



**BRIEFING NOTE TO CONTRACTING PARTIES OF THE RAMSAR CONVENTION ON  
WETLANDS ON THE DESIGNATION OF WORLD WETLANDS DAY BY THE UNITED  
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

*Prepared by the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (July 2021)*

The present document has been prepared by the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands at the request of the 57th Meeting of the Standing Committee to the Convention. Its purpose is to inform Contracting Parties of the developments regarding the Convention's request to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to proclaim the 2nd of February as World Wetlands Day.

Contracting Parties are encouraged to convey this information to their appropriate representative at their Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and, in light of the Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIII.1, inviting the UNGA to proclaim World Wetlands Day, to seek their support when this matter is considered in by the UNGA Plenary, at the co-sponsor countries (including Costa Rica, Mexico and Slovenia) request. This document provides talking points and supporting information related to this matter.

**Request to Contracting Parties**

During July 2021, the Permanent Missions in New York to the United Nations of the co-sponsor countries of the World Wetland Day will circulate the draft resolution, concept note and timeline for the presentation and informal consultations for the negotiation of the draft. Adoption will likely take place during the first weeks of September in the last meetings of the General Assembly under the 75th session.

In support of the fulfillment of the Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIII.1 (World Wetlands Day), in which Contracting Parties invited the UNGA to recognize World Wetlands Day, Contracting Parties to the Convention, through their Permanent Missions to the United Nations, are thus encouraged to:

- a) Sponsor the draft resolution on World Wetlands Day once included in the agenda of the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UNGA, and
- b) Support the adoption of the draft resolution on World Wetlands Day by the UNGA when it is considered.

It will be appreciated if the Administrative Authority of each Contracting Party to the Convention can ensure that its representation to the United Nations in New York is made aware of this subject and can provide this support.

Please, do not hesitate to contact Ms Leticia Zamora, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations ([lezamora@rree.go.cr](mailto:lezamora@rree.go.cr)) or the Secretariat of the Convention ([rivera@ramsar.org](mailto:rivera@ramsar.org)) if you require any further information.

## 1. Talking points

The draft UNGA resolution is largely self-explanatory as to its intention. Further talking points regarding the need to elevate the day to UN level as well as reasons why wetlands are important are found below.

### Why World Wetlands Day?

- World Wetlands Day has been celebrated by the Convention on Wetlands since 1997. However, at the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (COP13) in 2018, Contracting Parties recognized their shared goal of increasing the visibility of the Convention in recognition of the critical need – highlighted in the Global Wetlands Outlook – to protect wetlands in order to halt their steep decline and the resulting loss in biodiversity and wetlands’ ability to foster resilience to climate change.
- As a result, Contracting Parties agreed at COP13 to invite the UNGA to proclaim 2 of February as World Wetlands Day. Contracting Parties considered that leveraging the considerable global platform of the United Nations would support and reinforce their efforts to promote the wise use of wetlands by elevating the level of attention on this important issue.

### Why are wetlands important?

- Wetlands are critical to people and nature, given the intrinsic value of these ecosystems and the benefits and services they provide to people.
- Wetlands are the ecosystems with the highest rate of decline, loss and degradation.
- Wetlands are essential to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to: poverty eradication, food and nutrition, good health and well-being, gender equality, water quality and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, oceans, seas and marine resources, and biodiversity and sustainable use of ecosystems.
- Wetlands are essential for the achievement of SDG 6, on clean water and sanitation, and its Target 6.6, which seeks to protect and restore water-related ecosystems; SDG 14, on conservation of coastal and marine areas, and SDG 15, related to life on land, and its Target 15.1, which seeks to ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, including wetlands, in line with obligations under international agreements<sup>1</sup>.
- The Convention on Wetlands has an important role in ensuring the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as well as its contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution 71/313

- The Convention on Wetlands is co-custodian of SDG Indicator 6.6.1 which monitors change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time, and that the Convention is a partner agency for SDG Indicators 6.5.1, 14.5.1 and 15.1.2.<sup>2</sup>
- Decision III/21 adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), recognized the role of the Convention on Wetlands as the lead partner in the implementation of activities related to wetlands under the CBD, and the important contribution that the Convention on Wetlands has made towards the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020.
- 171 States have become Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands as of January 2020 and the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands provides outreach materials to help raise public awareness of the importance and value of wetlands on 2 of February each year, the anniversary of the date of the adoption of the text of the Convention, in 1971.
- The 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands, held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, unanimously adopted Resolution XIII.1: World Wetlands Day, which invites the UNGA to recognize 2 of February of each year, the date of adoption of the Convention on Wetlands, as World Wetlands Day“.

## 2. Background information

### History

On 2 of February 1971, the text of the Convention on Wetlands was adopted in the city of Ramsar, Islamic Republic of Iran. Since then, 171 Member States have become Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands, as of January 2020.

At the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2018 (COP13), Contracting Parties recognized that all share the goal of increasing the visibility of the Convention on Wetlands and recognized the critical need – highlighted in the Global Wetlands Outlook – to protect wetlands in order to halt their steep decline and the resulting loss in biodiversity and wetlands’ ability to foster resilience to climate change. As a result, Contracting Parties agreed that leveraging the considerable global platform of the United Nations to further their advocacy efforts to promote the wise use of wetlands would elevate the level of global attention on this important issue.

