with surveys, training and capacity building, experience sharing and responding to on-site/species conservation issues of urgent importance, and ENCOURAGES the sharing of lessons learned in order that the network could be expanded to other areas along the West Asian/East African flyway; and
56. REQUESTS that Contracting Parties give due consideration to the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands and ecologically-associated habitats in drafting the post-2024 Ramsar Strategic Plan.

Annex 1

Previous Resolutions especially relevant to the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands

Recommendation VI.8	Strategic planning in coastal zones
Resolution VII.21	Enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands
Resolution VIII.4	Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)
Resolution VIII.32	Conservation, integrated management, and sustainable use of mangrove ecosystems and their resources
Resolution X.22	Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways
Resolution XII.13	Wetlands and disaster risk reduction