



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.23

Wetlands in the Arctic and sub-Arctic

Scope

1. RECALLING and ADDRESSING the area of the Arctic and sub-Arctic as delineated by the Arctic Council’s Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group;
2. CONSIDERING that some ecosystem services provided by Arctic wetlands (for example, carbon sequestration and storage) are of global importance, and furthermore, that measures to mitigate climate change can be taken by all Contracting Parties (as noted in Resolution X.25 on *Wetlands and “biofuels”* and Resolution XI.14 on *Climate change and wetlands: implications for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands* in relation to restoring peatlands) also outside the Arctic and sub-Arctic;

Arctic and sub-Arctic wetland biodiversity, ecosystem services and vulnerability

3. NOTING that various wetlands types, characterized by either being seasonally or permanently frozen, occur in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, including permafrost peatlands, wet tundra, coastal and shallow marine areas, as well as glacial forelands, and that these areas contain unique biodiversity, and are thus of global importance;
4. AWARE of the diversity and value of wetland ecosystems in the Arctic and sub-Arctic and their importance for migratory species, such as marine mammals, ungulates and birds, with several different migration patterns and flyways;
5. CONSCIOUS that Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands are of global significance not only for their biodiversity and their ecosystem services, especially for indigenous peoples and local communities, but also for other services, such as their roles as sinks or stores of carbon;
6. NOTING that Arctic and sub-Arctic wetland ecosystems are sensitive and vulnerable, for example: to changes in hydrology and water levels, to oil spills that are particularly long-lived and difficult to address in dark midwinters and extremely low temperatures; and to disturbance of fragile surface vegetation leading to progressive soil erosion and water pollution;
7. ALSO RECOGNIZING that climate change is resulting in negative effects on wetlands, such as declining summer sea-ice extent, permafrost thaw, sea-level rise, exacerbation of the spread of invasive species, and changes in species distribution, and that the Arctic Council’s Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA) and the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment note several changes

in arctic ecosystems, including rapid northward shifts of tree lines owing to recent rises in summer temperatures, and breakdowns in marine food webs, following dietary changes after declines of prey species;

8. NOTING that the ABA notes declines in extent of some Arctic wetland types, including thermokarst lakes and peatlands, and that the Global Assessment on Peatlands Biodiversity and Climate Change adopted by Decision IX/16 on *Biodiversity and Climate Change* of the Convention on Biological Diversity states that arctic peatlands are vulnerable;

Knowledge and awareness

9. CONSCIOUS that, as for most wetlands, more scientific data (for example, on the historical evolution, drainage and exploitation, geographical distribution and area coverage of different wetland types, and their biodiversity, ecological functions, ecosystem services and other important values as well as their vulnerability) are needed to inform decisions concerning the conservation and management of Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands, and that knowledge remains relatively limited;

Ramsar Sites and other wetlands of high conservation value

10. AWARE that, as stated in the Arctic Protected Areas Indicator Report¹ of the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) working group, the total extent of protected areas within the CAFF boundary has almost doubled between 1980 and 2016, resulting in 20.2% of the terrestrial area and 4.7% of the marine area within the CAFF boundary having some form of national protection in 2016, and resulting in a substantial increase in the total extent of protected wetlands in the area;
11. ALSO NOTING the designation of 80 Ramsar Sites in the Arctic and sub-Arctic as of the end of 2017, covering 0.9% (289,931 km²) of the CAFF delineated area²; and ALSO NOTING that Arctic and sub-Arctic wetland types are under-represented among sites on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance;
12. NOTING that it is unknown how well the network of wetlands in the Arctic and sub-Arctic fulfil the vision of the Pan-Arctic Network of Marine Protected Areas to be an "ecologically connected, representative, and effectively managed network of protected and specially managed areas that protects and promotes the resilience of wetland biological diversity, ecological processes and cultural heritage"²;
13. NOTING that the Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment IIC report by CAFF, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), and the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) has recognized 97 marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance in the Arctic and sub-Arctic³, where shipping should be avoided, or its impact mitigated, and that several of these areas include coastal wetlands;

¹ CAFF and PAME. 2017. Arctic Protected Areas: Indicator Report, 2017: Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna and Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment, Akureyri, Iceland.