At COP13 the United Arab Emirates presented a draft resolution inviting the United Nations General Assembly to designate 2 of February as World Wetlands Day and Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Burkina Faso on behalf of the Africa region, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland on behalf of the Europe region, Gabon, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Nepal, Niger, Oman, Panama, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, the United States of America, Uruguay and Zimbabwe all expressed support.<sup>3</sup>

The Conference of the Parties subsequently adopted the draft resolution unanimously and without amendment, as Convention on Wetlands Resolution XIII.1 on World Wetlands Day. This resolution is appended to this document as Annex 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators, 13 February 2019

<sup>3</sup> See COP13 Conference Report, paras 82-85: <https://www.ramsar.org/document/cop13->

[conference- report.](#)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on Wetlands has received update on the progress at its 57th meeting in June 2019 and at Standing Committee 59 in June 2021. The core group of countries were established at Standing Committee 57 and Contracting Parties were encouraged to engage their Permanent Missions in support of the initiative, and invited to consider co-sponsoring the draft UNGA resolution. The Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to draft talking points and share them with Contracting Parties to enable consistent messaging in support of the initiative and the present document has been prepared in response.

On 7 July 2021 the Governments of Slovenia, Costa Rica, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, held at the margins of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development of the United Nations a High-Level Virtual Event “Wetlands: Key Enablers for a Resilient and Sustainable Recovery” to provide and space to present the draft resolution to establish the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February as World Wetlands Day in alignment with the decision of the Contracting Parties of the Convention during COP13 in 2018. See records of the event at: <https://www.ramsar.org/resources/wetlands-key-enablers-for-a-resilient-and-sustainable-recovery>

The delegations of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of the co-sponsor countries lead by Costa Rica have stepped forward to lead this effort in New York. Adoption will likely take place during the first week of September in the last meetings of the General Assembly under the 75th session.

### Context

The Convention on Wetlands is a global intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources, for the benefit of nature and people. The Convention was adopted on 2 of February 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar, Islamic Republic of Iran.

Since 1997, the Convention on Wetlands has celebrated World Wetlands Day on 2 of February each year in order to help raise public awareness of the importance and value of wetlands. The Secretariat has supported Contracting Parties in their efforts by providing outreach materials and undertaking complementary public outreach.

Contracting Parties to the Convention recognized through their adoption of Resolution XIII.1 on World Wetlands Day the value of having the whole international community, through the United Nations, establish a day to focus on international and national action for wetlands, to raise awareness of the need to stop the rapid loss, and the need for action to promote their restoration, conservation and wise use.

### The importance and benefits of wetlands<sup>4</sup>

Wetlands are part of our natural wealth providing us services worth trillions of US dollars every year.

Healthy wetlands are crucial to achieving many of the SDGs, and especially SDG 6 on water, SDG 14 on oceans and seas, SDG 13 on climate change and SDG 15 on biodiversity:

- ✓ Wetlands provide directly or indirectly most of the world's freshwater for consumption and irrigation.
- ✓ Wetlands provide food. Three billion people are fed on rice grown in wetland paddies. Fish, which are the main source of protein for one billion people, depend on coastal wetlands for part of their part of their life cycle.
- ✓ Wetlands are critical to commercial and recreational fishing industries.
- ✓ One billion people depend on wetlands for their livelihoods.
- ✓ Wetlands are essential to efforts to regulate the global climate. Peatlands, mangroves and seagrasses naturally store carbon. Peatlands cover an estimated 3% of the world's land surface area but store 30% of all carbon stored on land. Mangroves, coral reefs and floodplains prevent flood disasters during extreme weather events.
- ✓ Forty percent of the entire world's species live or breed in wetlands. More than 25 % of all wetlands plants and animals are at risk of extinction.

#### Threats to wetlands

In spite of all the benefits of wetlands, they are severely threatened. Wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. According to the Global Wetlands Outlook (2018), 35% of wetlands have been lost since 1970. Recent assessments by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) concluded that 75% of the Earth's land surface has been significantly altered by human actions, including the loss of 85% of the area of wetlands.

There is an overwhelming lack of awareness of the benefits and services provided by wetlands and a widespread misconception that they are wastelands, which can be refilled and converted for other purposes, including their use as garbage dumps.

Rapid urbanization, reconverting land for agriculture, excessive water extraction as well as pollution are some of the key drivers of wetland loss and degradation.

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<sup>4</sup> Wetlands are defined by the Convention on Wetlands as land areas that are saturated or flooded with water either permanently or seasonally. Inland wetlands include marshes, ponds, lakes, fens, rivers, floodplains, and swamps. Coastal wetlands include saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons and even coral reefs. Fishponds, rice paddies and saltpans are human-made wetlands (See Article 1 of the Convention's text).

## Annex 1



### 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.1

##### World Wetlands Day

1. RECALLING the International Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands and Waterfowl, hosted by the Game and Fish Department of the Government of Iran from 2 to 3 February 1971, in Ramsar, Islamic Republic of Iran, where the “Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat” was adopted by representatives of 18 States on 2 February 1971;
2. FURTHER RECALLING that the Convention was signed in Ramsar on 3 February 1971;
3. AWARE of the comprehensive nature of the Convention Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) established by Resolution XII.9 for the period 2016-2024;
4. RECALLING that Resolution XII.9 recognizes the growing celebration of World Wetlands Day in a large number of countries, and urges Contracting Parties to continue or to begin to use this occasion to bring attention to their achievements and continuing challenges in wetland conservation and wise use; and
5. CONGRATULATING all Contracting Parties celebrating World wetlands Days;

##### THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

6. WELCOMES the celebration of World Wetlands Day in a growing number of countries;
7. INVITES the United Nations General Assembly to recognize 2 February of each year, the date of adoption of the Convention on Wetlands, as World Wetlands Day; and
8. INVITES Contracting Parties, the Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme and international organizations and non-governmental organizations with an interest in wetlands to facilitate cooperation and information exchange in support of 2 February as World Wetlands Day.