² Ibid, 2017.

³ AMAP/CAFF/SDGW. Identification of Arctic marine areas of heightened ecological and cultural significance. Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment (AMSA) IIC.

Threats to wetlands

14. AWARE of potential threats to wetlands generated by current and possible future development in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, for example through possible increases in shipping, tourism, increased demand for natural-resources extraction, and other industrial developments;
15. NOTING that wildfires that could have negative effects on wetlands have increased in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, especially in dried, upper layers of peat;
16. ALSO RECOGNIZING that some wetland species may be affected by competition from more southern species that are becoming established at higher latitudes, and that invasive alien species also may be establishing and spreading in these regions;

International cooperation

17. RECALLING the memorandum of cooperation signed at the 11th meeting of the Conference of Contracting Parties (COP11, 2012) between the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and the CAFF Secretariat, and the memorandum of cooperation signed in 1997 between the Ramsar Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS);
18. ALSO RECALLING Ramsar Resolution X.22 on *Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways*, which encourages the Secretariats of the Ramsar Convention, CMS and its Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and CAFF to continue to work together with their governance and scientific subsidiary bodies and other interested organizations to establish a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experience; and
19. RECOGNIZING that the Arctic Council States are undertaking an initiative on enhancing engagement in relation to the role and functions of Arctic wetlands in supporting sustainable development and biodiversity resilience in the Arctic;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

Knowledge and awareness

20. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties to obtain sufficient data about Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands in order to take the necessary measures for their conservation and sustainable use, while recognizing the constraints of working in the Arctic and undertaking the necessary inventories of, and research on, Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands, as appropriate;
21. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties to undertake assessments, as appropriate and subject to the availability of resources, of the state of Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands, to include hotspot analyses for wetland biodiversity, and of gaps in the network of Ramsar Sites and other protected areas containing wetlands, as well as assessing representation of wetland habitats within these areas and their connectivity in the context of the implications of future climate change impacts, and how these may affect the wetlands, while recognizing the constraints of working in the Arctic and sub-Arctic;

22. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate and subject to the availability of resources, to raise awareness of the biodiversity, ecosystem services and socio-economic importance of Arctic and sub-Arctic wetlands;

Ramsar Sites and other wetlands of high conservation value

23. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, within the biogeographical regions of the Arctic and sub-Arctic, when identifying wetland sites of high conservation value that may merit additional conservation measures, to designate new Ramsar Sites within their territories, which comprise under-represented wetland types and/or which are important links in flyways and other migratory routes;

Wise use and mitigation of impact on wetlands and restoration

24. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to seek to ensure that restoration measures in wetlands in the Arctic and sub-Arctic are prioritized and undertaken in order to improve the connectivity between habitats, especially for sites of importance for migrating wetland species, and sites with available fresh water in subregions where fresh water supply is, or may become, locally scarce with continuing climate change⁴;
25. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to seek to ensure that an analysis of the impacts of development projects, transportation and tourism activities is undertaken as a means to support Contracting Parties' efforts to maintain the ecological character of wetlands, taking into account Ramsar Resolution XI.9 on *An Integrated Framework for avoiding, mitigating, and compensating for wetland losses*;
26. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, where there are herds of domestic or semi-domestic grazing animals in Arctic or sub-Arctic areas, to work with stakeholders to ensure that the population size of these herds is kept at a level that does not affect wetland populations of wild grazing animals, and that the combined grazing pressure of domestic and wild animals does not risk overgrazing of wetlands;
27. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties to address, through restoration and adaptation measures, as feasible and appropriate, issues of large-scale erosion resulting from unsustainable land uses in the Arctic and sub-Arctic, such as roads, off-road driving and extraction of natural resources;
28. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to seek to put in place measures to eradicate existing invasive alien species and prevent the future spread in Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of existing and new invasive alien species that are a threat to wetland biodiversity;
29. ENCOURAGES the concerned Contracting Parties, as appropriate, to restore peatlands, especially those with a large carbon-storage capacity, regardless of their climate zone, in order to mitigate climate change in the Arctic and sub-Arctic; and

⁴ Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, CAFF 2013.

International cooperation

30. REQUESTS the Secretariat to share with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change information on relevant activities under the Ramsar Convention.